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“‘Some day the truth will have to be known’: A Reading of
Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis* as a
Vehicle for Public Vindication”

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis on my own and without the use of any other resources than those indicated. All passages taken verbatim or in spirit from published and unpublished sources are marked as such. The thesis has not been submitted in this or similar form as an examination paper either in Austria or abroad.

Viktoria Jaksch

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Table of Contents

1.	List of Abbreviations.....	2
2.	Introduction	3
3.	Textual History of <i>De Profundis</i>	5
4.	Searching for the Generic Identity of <i>De Profundis</i>	10
4.1	Problems with a Discussion about <i>De Profundis</i> being a Letter or Piece of Literature	10
4.2	Problems with a Discussion about <i>De Profundis</i> being a Letter or an Autobiography	14
4.3	<i>De Profundis</i> as a Personal Letter: Historical and Biographical Perspective.....	17
4.3.1	Letter Writing in the 18th and 19th Centuries	17
4.3.2	Wilde as a Letter Writer	20
4.4	<i>De Profundis</i> as a Piece of Life Writing for a Larger Audience: Historical and Biographical Perspective	23
4.4.1	Life Writing in the Victorian Era and the Development of a Celebrity Culture	23
4.4.2	Byron and Wilde: Literary Celebrities Fallen from Grace	26
4.4.3	Wilde as a Life Writer	28
5.	Wilde's Letters to Douglas in Relation to <i>De Profundis</i>	31
5.1	Wilde's Letters to Douglas: Love Letters?.....	32
5.2	Characteristics of Victorian Familiar Letters	34
5.3	Characteristics of Victorian Familiar Letters in Wilde's Letters to Douglas	36
5.4	Characteristics of Victorian Familiar Letters in <i>De Profundis</i>	39
6.	<i>De Profundis</i> through the Lens of Epistolary Fiction.....	41
6.1	Parallels between <i>De Profundis</i> and Epistolary Fiction	41
6.2	Making Douglas Heard	44
6.2.1	Rhetorical Questions	44
6.2.2	Quotes and Paraphrases.....	47
6.3	References to Shared Knowledge.....	49
6.3.1	References to Shared Events	52
6.3.2	References to Common Acquaintances.....	55
7.	Comparison of <i>De Profundis</i> to Wilde's Short Story "The Devoted Friend"	58
8.	Conclusion.....	63
9.	Bibliography.....	65
10.	Annex: Abstracts	69

1. List of Abbreviations

CL – Wilde, Oscar. *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis. London: Fourth Estate, 2000.

DP – *De Profundis*, the printed version of the manuscript included in: Wilde, Oscar. *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis. London: Fourth Estate, 2000. 683-780.

“TDF” – Wilde, Oscar. “The Devoted Friend.” *Complete Short Fiction*. 1994. Ed. Ian Small. London: Penguin Books, 2003. 24-34.

2. Introduction

At the centre of this master's thesis stands a text that has puzzled and divided Wilde scholars since its full publication in 1962: *De Profundis*¹, the lengthy document produced by Oscar Wilde during his last months at Reading Gaol and addressed to his former lover, Lord Alfred Douglas. *Text* and *writing* are probably the least controversial labels that can be found to describe *DP*. Other labels, such as (personal) letter, (spiritual) autobiography, work of art/literature or prison writing, have been debated for a long time.² Not only are the arguments for one or the other textual category often made without clear definitions of the debated labels, but they are also frequently based on writings other than *DP*³, such as Wilde's correspondence, which is heavily scrutinised in the hope of finding hints at Wilde's own intentions towards *DP* regarding audience and publication. Furthermore, it seems as if the entire discussion about *DP*'s generic identity has missed the central point because is not a discussion over whether *DP* is a personal letter or a work of literature really a discussion about whether *DP* is written with one person (Douglas) or a larger audience in mind? It is this question that this thesis will attempt to answer and it will do so through a close analysis of the text – both the manuscript and printed versions of it, proposing the argument that a text's intended audience can be inferred from textual features, or as Altman would say, “[a]ddressee-consciousness informs the act of writing itself” (111). Hence, the analytical part of the present thesis will focus entirely on the text in the attempt to answer the question of whether *DP*, in particular what has been termed the “private” parts (Guy and Small “Reading” 136), i.e. the parts not included in Ross' 1905 and 1908 publications, exhibits formal/aesthetic features that suggest that it was written with a larger, possibly future, audience in mind. The thesis starts from the assumption that, in contrast to Wilde's (love) letters to Douglas, *DP* is written in its entirety for, i.e. accessible to, a larger audience. What is important to note here is that *accessibility* is understood not as a text's actual availability to a wider audience in the

¹ Wilde had given his manuscript the title *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis* (Latin for *Letter: In Prison and Chains*). *De Profundis* (Latin for *From the Depths*) is the title Wilde's literary executor, Robert Ross, chose for his 1905 and 1908 publications of parts of the manuscript. Nowadays, the latter title is also commonly used for the entirety of the text (Guy and Small *Studying* 47), which is why, in this thesis, *De Profundis*, or rather *DP*, will be used to refer to the manuscript and any printed versions thereof.

² According to Guy, *DP* can be read, for example, as a piece of life writing, prison writing and as a love letter (419). Gagnier speaks of it as a letter, an autobiography and a biography of Douglas (“Materialist”). Small regards the manuscript merely as a “draft for both a future literary work and for a letter” (Small “Love-Letter” 98), while Ellmann sees it primarily as a love letter (483), but claims that it “would also offer an autobiographical account of [Wilde's] last five years” (479). Erben states that, “although written as a letter, [DP] is in fact as much autobiography as anything else” (146) and for Tóibín it “has neither the informality of a personal letter nor the distilled sound of a piece of imaginative writing”, which is why he “places it in a category of its own”, but adds that “it remains one of the greatest and most complex love letters ever written”.

³ “Evidence” from such texts, i.e. texts other than *DP*, will be called external evidence.

sense that the text is published and therefore physically available, but as an author's intention to make a text understandable for a wider audience by keeping this audience and their expectations and needs in mind during writing.

Writing letters with a wider (possibly future) audience – and perhaps even publication – in mind is a form of life writing, which is why this thesis is mainly grounded in life writing theory. However, in answering my research question, I will also draw on many other theories, which I will now briefly outline chapter for chapter. Chapter 3, which is concerned with the history of *DP*, i.e. the circumstances of its production and subsequent publication, takes a mainly biographical approach to *DP*, the biographies resorted to being Ellmann's biography of Wilde and Hyde's biography of Douglas. A big part of this chapter is also a review of the research conducted by Josephine Guy and Ian Small, the Wilde scholars who have published most on *DP*, in connection with the publishing history of *DP*, which they mostly trace by analysing Wilde's correspondence with his literary executor, Robert Ross. In chapter 4, the thesis will focus on different stances that have been taken so far regarding *DP*'s generic identity. The chapter is mainly informed by genre theory, especially when it comes to defining and distinguishing between the genres of letter and autobiography in search of *DP*'s generic identity (subchapters 4.1 and 4.2) and to historically contextualising practises of writing and reading letters (subchapter 4.3.1) and other genres of life writing (subchapter 4.4.1). The rest of the subchapters of chapter 4, again, take more of a biographical approach and look at Wilde as a letter writer (4.3.2), fallen celebrity (4.4.2) and autobiographer (4.4.3). Especially subchapter 4.4.3 will also draw on authorship theory and concepts from celebrity theory – in particular the research done by scholars such as Tom Mole, Clara Tuite, Gaston Franssen, Rick Honings, Loren Glass and Michèle Mendelssohn – for the purpose of showing Wilde's talent for self-fashioning and creating a myth/an image for posterity, which will help us understand why Wilde might have written *De Profundis* with a larger audience in mind. All in all, chapter 4 will show that a historical/biographical perspective, along with the external evidence produced by scholars so far, is not suited to answering the question at the heart of this thesis. Thus, chapter 5 is devoted to making an argument for Wilde's letters to Douglas being Victorian familiar letters and to comparing them to *DP* with the aim of showing that *DP* differs in a number of significant respects from them. To this end, this chapter draws on genre theory regarding love letters (subchapter 5.1) and Victorian familiar letters (subchapter 5.2), and involves the close reading of the texts under consideration with regard to the characteristics worked out in subchapter 5.2. In order to gather still stronger evidence for *DP*'s breaking of the norms of Victorian familiar letters, chapter 6 will compare

DP to a genre that can be regarded a generic hybrid: epistolary fiction. The assumption is that if *DP* is written with a larger audience in mind it will share certain characteristics with the letters of which epistolary novels are composed since these letters are always directed at more than one person – the fictional addressee(s) and the real-world reader(s). Again, the first part (subchapter 6.1) of this chapter will be concerned with genre theory – this time regarding the genre of the epistolary novel – in order to work out similarities between fictional letters on the one hand and non-fictional letters written with a larger audience in mind on the other, while the second part (subchapters 6.2 and 6.3) is devoted to the close reading of Wilde's letters to Douglas and *DP* with regard to the genre characteristics laid out in subchapter 6.1. It is the comparison conducted in chapter 6 that will provide the strongest arguments for claiming that *DP*, in its entirety, was written with a larger audience in mind. Chapter 7, then, will shed light on an entirely different aspect of the text to be considered in the attempt to argue that Wilde might have toyed with the idea not only of a future publication of the parts already published shortly after his death but also the “private parts”: the connection of the “private” parts to one of Wilde's published short stories, namely “The Devoted Friend”. This chapter will provide a literature review on comparisons that have been drawn so far between *DP* and Wilde's fictional works before ending with a close reading of *DP* and the short story, which will show that the two works are quite similar in terms of “characters”, narrative structure and symbols.

3. Textual History of *De Profundis*

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) met Alfred Douglas (1870-1945) in 1891 (Hyde *Douglas* 24), but, as Wilde puts it, their “ill-fated and most lamentable friendship” (*CL* 684) “really [began] with [Douglas] begging [Wilde] in a most pathetic and charming letter to assist [him] in a position appalling to anyone, doubly so to a young man at Oxford” (*CL* 701). The incident referred to occurred in the spring of 1892. Douglas was being blackmailed for sleeping with boys (Hyde *Douglas* 27) and turned to solicitor Sir George Lewis, a good friend of Wilde's. Wilde's connection to Douglas was the reason why the former “began to lose [Lewis'] esteem and friendship” (*CL* 701). As far as we can now recover, Wilde, who was married, a father of two and had just successfully staged *Lady Windermere's Fan*, began a brief sexual affair with Douglas, sixteen years his junior, shortly afterwards. According to Douglas, their relationship soon became platonic when Wilde realised that Douglas “didn't like it at all and only consented to it to oblige him” (Douglas in Hyde *Douglas* 28). But their relationship remained “intense and romantic” (Ellmann 366) even though both moved on to have sexual

relationships with other young men, some of whom took advantage of Wilde's generosity or even blackmailed him (Ellmann 367). From late 1892 onwards, Wilde's life increasingly split into a secret and a public part, the former increasingly jeopardising the latter, as "English society tolerated homosexuality only so long as one was not caught at it" (Ellmann 368).

The first sign that Wilde's life might be taking a dangerous turn was when he broke with two of his best friends, John Gray and Pierre Louÿs, who tried to make Wilde reconsider his relationship with Douglas, because of which Wilde had begun to neglect his wife and children (Ellmann 371f). From 1893 on, Douglas' tantrums repeatedly caused Wilde to break up with him only to take him back some days later after incessant begging from Douglas (Ellmann 378f). Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensberry, who was outraged by Wilde's relationship with his son, came into possession of some of the love letters from Wilde to Douglas and planned to humiliate Wilde at the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at St James's Theatre on 14 February 1895 with a bouquet of rotten vegetables (Ellmann 411). Wilde got wind of it and made sure Queensberry was denied entry to the theatre. Four days later, on 18 February 1895, Queensberry left an insulting card for Wilde at Albemarle Club saying "To Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite [sic]" (qtd. in Ellmann 412). Wilde let himself be persuaded by Douglas to take legal action and prosecuted Queensberry for libel (Ellmann 413). A fatal mistake, as it prompted the latter to prove the truth of his accusations in order to avoid conviction. When Wilde was found guilty and sentenced to two years' hard labour while Queensberry was acquitted, Wilde's life and career hit rock bottom; not only because he was facing a prison sentence, but also because Queensberry's acquittal meant that Wilde had to cover Queensberry's expenses in the libel suit, which left him bankrupt. Wilde's time in prison almost destroyed him as a person and as an artist, not only because it meant that he was cut off "from the intellectual and creative milieu associated with his most productive years in the first half of the 1890s" (Small *Epistola* 2), but also because he knew that in the eyes of the media and the public he was a perverted monster, many of his friends had turned away from him and he was not even allowed contact with fellow prisoners (Marcovitch 192f). Also, his relationship with Douglas suffered two hard blows when Douglas intended to publish some of Wilde's letters to him in the *Mercure de France* without Wilde's permission and proposed to dedicate a collection of poems to Wilde. In a letter to Ross dated approx. 30 May 1896, Wilde calls this proposal "revolting and grotesque" (CL 654). Not understanding Wilde's reasons for his violent objections to both plans, Douglas broke off their communication (Ellmann 479).

To those who still wanted contact with him, Wilde was only permitted to write a small number of letters, which were heavily censored by the prison authorities (Marcovitch 192f). In Pentonville prison he also suffered from constant hunger and diarrhoea (Ellmann 455). In September 1895 he was so weak from malnutrition and dysentery that he fainted, the fall permanently damaging his hearing in one ear (Ellmann 465). His condition got slightly better when he was transferred to Reading Gaol in November 1895. There, now unfit for hard labour, he was assigned lighter tasks in the garden and library (Ellmann 465). It was during the last months of his imprisonment in Reading Gaol (Small *Epistola* 1) that Wilde wrote the manuscript that he would call *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*. It is approximately 55,000 words long and “written on both sides of forty often barely legible folios” (Guy and Small *Studying* 50). The prison authorities, in particular the prison’s governor, Major J. O. Nelson, collected the sheets Wilde had written during the day each night, handing (some of) them back the next morning (Ellmann 479)⁴, which accounts for inconsistencies and repetitions (Guy and Small “Reading” 131).

Regarding the manuscript’s content, it can be said that roughly the last third contains “two long, abstract digressions ([...] on *Hamlet* and on the life of Christ) as well as numerous shorter asides almost certainly suggested by the books to which Wilde had access in prison (so comments on Dante, Goethe, and the Old Testament are frequent)” (Guy and Small *Studying* 60). It is these passages that Wilde had asked Robert Ross, his literary executor,⁵ to copy and to send to a number of friends and that were published by Ross under the name *De Profundis* in 1905 and, with slight changes, in 1908, i.e. after Wilde’s death in 1900. The passages of the manuscript contained in these publications included no references to Douglas or were cleared of them (Guy and Small “Reading” 132). What is worth noting here is that, two weeks before Ross’ 1905 publication, Wilde’s translator into German, Max Meyerfeld, had, with Ross’ knowledge and help, published a German translation in *Die Neue Rundschau*, which was longer than the version Ross would later publish (Guy 428). In his preface to the 1908 edition, for which Ross had translated the extra parts in Meyerfeld’s translation back into English (Guy 428), Ross explained the reason why these parts had been included in the German version: he thought it was due to the “tolerance and literary enthusiasm” Germany and France showed Wilde and his works (qtd. in Small *Epistola* 314).

⁴ Wilde would later call Major Nelson “the most Christlike man I ever met” (qtd. in Ellmann 476): He allowed him to have a collection of books (ibid), gave him as much ink and as many sheets of paper (usually one at a time) to write as he needed (Ellmann 479).

⁵ Letter to Ross dated 1 April 1897, CL 781f.

The two first thirds, then, according to Guy and Small, constitute a “fundamentally private [...] reliving of specific past events” directed solely at Douglas (“Reading” 136). In his introduction to the 1908 version, Ross even refers to their content as “business and private matters of no interest whatsoever” (qtd. in Small *Epistola* 315). Generally, it can be said that these parts are built around several recurring central ideas, which Wilde seems to have been eager to convey because he stresses them repeatedly. These include Douglas’ lack of appreciation of Wilde’s genius, his violent outbursts, greed for money and appetite for life at the expense of others, his disregard of Wilde’s need for quiet, Wilde’s attempts to escape from Douglas’ presence and his function as a cat’s-paw between Douglas and his father. As mentioned in the introduction, it is these parts that present the focus of this thesis and that, as this thesis suggests, are not written for as limited an audience as Ross or latter-day scholars such as Guy and Small seem to think. They were first published in 1949 when Vyvyan Holland, Wilde’s son, released a version of the text on the basis of a copy of a copy that was presumably sent to Douglas.

The manuscript, which exhibits many of the characteristics of the letter genre (see chapter 5.4), is addressed to Alfred Douglas, but as we know from Wilde’s letter to Robert Ross written on 1 April 1897, Wilde had planned to send the manuscript to Ross, who was to supervise a “type-writing [girl]” (CL 781) as she made three copies of it (one for Wilde for later revisions, one for Ross to keep and one for More Adey, another close friend of Wilde’s) before sending it to Douglas. However, the prison authorities prevented Wilde from sending the manuscript from prison, perhaps because to them, the manuscript “looked like something more public and intended for fuller publication” (Guy and Small *Studying* 56f). What exactly it was that gave the authorities that impression is difficult to recover, but it seems that the length indeed might have been a big factor. Consequently, Wilde was handed back the manuscript on leaving Reading Gaol and, as suggested by Small (*Epistola* 22), might have discussed with Ross in the days after his release certain changes to be made in the typewritten copies made by Ross. In the end (probably with Wilde’s permission), one of the copies was sent to Douglas⁶. By then, (parts of) the manuscript had been read by at least four people apart from the addressee, Alfred Douglas: the prison authorities, Robert Ross, More Adey and a “type-writing [girl]” (CL 781). What does this mean for the text? Ultimately, it means that Wilde could either not write about things that were not meant for the eyes of these readers or

⁶ Douglas’ accounts regarding his knowledge about the typescript are contradictory (Small *Epistola* 14): On one occasion, he claimed to have burnt the copy on receiving it. On another occasion, he denied ever having received it.

live with the fact that they would afterwards know things he would rather not have shared with them under other circumstances.

Ultimately, the manuscript remained with Ross, who gave it to the British Library in 1909, where it was kept sealed until 1960 and where it is still kept. In 1962, Rupert Hart-Davis published a new, full version, since, on studying the manuscript at the British Library, he detected “several hundred errors [...] [such as] “[m]isreadings [...], misprints [...] [and an] inexplicable shifting of passages and whole paragraphs” (CL 683, footnote) in Holland’s 1949 version. Together with Merlin Holland, Wilde’s grandson, Hart-Davis published a revised version of the (transcribed) manuscript in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* in 2000. One has to bear in mind that any printed version of the manuscript is “in fact a mediation [...] [and] that the transposition of handwriting into type inevitably involves a number of editorial interventions and compromises” (Guy and Small *Studying* 52). In the present case this concerns especially

a standardization of accidentals, principally punctuation, spelling, and paragraphing; the omission of Wilde’s many deletions of passages; and the rendering invisible of his frequent reordering of material and his insertion of new thoughts. (Guy and Small *Studying* 52)

Also, Wilde’s handwriting is at times so illegible that “there are plausible alternative readings for certain words and phrases” (ibid). The manuscript, digitised and made available online by the British Library, will be an important part of chapter 6.3.1 because it shows that some of the changes Wilde made in the writing process made the text more accessible to a larger audience. For all other chapters of this thesis, the differences between the manuscript and the most recent print version of it, i.e. Holland and Hart-Davis’ 2000 version, are not relevant, which is why, unless otherwise specified, the analysis conducted in this thesis will be based on the printed version in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis and published in 2000.

It should be noted that, with *De Profundis ‘Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis’*. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* 2, Small also published his own print version of *DP* in 2005, which technically makes it the most recent one. However, in his insistence on seeing the manuscript both as a draft for a private letter for Douglas and a document meant for public consumption (see chapter 4.1), Small published two versions at once, calling the former *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis* and the latter *De Profundis*. While basing the latter mainly on Ross’ publications, he based the former on Holland’s 1949 edition as it is “a copy of a copy of the typescript made for Douglas” (Small *Epistola* 24), and only “collated, and on occasions interpolated, the manuscript with it” (ibid). I agree with Merlin Holland, who claims that

“[Small’s] choice of [Vyvyan Holland’s] corrupt 1949 publication is [bizarre]” (“Stormy” 84) and that “the public would have been better served if [Small’s] edition had reproduced the [manuscript] as the base text with the 1905 and 1908 editions in an appendix” (ibid 86). Holland criticises most that we simply know too little about Wilde’s intentions for a future literary work (ibid 84). For example, as Guy also points out, we do not know how many copies Ross made and in how far Wilde was involved in the making of these (amended) copies (Guy 423) so that “it is only the manuscript that has Wilde’s full authority” (ibid 427). Hence, the choice of Holland and Hart-Davis’s 2000 edition for the analysis in this thesis is an obvious one.

4. Searching for the Generic Identity of *De Profundis*

In the search for *DP*’s generic identity, scholars have been tempted to resort to binaries, typically the following: letter vs. piece of literature and letter vs. autobiography⁷. This chapter is devoted to showing that juxtapositions like these are problematic in many more respects than just the fact that they are used without clear definitions and as if they necessarily mutually excluded one another.

4.1 Problems with a Discussion about *De Profundis* being a Letter or Piece of Literature

Letters written by authors are often regarded as merely supplemental material to the authors’ literary *oeuvre* and are appreciated for offering biographical information about the author or information about his or her works (Haughton 57). Haughton sees them as “occupy[ing] a fluid space between a writer’s literary *oeuvre* and its non-literary hinterland, between the work of art and biography” (ibid). This quote might draw on “politically contentious ideologies of [literary] value” (Brant 12) – an issue that will be discussed later in this chapter –, but it gets to the core of the difficulties that editors face when having to decide on how to anthologise an author’s letters, i.e. on whether to include them in collections of the author’s letters or his or her literary works. *DP* is an excellent example for how difficult it is

⁷ It is perhaps confusing to talk about binaries here since binaries are usually defined as sets of two different categories. Obviously, a letter can be and often is autobiographical, and texts from every genre, also letters, can be literary works if someone subjectively attributes literary value to them. These issues will be discussed in chapters 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. I have simply chosen the term binaries because the concepts under consideration are often juxtaposed as if they indeed mutually excluded one another.

to answer the question of whether a letter should be published as part of an author's literary works or not. Since Hart-Davis' 1962 edition of *De Profundis* it has often been read as a (love) letter⁸ and has been included in editions of Wilde's letters (Small *Epistola* 3). At the same time, it has "been treated as another of Wilde's literary works and, since the publication of the 1966 Collins *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, anthologized accordingly"⁹ (Small *Epistola* 3).

Small, who has published extensively on Wilde's works, strongly argues against seeing the text as either a personal letter or literary work. He treats the manuscript as a "draft for both a future literary work and for a letter" (Small "Love-Letter" 98) because, together with Guy, he identifies within the manuscript "documents initially composed separately and with different audiences in mind" (Guy and Small "Reading" 130). So while he sees "very strong grounds for arguing that Wilde intended his manuscript to form (in some way) a literary work or the basis of a literary work" (Small *Epistola* 3), he also identifies parts that are meant for Douglas' eyes only (Guy and Small "Reading" 130). Guy and Small's claim that *DP* is a composition of different texts directed at different audiences is somewhat comprehensible considering the conditions under which the text was produced. In other words: The physical and emotional distress, the relatively long period of time and the limited access to previously written manuscript parts may indeed have made it difficult for Wilde to recover the audience he had had in mind during previous writing sessions. But why would Wilde "weld" together parts written for completely different audiences?¹⁰ Guy and Small's claim is that the manuscript contains private passages meant for Douglas only (e.g. "Reading" 136) as well as "passages, such as those on Hamlet or on the life of Christ, [which] read as if they had their origins in a different kind of intellectual activity from recriminations against Douglas" (*Studying* 56), which Wilde, in their entirety might have planned to revise and maybe even publish later on (*ibid*). In contrast, my contention is, as mentioned, that the "personal

⁸ Ellmann, in his biography of Wilde, claims that "[t]he most important thing about *De Profundis* is that it is a love letter" (483).

⁹ In it, *DP* is termed a letter and appears in the section "Essays, Selected Journalism, Lectures and Letters" at the very end of the book. One might wonder why the 1966 Collins edition was called *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* and not *Complete Literary Works of Oscar Wilde*. One reason might be that some works – among them very likely those in the section including *DP*, as it comes at the very end – were considered to be of lower "literary value", the concept of literary value being, of course, highly contentious (Brant 12). Even though this might be the case, it has to be considered that Wilde's other letters to Douglas and indeed the majority of his surviving letters were excluded from the collection, which gives *DP* a special status among Wilde's letters, which some, as Small, would see as a reason for referring to it as a literary work. Another explanation might be that terms such as work of literature or literary work are often, but not necessarily, reserved for fictional works, which, again, would exclude the works in the section in question.

¹⁰ According to Guy and Small (*Studying* 56), Wilde spent six weeks on attempting to create a coherent whole out of the different pieces of writing.

passages” in the manuscript are already accessible to a larger audience, unfinished as they might be.

There are a number of further issues to be raised in connection with Guy and Small’s attempts of textual identification. First, Small fails to give textual evidence from the work itself that supports his claim that certain parts are addressed to a wider audience or even to posterity. This is surprising considering that every text is written with an audience and their expectations in mind.¹¹ He only gives external support for his claim, i.e. support derived from documents other than *DP*, such as Wilde’s letter to Ross dated 1 April 1897, in which Wilde gives Ross specific instructions regarding his “letter to Alfred Douglas” (*CL* 780). In it, Wilde alludes to the possibility of *DP* being written for a wider audience by including it amongst his corpus of literary works¹² and by ascertaining that “some day the truth will have to be known” (*CL* 780) about the reasons for his “behaviour with regard to Queensberry and Alfred Douglas” (*ibid*). This leads Small to conclude that Wilde seems to have had the idea “that the text of the manuscript (or parts of it) would at some point be placed in the public domain” (*Epistola* 13). Another indicator for Small (*ibid*) that Wilde intended *DP* (or at least a later, revised version of it) to be made public at some point are the specific instructions Wilde gave to Ross on how to proceed with the editing and copying of the letter: Ross should let the manuscript be typed on “good paper such as is used for plays” (*CL* 781) and leave “a wide rubricated margin [...] for corrections” (*ibid*). This would allow Wilde to “revise, change, or rework this typed version of the manuscript at a later date, and presumably for some other purpose or audience” (Small *Epistola* 13). Also, Small observes, it was not Wilde’s habit to send his letters to Douglas to anyone but Douglas (*Epistola* 14); he did, however, turn to Ross frequently regarding literary matters (*ibid*), which, Small suggests, shows again that Wilde toyed with the thought of its publication. The only textual support Small produces is his observation that some folios are heavily corrected while others are (corrected) fair copies of discarded originals (*Epistola* 7) or even second drafts (*ibid* 9). Based on this observation, Small argues that the composition of the manuscript resembles not that of an ordinary letter, but rather that of Wilde’s published works, which he would usually revise several times (*Epistola* 9).

¹¹ At university, entire courses are built around the goal to learn how to adapt one’s texts to a specific audience and to infer a text’s intended audience by analysing that text. As the online writing centre of the University of Maryland, for example, tells its students, the reason why the audience is so important is that it not only influences the pieces of information that are included, but for example also the arrangement of this information, the details needed for understanding and the tone (“Writing for an Audience”).

¹² “So I turn naturally to you [i.e. Robert Ross], as indeed I do for everything, and would like you to have all my works” (*CL* 780).

Second, Guy and Small claim that the respective audience of the separately composed documents can be inferred from the kind of persona the author-narrator is creating for himself in the different parts of the work and these parts' "artistic value" ("Reading" 137). In the passages identified by Wilde in his letter to Ross dated 1 April 1897, Guy and Small claim, Wilde "fashion[s] a version of his life for posterity" (ibid 130), which leads them to argue that they were "almost certainly conceived with publication in mind" (ibid 129). As these parts correspond to Ross' 1905 and 1908 editions, Small regards these editions as representing the texts "which best [embody] Wilde's intentions for a public work in so far as we can now recover them" (*Epistola* 24). Then, Guy and Small identify more "private" passages, which correspond to those in which Wilde confronts Douglas with his past behaviour, and describe them as "lack[ing] artistic value" (Guy and Small "Reading" 137) on the basis that self-revelation is seen as a concept "foreign to Wilde's literary aesthetic" (ibid). According to them, if it was written as a "piece of literature", it should not be as "arrogant" and "disjointed" (ibid 124) as they claim it is. Thus, they propose that Wilde most likely deemed these parts unfinished and unfit for publication: it is their contention that they were meant for Douglas' eyes only (ibid 130) and not conceived with the intention to make them available to a larger number of (future) readers, at least not without further changes and corrections (which Wilde never made).¹³ For his 2005 publication of *DP*, Small thus uses Holland's 1949 version as the basis for what he deems an authoritative text of *DP* as a personal letter on the grounds that – being based on a copy of Douglas' copy which was possibly authorized by Wilde (Small *Epistola* 14) – it comes closest to the personal letter that was (presumably) sent to Douglas (ibid 24). To sum up, Guy and Small equate their idea of "artistic" with "written for a wider audience" – two concepts which should be strictly kept apart in my opinion. First, because beginning with Marxism and especially since Marxist ideas of the 1990s and early 2000s, first and foremost those of British literary theorist Terry Eagleton, literary value has come to be seen as "always 'transitive'—that is to say, [as] value for somebody in a particular situation [...] – and [...] [as being] always culturally and historically specific" (Eagleton and Fuller 77), meaning that what is considered to be of value is always the product of prevailing power relations (Easthope 376). As a result, "'writing' or 'text' [are preferred] to 'literature', because [they] [sidestep] politically contentious ideologies of value" (Brant 12). Second, because in the late Victorian era we see a growing gap between "high" and "popular"

¹³ Interestingly enough, taking a look at the facsimile of the manuscript made available online by the British Library, one can see that also some of the "personal" parts were corrected and revised by Wilde (already in prison, that is) (see Wilde *Manuscript*). This practice revising his texts – often multiple times – is, as mentioned above, typically associated with his published works (Small *Epistola* 9).

literature (Shrimpton), so what was considered “artistic”, often experimental, of literary value, etc., would not be associated with being designed for a wider/mass audience.

To conclude this subchapter, it can be said that the discussion of *DP* as a letter or a literary work is not constructive since a letter is a genre and a literary work/piece of literature is not. It is a subjective value judgement made about a text and the making of such judgements has become somewhat unpopular. By taking the focus away from discussions about literary value and to the sole question of who the audience is that Wilde had in mind during writing *DP* and to which, thus, *DP* is accessible, the question of how to anthologise *DP* becomes much easier to answer. A larger audience would mean that *DP* should be included in collections of his other works for larger audiences such as his plays, poems or short stories and not in collections of works of a personal nature such as his letters to Douglas.

4.2 Problems with a Discussion about *De Profundis* being a Letter or an Autobiography

Two other genres that are also frequently juxtaposed in discussions of *DP*’s generic identity are letter and autobiography. Before explaining why discussions about *DP* being one or the other are problematic, a definition of autobiography seems to be in order.

An autobiography can be seen as a “[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (Lejeune 4). It can also be described as a self-referential text which “claim[s] to provide information about a ‘reality’ exterior to the text” (Lejeune 22). Lejeune famously postulates an autobiographical pact between the reader and the author/text according to which the reader can rely on the “‘identicalness’ [...] of the *name*” (14), i.e. the name of the author on the book cover, that of the narrator and that of the protagonist (ibid). This does not mean that an autobiography has to be “exact”, as Lejeune (14) calls it, meaning that the autobiography’s protagonist can deviate from its author. As long as the author, narrator and protagonist are identical, Lejeune claims, we are dealing with an autobiography, not a fictional work, even if the events related or the characters described are entirely invented (17).¹⁴ In this case, Lejeune speaks of lies, not of fiction (ibid). One might even claim that the reader expects “a measure of misrepresentation” (Cohn 31) from autobiographical works.

¹⁴ For example, Buckler notes about *DP*, “The autobiographical importance of the work is unmistakable, but not so much for its history of the self as for its *expression* of that history. How Wilde early in 1897 chose to speak about his past is more primary than the past itself” (96).

Lejeune's contention that autobiography and fiction mutually exclude one another is not uncontested, of course. Eakin, for example, regards the self as "incommunicable" (55) so that "the telling of lies is inextricably implicated in the writing of [one's] memories" (ibid), while Stanley Fish argues the exact opposite, namely that "autobiographers cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not" (A19). Scholars such as W. E. B. du Bois, then, began to see self-referential writing as "an intersubjective process that occurs within a dialogic exchange between writer and reader/viewer rather than a story to be proved or falsified" (Smith and Watson 16f).

The term autobiography was first used in the late 18th century (Smith and Watson 2); however, self-referential writing is, of course, much older (ibid). From the 17th century onwards, for example, the term memoir was used to denote "[a]utobiographical observations; reminiscences" (OED); before, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, it began to be used synonymously with biography (Buss 596). The memoir, in particular the scandalous memoir written by non-professional writers such as libertines and prostitutes, which had enjoyed huge popularity in the growing capitalist economy of the 18th century because it was entertaining and salacious (Rak 4f), was reduced to "a minor, market-driven form" (Rak 6) with the publication of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions* in 1782 and 1789 (Rak 5). *The Confessions* drew on many of the conventions of the scandalous memoir, but was written by a professional writer (Rak 5) and was thus not seen as a memoir, but "[rather] characterized often as the first autobiography" (Rak 6). Before the term *autobiography* was used, however, *confessions* caught on for autobiographical texts like Rousseau's (Smith and Watson 2). This term highlights that, being a selling point, "[t]he emotion of shame is central to much autobiographical writing", as Dalziell (807) suggests. Today the term memoir is again commonly "used by publishing houses to describe various practices and genres of self life writing" (Smith and Watson 3). In contrast to autobiography, however, memoir tends to focus on "the significant others of the memoirist's world" (Buss 595) and "[bracket] one moment or period of experience rather than an entire life span" (Smith and Watson 3). This moment is not seldomly "scandalous or titillating" (Smith and Watson 4) and should invite the reader to reflect on his or her own life (Larson qtd. in Rak 11).

In the previous subchapter, we have seen that a discussion about whether *DP* is a letter or a piece of literature does not work, also because they are different categories: one is a genre, the other a subjective label based on a value judgement. In this subchapter, we are dealing with two genres, letter and autobiography. The question now is whether a text can be both a letter and an autobiography. Small does not seem to think so as he gives his chapter on

DP in Joseph Bristow's *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions* the title "Love-Letter, Spiritual Autobiography, or Prison Writing?" (86). Other scholars beg to differ. Regenia Gagnier calls *DP* "a revealing autobiography from the depths [...] of a soul in pain" (*Idylls* 179), but still refers to it as a letter, Erben states that, "although written as a letter, [*DP*] is in fact as much autobiography as anything else" (146) and Ellmann talks about *DP* as "a letter [...] [that] would also offer an autobiographical account of [Wilde's] last five years" (479).

I share Gagnier's, Erben's and Ellmann's view. The reason why *DP* can be and in my opinion is both a letter and an autobiography seems to be that while the letter genre is mostly defined by structure (heading, salutation, complimentary close, signature; see chapter 5.2), autobiography's defining generic characteristics are structure-unrelated and hinge more on self-referentiality and the identicalness of author, narrator and protagonist. In terms of subgenre, *DP* can be regarded a celebrity autobiography or a spiritual autobiography, for example. Even an argument for *DP* being a memoir can be made. In fact, *memoir* seems not that unfitting, since *DP* brackets a certain period – the relationship with Douglas –, which can be described as scandalous, and focuses on a significant other, Douglas.¹⁵ All in all, there is simply not one answer to the question of *DP*'s generic identity because the boundaries of the different autobiographical genres blur into one another, which is why they are often subsumed, among others, under the term life writing.

Life writing can be described as an overarching term and a "less exclusive genre of personal kinds of writing that includes both biography and autobiography, but also the less 'objective,' or more 'personal,' genres such as letters and diaries" (Kadar 4). Life writing also reaches beyond the written form and covers "artifacts, [...] visual arts, photography, film, oral history, and so forth" (Jolly ix), in which case it is often referred to as life narrative. Even though the subject of life writing is one's own life or the life of someone else (Smith and Watson 4), the term life writing is often equated with autobiography, especially in the West, where "[autobiography] remains the widely used and most generally understood term" (Smith and Watson 2f). Even Smith and Watson sometimes (inexplicably in view of their above definition) limit life writing to self-referential writing, for example when they claim that "life narrative, then, [is best approached] as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present" (1). In any case, their treatment of the concept as a moving target finds approval, for example, by Kadar, who also considers the term as being "in flux" (3) so that presenting an exhaustive list of genres belonging to life writing would be impossible. In fact, given the encompassing nature of the

¹⁵ Gagnier even makes a case for *DP* being a biography of Douglas (*Idylls* 180, "Materialist" 342).

term life writing, all the primary texts under consideration in this thesis can be regarded as pieces of life writing. They are also all autobiographical – also the shortest personal letters are autobiographical at least to some extent if we, as Smith and Watson do, “use the adjective autobiographical to designate self-referential writing” (4). And they are all letters.

To sum up, in the search for *DP*’s generic identity among the many life writing genres, it is easy to get lost in the blurry boundaries between these genres. *DP* simply comprises elements from a variety of them. Therefore, rather than trying to pin *DP* down to a certain genre, I deem it much more fruitful to answer the question at stake around which the entire thesis revolves, namely the question of whether *DP* is a personal piece of writing destined to be read by Douglas alone or whether it was written with a larger audience in mind. Before doing so in chapters 5, 6 and 7, let me briefly discuss in subchapters 4.3 and 4.4 the historical and biographical arguments for *DP* being a personal letter and a piece of life writing destined for a larger audience, respectively.

4.3 *De Profundis* as a Personal Letter: Historical and Biographical Perspective

Why is it that scholars such as Ellmann (483) are so eager to call *DP* a personal letter, even a love letter, without even feeling the need to justify their claim? Are they simply misguided by the rhetorical characteristics typical of letters, i.e. heading, salutation, complimentary close and signature, in particular the salutation “Dear Bosie” (*CL* 683) and do not consider that the “Dear Bosie” might be as “empty” a salutation as “Dear Diary” in the sense that the addressee is an imagined person or group of people? Can the reason be found in the fact that the letter genre dominated Victorian life following some basic changes in the postal service that resulted in it becoming an affordable network for the masses? In the following I will offer a brief overview of the history of letter writing, with a particular focus on the 18th to the late 19th centuries, and the technological innovations that shaped this history in order to determine whether letters might indeed have played a big role in Wilde’s daily life.

4.3.1 Letter Writing in the 18th and 19th Centuries

If anyone living in the 21st century was to enumerate different genres, the letter would, most likely, not make first place on the list. Physical letters (especially in the form of personal or private correspondence) have not only ceased to be a central part of our daily lives due to

recent technological advances such as e-mail and short messaging services. They are, however, used by scholars of literary studies as documents that shed light on the biographies of authors or the history of their works and are, as such, often considered a useful addition to the literary works (Schuster 5). Schuster laments that while epistolary novels such as those by Samuel Richardson are regarded as belonging to the literary canon, actual letters written as a means of inter-personal communication are a rather marginalised genre in literary studies, which is often neglected until structural similarities between fictional epistolary novels and “actual” letters are to be unearthed, for example (6).

The reasons for this marginalisation are numerous: One of them is that letters are often seen “as conversations on paper” (Stanley 213) as they share certain characteristics with oral communication, such as turn-taking. Scholars who highlight this dialogical aspect and put letters at the very edge of the spectrum of written literature are Ellis (15) and Brant (21), for example. Stanley, in contrast, stresses the differences between letters and oral conversations, which, among others, include the interruptions in time and space between the writing and reading as well as the missing face-to-face interaction (213).

Another reason concerns the fact that the letter genre’s boundaries are extremely blurred (Haughton 57) to the extent that it can be impossible to determine whether one is dealing with a letter, a diary, a memoir or a poem, for instance. Even if a piece of writing takes the outer shape of a letter, one may tend to read it as another piece of autobiographical – maybe even public – writing, e.g. as a journal, if the writer does not incorporate calls for response from the recipient (Altman 89 and 91), for example.

A third reason links up to the fact that letters “disturb [the] binary distinctions [...] between [...] here and there, now and then, presence and absence” (Stanley 209), meaning that they can be seen as acting as bridges over time and space between two or more people (Altman 13). In this function, they allow the writer and the recipient to be “neither totally separated nor totally united” (Altman 43). Ellis (9) even calls them “miniature time capsules” as they are always received and read in the future relative to the writer’s present and because the writer’s present, or writing self, as Stanley claims, is infinitely preserved by the letter: it is “written at a particular point in time which influences [its] content” (Stanley 208). At the same time, always being the recipient’s past, the writer’s present is for ever unseizable (Altman 129) and, accordingly, “the letter that was written and sent is rather different from the one that arrives and is read because [it is] changed by its travels in time and space, from the there and then of writing to the here and now of reading” (Stanley 208). This intermediary role between presence and absence and between past, present and future constitutes what

Altman calls the letter's special "'halfway' nature" (43) and can also be seen as the letter form's very *forte* (Earle 8), as it certainly played a role in the genre's popularity, which peaked in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The 18th century can be regarded the golden age of letters, since, by that time, "letter-writing had assumed [...] [an] extraordinary cultural importance" (Beebee 1) to the extent that letters "were the eighteenth century's most popular genre" (Brant 27). Even though the transport of mail by means of mail coaches still took up to several weeks, the rapid expansion of the postal network (Curran) and commercial growth made letters "a central part of everyday life" (Brant 1). They were written in the most diverse of contexts (Onslow 144) while assuming a special importance in matters of government and business (Brant 1). Also, the ways in which letters were read in the 18th century differs from that of previous centuries (Brant 2). For example, Brant argues against "a dubious binary of public and private [letters]" (9), since personal letters were often circulated among, or read out to, family and friends (ibid). Finally, letters had a huge influence on the literature of the time: Epistolary fiction, i.e. fiction made up of letters, which originated in the 17th century, was immensely popular in the 18th century and successfully exploited by writers such as Samuel Richardson and Frances Burney. By "imitat[ing] real correspondence in important ways" (Brant 10), this fiction's special appeal was the sense of "authenticity, intimacy and immediacy" (Curran) it conveyed.

By the early 19th century, the popularity of the epistolary novel had begun to decline (Evans), but the importance of letters as prime means of communication had not: The postal network continued to grow and work faster, especially since the creation of the Great Western Railway in 1838 and the large-scale replacement of mail coaches by the railway by 1847 (Golden *Posting* 3). In 1838 Rowland Hill initiated a ground-breaking postal reform (Evans), which would eventually lead to the establishment of the so-call Pre-paid or Uniform Penny Post in 1840. Prior to this reform, it was the recipient who was charged, not the sender (Golden "Revolution"). Given that for members of the lower classes a letter could cost as much a day's wage or more, depending on the number of sheets in the envelope or the miles it had to travel, many simply could not permit themselves to accept letters (Golden "Revolution"). Only members of Parliament had the privilege to send letters for free (Golden *Posting* 4). With the Uniform Penny Post, this basically changed overnight: From 10 January 1840, postage was paid beforehand by the sender (Evans) and for just one penny, letters of a weight of up to half an ounce could be sent within the UK (Golden "Revolution"). The change from exclusive network to affordable and efficient public service had a massive impact on the numbers and types of letters written and Victorian life in general (Golden *Posting* 3f). Post

offices, for example, became important places of social interaction. People would not only frequent them to send letters, books or other print media, but also, from 1861, to deposit their savings in the so-called Post Office Savings Bank and later on also to send or receive telegrams (from around 1870 onwards) and to use the telephone service (from around 1882 onwards) (Golden *Posting* 2). It would be the latter two inventions (telegram and telephone) that would, already in the 19th century, “[begin] to undermine the primacy of the post decades” (Golden *Posting* 3), but not before, at the heyday, 19th-century letter writing led to the emergence of stamp collection as a pastime and boosted the industry, which brought to the market “[a] bewildering array of high-end and mass-produced postal products” (Golden “Revolution”) such as “pens, inkwells, stamp boxes, letter holders and clips, wafers and seals, envelopes, scales, writing manuals, and portable writing desks [...]” (Golden *Posting* 5).

To conclude this subchapter, it can be said that the letter genre was immensely popular in the 19th century, which means that, historically seen, it is somewhat understandable that one would call *DP* a personal letter without giving it another thought. But what about Wilde himself? How can he be situated in this world of mass circulation of letters? These questions are what the next subchapter sets out to answer.

4.3.2. Wilde as a Letter Writer

The importance of the genre not only to Victorian society in general, but also to Wilde himself becomes apparent if one considers that more than 1,500 of his letters have survived and made it into Holland and Hart-Davis’ 2000 complete collection of his letters. It also becomes evident from reading *DP*, which includes numerous references to “foolish” (*CL* 686), “revolting and loathsome” (*CL* 689), “offensive” (*CL* 692), “violent” (*ibid*), “pathetic and charming” (*CL* 701) and “very sweet and nice” (*CL* 710) letters by Douglas to him; letters from Douglas’ mother to him (*CL* 694); letters from the Marquess of Queensberry to Douglas (*CL* 695); letters used for blackmail (*CL* 702); “dreadful letters” (*CL* 705) from Douglas to the Marquess; a letter with “obscene threats and coarse violences” (*CL* 707) by the Marquess; letters Douglas intended to publish (e.g. 718f); letters from friends (*CL* 725) and many more. Also telegrams and, much less frequently, postcards are mentioned in *DP*. Hence, letters really were a central part of Wilde’s life, with Wilde being not only an ardent letter writer, but also, being a well-known public figure with lots of contacts, the recipient of masses of letters,

including fan mail.¹⁶ Knowing that, it becomes more easily understandable why scholars might label *DP* a personal letter without feeling the need to comment on it. But does that automatically mean that *DP*, even if we assume for a moment that it is a personal letter, is not meant for public consumption? After all, Schuster claims, “[J]edes Schriftmedium [...] [ist] potentiell öffentlich [...] und in vielen Epochen der Briefgeschichte [war] die Zirkulation privater Briefe selbstverständlich” (7). As I am trying to show in the following paragraph, at least Wilde seems to have held the view that personal letters are not meant to be circulated or read by a larger audience.

In a letter to Robert Ross dated November 1896 Wilde expresses his disgust at the thought of his letters being “shown about as curiosities” (*CL* 669). Also in *DP*, Wilde repeatedly stresses his irritation about Douglas’ intent to publish (excerpts of) his, i.e. Wilde’s, letters in magazines such as the *Mercure de France* without permission, claiming that “[t]he letters that should have been to [Douglas] things sacred and secret beyond anything in the whole world!” (*CL* 717). He also gives vent to his irritation regarding Douglas’ careless behaviour with regard to private correspondence, accusing Douglas of “[leaving his] letters lying about for blackmailing companions to steal, for hotel servants to pilfer, for housemaids to sell” (*CL* 716). Wilde here refers to an incident caused by Douglas by giving some clothes to a boy he had brought home without realizing that letters from Wilde were still in their pockets (Ellmann 367). This boy, Alfred Wood, would later extort money from Wilde and hand back three of the four letters that had come into his possession. The forth letter, called the “Hyacinth Letter” in reference to the line “I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days” (dated January 1893; *CL* 544), Wood held on to. It would later find its way into Queensberry’s hands and be used as “evidence” of Wilde’s “indecent” during the trials. In order avoid further blackmailing, Wilde decided to declare the Hyacinth letter a work of art and, to this end, asked his friend, Pierre Louÿs, to translate it into French, but to change its genre in the process: It became a prose poem (Ellmann 370f). This strategic move to deflect any suspicions strongly suggests that Wilde considered letters private, but poems works of art, meant for public consumption. In other words: Statements such as “I never write except for publication”¹⁷ (qtd. in Linder) and Wilde’s insistence on his letters’

¹⁶ At this point, it should be mentioned that of Douglas’ letters to Wilde only three have survived (Hyde *Douglas* 121). What happened to the rest of them does not emerge from any of the biographies about Wilde or Douglas.

¹⁷ This statement was made during the trials by Wilde. It is part of his recollection of events surrounding the Hyacinth letter. Upon allegedly being reproached by Queensberry with “disgusting conduct” and writing “a disgusting letter” (qtd. in Linder), Wilde claims that he answered, “The letter was a beautiful letter, and I never write except for publication” (ibid).

status as works of art¹⁸ (ibid) during the court trials have to be read with caution and in the context of his efforts to be acquitted of “gross indecency” or, as Marco Wan suggests, to “expound his aesthetic vision” (726).

Wan’s argument is that Wilde, even though he knew that the Marquess would bring highly incriminating evidence to court, stayed in London to face the Marquess as he saw in the high-profile trial a platform for strengthening his aesthetic vision (726). This vision was based on the principle “that art exists as an autonomous entity, and that art is not subordinate to life because it is not a mere reflection of life” (Wan 716), which repudiates 19th-century realism’s premise that art should always strive to imitate life as closely as possible and that art cannot exist apart from life (Wan 712). Wilde achieved his aim by thwarting the attempts of Edward Carson, the Marquess’ barrister, to link some of Wilde’s works to his sexual life in the attempt to prove that a writer of texts expressing an “indecent” intimacy between men was prone to committing acts of ‘indecent’ also in his own life (Wan 716). For example, on being reproached by Carson that his letter dated January 1893 (*CL* 544) was inappropriate and unnatural¹⁹, Wilde “elevated [the letter] from the realm of everyday correspondence to the realm of art” (Wan 720), insisting that only an artist was able to produce such writing (Holland *Peacock* 95). On being asked whether he regarded John Francis Bloxam’s controversial story, “The Priest and the Acolyte”, which appeared in *The Chameleon*²⁰ and relates a love affair between a priest and a boy, as immoral, Wilde answered, “Worse, it is badly written” (qtd. in Holland *Peacock* 69), again refusing to make a connection between life and art. Throughout his cross-examination, Wilde evoked notions in line with his aesthetic vision, especially notions of taste and beauty (Wan 718) and he did so compellingly: in the end, he was not convicted because he failed to defend his literary works, but because of the testimony of rent boys, who convinced the court of having been sexually intimate with Wilde (ibid). Still, knowing about Wilde’s views on the publication of personal letters from his private correspondence one is tempted to dismiss Wilde’s insistence on his letters’ status as works of art during the trials as a desperate attempt to avoid conviction. From this standpoint, then, it is not a long way to claiming that *DP*, which looks like a letter, must have been

¹⁸ Like Guy and Small, Wilde seems to be equating art with “destined for public consumption”.

¹⁹ In this letter, Wilde calls Douglas “My Own Boy” and says of Douglas’ “rose-leaf lips” that they “should have been made no less for music of song than for madness of kisses” (*CL* 544).

²⁰ *The Chameleon* was a magazine edited by John Francis Bloxam, which produced one issue only in December 1894. It was used by the prosecution because it contained the poem “Two Loves” by Douglas with the famous last line “I am the love that dare not speak its name” (*CL* 703) as well some aphorisms by Wilde. Wilde bitterly regretted agreeing to publish them in the magazine as it got him associated with Bloxam’s story and Douglas’ poem: “But I go to prison, all the same, for your friend’s undergraduate magazine, and ‘the Love that dares not tell its name’” (ibid).

“sacred and secret” (CL 717) to Wilde, too. However, such a reasoning would be far too simplistic, especially since it reduces *DP* to its letter-like structure.

This chapter has shown the role letters played both in Victorian society in general and in Wilde’s life in particular, thus providing arguments for why one might be tempted to label *DP* a personal letter. The following chapter, in contrast, is concerned with answering the question why *DP* might be a piece of life writing for the masses or posterity by tracing the development of literary celebrity culture from the 18th to the 19th century and tying it to the rise in popularity of genres of life writing.

4.4 *De Profundis* as a Piece of Life Writing for a Larger Audience: Historical and Biographical Perspective

4.4.1 Life Writing in the Victorian Era and the Development of a Celebrity Culture

At Wilde’s time genres of life writing were immensely popular among the increasingly literate population. There was a huge interest in genres such as memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, diaries and also letters (often as parts of the former). Also consumer artefacts such as photographs and engravings (Boyce, Finnerty, and Millim 4f) were passionately collected by the Victorians (Millim 138). This chapter is concerned with the reasons for this boom in life writing genres.

Any discussion of the role of life writing in the Victorian era has to be rooted in the context of the discussion of the development of a new social category for artists and authors, athletes, actors – basically anybody: the celebrity. Tom Mole understands celebrity as “a cultural apparatus consisting of three elements: an individual, an industry and an audience” (1) “that took shape in response to the industrialised print culture of the late eighteenth century” (xi). He argues that Lord Byron is one of the first literary celebrities (xi). Mole is not alone with his view (cf., e.g., Franssen and Honings, Marsh or Glass), but other scholars beg to differ notably. Film historians, for example, root the phenomenon in the emergence of visual mass media in the 20th century (Schickel qtd. in Turner 12). In contrast, Van Krieken regards “the Church as an innovator in the celebrity production process” (17) and traces celebrity back to the emergence of print (18). The Church is considered important in this process as it “generat[ed] through the creation of saints the kind of relationship between ordinary people and exemplary, highly visible individuals that persists to this day” (Krieken 29). Even though Van Krieken considers the concept of celebrity to go thus far back, he

admits that “celebrity society is certainly bound up with that of modernity, especially with the evolution of modes of communication” (17).²¹

This thesis focuses on a “special form of celebrity” (Franssen and Honings 16): literary celebrity. In contrast to the concept of celebrity as a whole, there seems to be little disagreement regarding the time when literary celebrity emerged: it is generally associated with the first half of the 19th century (e.g. Franssen and Honings 18, Glass 39). Rising literacy rates after 1800 (in the Britain of the 1790s, only about 5 percent of the population could read) ensured that authors would reach larger audiences (Berenson and Giloi 1). Moreover, while pre-Romantic writers either had aristocratic patrons or were themselves aristocrats (Glass 39), writers in the Romantic period, “[c]ut loose from the simultaneously supportive and restrictive ties of patronage, [...] found themselves struggling for recognition and remuneration from a rapidly expanding audience of strangers” (Glass 40). Hence literary celebrity can be seen as the logical consequence of the disappearance of the concept of literary patronage and as an opportunity for writers to advertise themselves and acquire a loyal readership within the constantly growing reading public (Glass 40). The self-marketing expected from the author would entail to “[engage] interest at the level of private life” (Tuite “Tainted” 60), meaning that they had to establish an imagined intimacy with their readers (Glass 44). In the late Romantic period up until the 1840s, the cultural practice of lionism was the dominant form of establishing such intimacy. At that time, we are still talking about a “face-to-face intimacy” (Salmon 68) between the celebrated figure, the “lion”, and his or her admirers, the “lionisers”. Later on in the 19th century, when readers’ desire for “personal contact with authors whose characters had touched them emotionally and whose voices were so familiar to them” (Glass 44) had become even stronger, authors had to find other ways of building a relationship with their audience. This is where life writing/narrative comes into play. By around 1850, owing primarily to the emergence of cheap mass newspapers and magazines (Berenson and Giloi 2) as well as photography (Franssen and Honings 20), celebrity can be said to have become based on a “parasocial relationship” (Salmon 68) between people who have not physically met one another, much as in the case of modern celebrities. The advent of mass media was driven by “ever more complex technologies—steam-powered rotary presses, automatic paper folders, linotype machines, railroads, telegraphs, and soon telephones, and innovative photographic techniques” (Berenson and

²¹ Those scholars who argue that the concept of celebrity (culture) is a relatively modern one do not, of course, deny the fact that there have been celebrated public figures long before the Romantic period, they simply distinguish between fame and celebrity as “an ephemeral version of fame [which] is tightly connected to the mass press born in the 1860s” (Berenson & Giloi 6).

Giloi 2). Especially photography's role in the making of celebrities must not be underestimated, not only because they made individuals easily recognisable, but also, being "the visual transcript of the celebrity's body" (Marsh 106), celebrity photographs offered fans the illusion of bodily intimacy (ibid). By the second half of the 19th century, mass media had begun to force their way into celebrated people's private lives so relentlessly because of their readers' need for illusory intimacy with their favourite authors that there were "not merely reluctant celebrities, but hounded ones" (Boyce, Finnerty, and Millim 2) whose most personal details regarding their lifestyle, looks and love life were broadcast to the world (Eisner 5).

Given this reciprocal relationship between readers and authors, "the celebrity image can be seen to be communally produced, that is to say, produced by the public that is so often diabolized as the passive consumer opposed to the productive creative genius" (Tuite "Tainted" 79). This is one of the reasons why, already in the Romantic period, "celebrity [...] came to be understood as distinctly inferior variety of fame" (Mole xii). William Hazlitt, the English essayist and literary critic, for example, claimed that "fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable" (283). In other words: Romantics tended to tie celebrity to immediate popularity and position it in opposition to fame (Higgins "Celebrity" 42), which was exclusively reserved for the "neglected genius", who, while alive, is unsuccessful as a writer and misunderstood by society, but whose genius and extraordinary autonomy and originality will be appreciated after his/her death (Boyce, Finnerty, and Millim 3). By the Victorian era, and the advent of mass media, many writers were longing for immediate celebrity rather than for eternal fame. However, Victorians glorified Romantic literary geniuses like William Wordsworth (Deane xii) and also preferred the "traditional 'fame' associated with posthumous reputation rather than the immediate 'celebrity' that is facilitated and driven by the mass media and marketplace" (Boyce, Finnerty, and Millim 3). Autonomy and originality were still seen as prerequisites on the path to fame (Higgins *Magazine* 9), autonomy being understood as "individuality in artistic creation" (ibid 1). Thus, it can be said that it would have been according to the spirit of the Victorian era to strive both for immediate recognition, i.e. celebrity, which would also come with commercial success, and eternal fame. In fact, in *DP* Wilde frequently refers to himself as "genius" (e.g. CL 690, 718), "man of genius" (CL 718) and "distinguished genius" (CL 724).

Another reason why celebrity had such a bad reputation is, as Tuite suggests, that "celebrity does not rely purely on fame as positive publicity but can incorporate and capitalize

on the effects of negative fame or notoriety” (“Tainted” 78). On the basis of the publication of the novel *Glenarvon* by Caroline Lamb, in which Lamb rewrote her affair with Lord Byron and which can be regarded as a prime example of scandalous memoir, Tuite shows that “libel and defamation are critical to the category of celebrity as a modern form of fame” (“Tainted” 75) as scandal and an ensuing loss of reputation can “find a return in sales” (ibid 72) or “involve a deferral of reputation that is then capitalized through literary posterity” (ibid 72). She terms this aspect of celebrity “scandalous celebrity” and by ascribing it the power of translating scandal and notoriety into fame calls into question the very distinction between celebrity and fame (“Tainted” 78).

In this subchapter, it was shown that life writing genres were very popular in Wilde’s days and that they played an important role in the making of celebrities like Wilde. It was also suggested that Victorians still strove for posthumous fame and not only for immediate celebrity. What was not answered, though, is why a celebrity like Wilde would want or have to engage in life writing for the masses in order to attain posthumous fame. To answer this question, we have to take a closer look at Tuite’s concept of “scandalous celebrity” (“Tainted” 78) and trace Wilde’s transformation from celebrity to acclaimed writer and to scandalous figure, which in many ways is also echoed in Byron’s life. The following subchapter is devoted to comparing Byron and Wilde as examples of scandalous celebrity.

4.4.2 Byron and Wilde: Literary Celebrities Fallen from Grace

One of the defining moments in Wilde’s life was when he, the unemployed, self-declared figurehead of Aestheticism, accepted an invitation by American theatre promoter D’Oyly Carte to go on a lecture tour in America. The aim of this tour was to bring the American public to understand the aesthetic craze that spread from Britain at the time in order to allow it to appreciate Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert’s opera *Patience*, which satirised Aestheticism and had opened in New York on 22 September 1881 (Hyde *Wilde* 50). Mendelssohn explains that his lecture tour, which started on 2 January 1882 in New York and lasted several months, provided him with an audience (at least in the beginning, the lecture halls were packed), introduced him to American showmen who gave him advice on how to look and dress like a star, to celebrity photographers, who took his picture, and the media, who conducted numerous interviews with him. It was during these interviews and his lectures that “he finds his voice” (ibid) and starts to invent himself as the “personification of aesthetic style” (Mayer 114). Thus, his time in America contributed greatly to his transformation “into

a universally recognized public figure” (Sloan 169 qtd. in Mayer 113). Importantly, his renown at the time was not due to his art, but due to his incredible talent for creating and shaping his public persona²² (Mayer 114) through his “choreographed public performance and diligently managed publicity [as well as his] sense for product placement and branding” (Mayer 114). While this holds also true for Byron,²³ “Wilde’s dandyism was a good deal different from anything evinced by Byron” (Quintus 10). While Byron had emphasized his masculinity in dress by sporting military regalia, Wilde completed his outfits with sun flowers and lilies of the valley (ibid). Their extravagant ways of self-portraiture and skilful self-commodification, however different, helped both Byron and Wilde to forge a relationship to the general public long before they received acclaim also for their literary works. For Wilde, this was not until the publication of his fairy tales and essays. For his definitive break-through as a writer, he had to wait until the 1890s, which, up until his conviction for gross indecency in 1895, had been Wilde’s decade: “[h]is singular personality dominated the most exclusive dining tables and the most fashionable drawing rooms of London, and he was an important and recognizable public figure on three continents” (Foldy ix). In these five years he also finally received the critical acclaim that had not followed previous works. Especially his society comedies and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* caused him to gain a “reputation as a brilliant wit, literary stylist, and master of the English language” (ibid). He refined and perfected his idea of aestheticism, which now also encompassed “artistic freedom and full expression of personality” (Ellmann 288) and gave the aesthetic movement its major representative work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (ibid). Even though Wilde may have been right when he claimed that “during the whole time [he and Douglas] were together [he] never wrote one single line” (CL 685) (if “together” is read as “both present at the same location and time”), Wilde’s most successful and productive time as a writer coincides roughly with the duration of his relationship with Douglas, which began around June 1892 (Ellmann 363).

However, along with his reputation, Wilde’s “notoriety grew [...] and [...] his success brought not only financial gain but repeated assignations with rent boys” (Quintus 16). Similarly, Byron is said to have had relationships with rent boys and to have fathered a child with his half-sister, Lady Caroline Lamb, which whom Byron had had an affair and who had gotten obsessed with him, kept stirring the rumour pot, thus actively sabotaging Byron’s

²² This persona is, according to Marcovitch (20), a performance, more precisely the “most fundamental type of performance”, in which the body is turned into “a sign to the public which substitutes for the entire personality” (ibid 17). Quintus sees the persona not as a sign, but as a mask worn “chiefly to present [oneself] to the world, and in some measure to market [oneself] as well” (3).

²³ While as a student, Wilde was intrigued by and defended Byron against allegations of incest (Quintus 6), he chose Keats over Byron as his literary model during the lecture tour (ibid 10).

career (Quintus 16). These rumours, climbing debts and the scandal following his separation from his recently wedded wife made him flee the country, never to return. Like Byron, also Wilde was hit by scandal and was forced to go into exile at the culmination of his career. Unlike Byron, though, who by fleeing could at least enjoy his continued popularity on the continent, Wilde did not leave England immediately, but, against the advice of many of his closest friends, stayed to face trial, which ultimately proved fatal. The scandal surrounding his trials and imprisonment was enormous. Suddenly, the media that played such a big role in Wilde's attaining of his status as one of the – if not *the* – most influential celebrities of his time, celebrated the jury's verdict and so did the public (Ellmann 450). “[I]nfamy had replaced fame”, Ellmann (454) pointedly observes: “It was as if he had never written any of those plays, dialogues, stories and poems. All his acts had been erased except those memorialized in the courtroom” (ibid). On his release from prison, Wilde left for France. He spent the rest of his life in self-imposed exile on the European mainland. According to Tuite, who claims that exile can facilitate the crossing over from social ruin into posthumous fame (*Byron* 39, “Tainted” 79) as it “enacts the prerogative of masculine mobility” (*Byron* 39) associated with “an aristocratic model of heroic fame” (ibid), Wilde's flight to France is one of the reasons for his continued fame.

Tracing Wilde's comet-like rise as a celebrity and his even faster downfall over just two pages quite vividly shows that Wilde's writing of *DP* cannot simply be explained as being a means of fulfilling his psychological “need for catharsis” as Anderson (1 qtd. in Sha 7) claims or for “reliev[ing] the anger that had built up inside him and had been unexpressed for two years”, as Murray (100) suggests. There is a more poignant dimension to it, which is his striving for eternal fame: Life writing for posterity would quite simply give Wilde the opportunity for vindication, to salvage some of his reputation as an acclaimed writer.

4.4.3 Wilde as a Life Writer

In this chapter we will focus on *how* Wilde, in *DP*, manages to salvage some of his reputation. It is not hard to tell that he does so by “transferring responsibility for his plight” (Anderson 2 qtd. in Sha 7). *DP* is full of recriminations against Douglas. Primarily, Wilde accuses Douglas of four faults. First, he accuses him of “stand[ing] persistently between Art and myself” (*CL* 687):

“[Y]ou could not understand the conditions requisite for the production of artistic work.” (*CL* 685)

“[Y]our desires were in Life not in Art.” (*CL* 686)

“[Y]ou were the absolute ruin of my Art.” (*CL* 687)

By blaming Douglas for his creative ruin, he insinuates that all he ever wanted was to keep on writing plays, essays, short stories and the like, i.e. dedicating himself to what he was celebrated for. Without Douglas, he implies, there would be no reason why he should not have died a celebrated writer.

In addition, Wilde also accuses Douglas of being responsible for his financial ruin:

“[Y]ou [brought] me to utter and discreditable financial ruin. [...] [Y]our claim that all your pleasures should be paid for by me whether I was with you or not: brought me after some time into serious monetary difficulties [...]” (*CL* 687)

“[Y]ou returned silently, for money: took what you could find on the dressing-table and mantelpiece, and left the house [...]” (*CL* 699)

“[Y]ou gambled with my life, as you gambled with my money, carelessly, recklessly, indifferent to the consequence.” (*CL* 707)

By making one sole person responsible for his artistic and financial ruin, Wilde suggests that he would have led a life full of art and without monetary problems if it was not for one particular person. Thus, he presents himself as someone whose only fault it was to have allowed one wrong person in his life.

Other accusations, such as the accusation of being absorbed by the hate for his father (“Your hatred of your father was of such stature that it entirely outstripped, o’erthrew, and overshadowed your love to me.” (*CL* 706)) or of being vain (“If Hate blinded your eyes, Vanity sewed your eyelids together with threads of iron.” (*CL* 720)), are less self-serving. What is self-serving, though, is that Wilde intersperses his accusations with affirmations of his guilt over his own misery:

“I blame myself terribly. As I sit here in this dark cell in convict clothes, a disgraced and ruined man, I blame myself. In the perturbed and fitful nights of anguish, in the long monotonous days of pain, it is myself I blame.” (*CL* 685)

“[I]n allowing you to stand persistently between Art and myself I give to myself shame and blame in the fullest degree. [...] I blame myself without reserve for my weakness. [...]” (*CL* 687)

“I blame myself again for having allowed you to bring me to utter and discreditable financial ruin.” (CL 687)

“But most of all I blame myself for the entire ethical degradation I allowed you to bring on me.” (CL 689)

Wilde finds the grounds for his guilt in his “weaknesses”:

Through deep if misplaced affection for you: through great pity for your defects of temper and temperament: through my own proverbial good-nature and Celtic laziness: through an artistic aversion to coarse scenes and ugly words: through that incapacity to bear resentment of any kind which at that time characterised me: through my dislike of seeing life made bitter and uncomely by what to me, with my eyes really fixed on other things, seemed to be mere trifles too petty for more than a moment’s thought or interest – through these reasons, simple as they may sound, I gave up to you always. (CL 689)

His self-castigation culminates in the much-quoted sentence “Blindly I staggered as an ox into the shambles” (CL 690). This is cleverly done: Admitting to being partly responsible for his situation does not only make him credible, the mention of his weaknesses also strikes a chord with his readers or, as Gagnier puts it, “merely reinforces a positive image of Wilde’s own personality” (“Materialist” 342) to the extent that Douglas is cast in the role of the villain who alone is at fault for Wilde’s situation. Murray (101) calls into question the truth content of Wilde’s accusations²⁴ and refers to *DP* as “the most degrading document ever to come from [Wilde’s] pen” (ibid). Wilde later justified his accusations by having been “starving and half mad” (Douglas 135 in Murray 102). Regardless of whether there is truth to them or not: For Douglas they meant that his “rage at the letter’s lies [...] built up in him the frustration that destroyed him” (Murray 102), for Wilde they meant that he would be rehabilitated.

To conclude, it can be assumed that there was an element of striving for eternal fame in Wilde’s writing of *DP*, not only because it catered to contemporary audience tastes, but also because to him, broken and exiled, posthumous fame was all he could hope for. Clearing his name and vindicating himself must have seemed essential for salvaging some of his reputation as an acclaimed writer and, finally, gaining posthumous fame. After all, as Tuite suggests, fame is not out of reach for celebrities fallen from grace. We have not even looked at the

²⁴ Indeed, some of Wilde’s accusations have been shown to be untrue, e.g. Wilde’s claim that Douglas promised Wilde that his family would pay for Wilde’s fees in the libel suit only to break the promise later on (Murray 101).

textual level of *DP* yet and can already say that, historically and biographically, an argumentation for *DP* being a piece of life writing destined to be consumed in its entirety by a larger audience is more convincing than the suggestion that it was written for Douglas alone. Let us now move to the textual level to bolster this argument, and compare Wilde's letters to Douglas to *DP*.

5. Wilde's Letters to Douglas in Relation to *De Profundis*

Of all the letters Wilde wrote to Douglas, 33 (*DP* excluded) have survived. All of them are included in Holland and Hart-Davis' *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. The first one is dated November 1892 (*CL* 538f), the last one circa 12 September 1897 (*CL* 935). Some are only a few lines long, some are longer and divided into paragraphs, but none come anywhere near the length of *DP*. The generic identity of these texts has, to my knowledge, never been a subject of debate. They have been treated as personal letters²⁵ and appear in none of the collections of Wilde's works (most prominently, perhaps, the various editions of *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*), only in collections of his letters. This chapter is concerned with finding common characteristics of (Victorian personal) letters and with tracing these characteristics in Wilde's 33 letters to Douglas before comparing the letters to *DP*.

Identifying certain features that commonly characterise letters in general is easier said than done: Earle observes that "[t]here continues to be little agreement on precisely what a letter is" (8). Brant also talks of an unstable genre made up of a multitude of texts "which share identifiable markers of genre" (2), but which are at the same time so different that ignoring these differences would "diminish the significance of their diversity" (*ibid*). She finds the reason for these differences in the diverse contexts in which letters are used and in the different aims with which letters are written (*ibid*). Therefore, in our quest for characteristic features, we will focus on a particular subgenre of letters. The subgenre that comes to mind automatically is the Victorian love letter. However, while the letters are certainly Victorian, the question is whether all of Wilde's letters to Douglas can be considered love letters.

²⁵ As an indicator that Wilde did not write the other letters to Douglas with publication in mind a letter to Ross dated (most likely) 30 May 1896 is often cited. In this letter Wilde implores his friend to retrieve any letters he has ever sent to Douglas: "I will ask you to seal them up. In case I die here you will destroy them. In case I survive I will destroy them myself" (*CL* 654).

5.1 Wilde's Letters to Douglas: Love Letters?

If we were to disregard the textual level of the letters and merely considered external evidence such as the letters' temporal placement on the timeline of Wilde's and Douglas's relationship, one would be tempted to collectively identify them as love letters: The oldest surviving letter to Douglas is dated November (?) 1892, long after Wilde had met Douglas (in 1891) (Hyde *Wilde* 133) and had, according to Douglas, begun to "[make] overtures to [Douglas]" (qtd. in Hyde *Wilde* 145). Also, five months before the date indicated on the first of the 33 letters, i.e. in May or June 1892, Wilde wrote to his friend Robert Ross that he worshipped Douglas (*CL* 526). Since their close relationship only came to a (more or less temporary) end upon Wilde's imprisonment, it can thus be assumed that they were in an intimate relationship of some sort when Wilde wrote his first (surviving) letter to Douglas in November 1892.

However, when moving to the textual level of these letters, doubts arise regarding whether the letters can be collectively subsumed under the label "love letters" and we are presented with some challenges. Apart from the obvious difficulty of pinning down what love is it has in fact proven almost impossible to find literature on what the defining characteristics of a love letter are. While McDougall (546) claims that the reason for this is that love letters have rarely been analysed systematically, Hübener, Paulus and Stauf claim that defining characteristics of the genre seem to escape scholars because the word *love* refers to different phenomena and concepts (505). There is something to the latter's claim considering that many definitions of love letters are circular definitions, meaning that (part of) the word defined appears in the definition, which makes the definitions quite useless. Brant, for example, states that "[l]ove-letters express love" (93) and Bray talks about love letters expressing "loving feelings" (552). Not even guides on writing love letters are particularly helpful when it comes to answering the question of what the difference is between a love letter and other types of letters. For example, *Gaskell's Compendium of Forms*, a conduct book on, *inter alia*, letter writing from 1881 only tells its readers that "[l]ove letters written in sincerity and faith need few suggestions or guidance as to their composition. [...] The true lover will find words he seeks flow easily from his pen [...]" (Gaskell 221). Also, scholars fail to give selection criteria for the love letters they have chosen to analyse. McDougall (557f), for example, first selects European and Chinese lover letters and then identifies common topics such as references to past and future letter correspondence, thoughts and feelings (the writer's and the recipient's), terms of endearment, "[d]escriptions of the letter-writer's own physical state (usually less than satisfactory) and enquiries into the health and well-being" (558) as well as

other topics, all of which may just as well be encountered in other letter genres. Only Brant gives some answers to the question of what recurring topics can be found in love letters when she claims that “[l]ove-letters [...] express demand and need” (93). Specifically looking at eighteenth-century love letters, she also identifies references to parts of the body (96) and the use of figurative language, in particular similes, which “formed the backbone of those compliments which made the character of the lover immediately recognisable” (95). As compliments and references to body parts also occur strikingly often in Wilde’s letters to Douglas, I have decided to add them to my catalogue of specific features that will help establish whether these letters count as love letters or not. This catalogue, then, contains the following criteria:

1. The occurrence of the word *love* in a romantic sense
2. Expressions of demand, need or desire
3. Compliments (especially in the form of metaphors and similes)
4. References to body parts that are expressive of intimacy

The following list gives a number of examples of where and how these features occur in Wilde’s letters to Douglas. The numbers at the end of each line refer to the four categories of characteristics listed above:

“I should awfully like to go away with you somewhere where it is hot and coloured.”
(CL 538) – 2

“[...] those red rose-leaf lips of yours [...]. With undying love” (CL 544) – 3/4-1

“[...] your curved lips (CL 559) [...] you break my heart [...] you are the divine thing I want.” (CL 560) – 4-4-2

“You really must be painted, and also have an ivory statue executed.” (CL 565) – 2-3

“Let us always be infinitely dear to each other [...]. [...] I think of you daily [...].”
(CL 577f) – 2

“[...] I miss you so much.” (CL 588) – 2

“With love” (CL 590) – 1

“I think of you all day long, and miss your grace, your boyish beauty, [...] and, above all, you yourself. [...] I have no words for how I love you.” (CL 594) – 2-1

“With fondest love” (CL 608) – 1

“I have been very lonely without you [...].” (CL 622) – 2

“This is to assure you of my immortal, my eternal love for you.” (CL 646) – 1

“Oh! May I live to touch your hair and your hand. [...] I am now, as ever since the day we met, yours devoutly and with an immortal love” (*CL* 647) – 4-2-1

“I know now how much greater love is than everything else.” (*CL* 651) – 1

“From your silken hair to your delicate feet you are perfection to me.” (*CL* 561) – 3-4

“I think of you always, and love you always [...].” (*CL* 902) – 2-1

“But we love each other.” (*CL* 933) – 1

Especially in the letters written from prison, or rather, between 29 April 1895, which is the date of the first letter written from Holloway Prison, and the creation of *DP*, the above characteristics abound to the extent that Wilde’s love for Douglas is the sole topic (see, e.g. his letter from May 1895, *CL* 650f). On the basis of the previously identified characteristics, out of all the letters written to Douglas before prison, only the letters dated 12-15 (?) April 1893 (*CL* 560), which is only three lines long, 5 April 1895 (*CL* 637) and 9 September 1893 (*CL* 571) cannot be regarded “love letters”. In the first, Wilde tells Douglas where to meet him for lunch the following day, in the second, he tells Douglas to ask different people to “attend to give bail” (*CL* 637) as he is being held at the police station, and in the third letter he informs Douglas of his recent activities and plans for the near future. However, out of the eleven letters to Douglas that Wilde wrote after his release from prison only five fulfil the above characteristics. Thus, even though the majority can be classified as love letters, I deem it best to resort to a superordinate term and refer to them as personal or familiar letters, which encompass letters of a personal, informal nature written to friends, family members or close acquaintances, and which are written with the aim of maintaining or strengthening the relationship to the respective addressee through inquiries about his or her well-being or the sharing of news, for example. Let us examine, in the following, whether all of the letters fulfil the characteristics of Victorian familiar letters.

5.2 Characteristics of Victorian Familiar Letters

In the Victorian period, personal letters or familiar letters were also called “domestic letters” (Gaskell 215). Very broadly, familiar letters can be defined as “those of an intimate, friendly, or an affectionate nature” (ibid). Given the letter’s significance in this period, a large number of manuals on letter writing were published, which offer insight into the conventions governing the composition of specific types of letters. One focus of these manuals is placed on the material component of letter writing, i.e. the paper, ink or envelope, the legibility of the

handwriting, the correct folding of the paper and its insertion into the envelope, the use of stamps and the superscription on the envelope. However, for the purpose of this thesis, we will concentrate on structure and content. The manual that I consider most useful for this purpose, especially as it contains not only sample letters (as most manuals) but also detailed guidelines, and that was published closest to the production of the letters under consideration, namely in 1883, is J. Willis Westlake's *How to Write Letters: A Manual of Correspondence, Showing the Correct Structure, Composition, Punctuation, Formalities and Uses of the Various Kinds of Letters, Notes, and Cards*.²⁶

According to Westlake, a letter should contain a heading, a salutation, a body and a conclusion. The "heading consists of the *Place* and the *Date*" (Westlake 19). The salutation introduces the body of the letter and depends on the writer's relation to the recipient (Westlake 30). In the body, i.e. the main part, the first sentence "should be as free and natural as possible" (Westlake 87). Westlake advises to put into it "[w]hatever is uppermost in the mind" (87). Also, the writer should start a new paragraph whenever he or she begins to write about a new, unrelated matter (Westlake 40). Quite generally, the writer is also encouraged to "write of little things" (Westlake 92) and to write with the heart, not the head (*ibid*), meaning that expressions of affection "that are prompted by genuine feeling" (Westlake 93) should not be suppressed. Apart from that, Westlake's (92) only advice regarding the content is:

The supreme excellence of a familiar letter is naturalness. Such a letter should be unstudied, free from affectation, and as nearly as possible like good conversation. And it should be perfectly characteristic of the writer, so that the recipient may feel when reading it, as if his friend were actually present and speaking. When you are about to write a letter to a friend, think what you would say to him if he were at that moment with you, and then write it. We all like talking letters – good *talking*, of course.

Typically, the main part closes with "some expression of compliment or affection" (Westlake 87). The conclusion, then, follows the main part and includes the complimentary close and the signature (Westlake 44). Unlike the name suggests, the former is not (necessarily) a compliment to the reader, but is simply the term for "the phrase of courtesy, respect, or endearment used at the end of a letter" (*ibid*). Which one the writer chooses depends, again, on several factors. The close most often used by Wilde, *Ever yours*, for example, is, according to Westlake (45), a familiar close which is perfectly suitable for letters to friends. Other examples from Wilde's letters are "Ever your own" (CL 560), "Ever your" (CL 566), "Always, and with devotion" (CL 594) or "I am always devotedly yours" (CL 602). The

²⁶ This manual was published in the US, but Westlake was British. Conveniently, Westlake's views on letters also correspond to Wilde's: "A letter should be regarded not merely as a medium for the communication of intelligence, but also as a work of art" (Westlake 44).

signature, according to Westlake (45), is an integral part of every letter and must not be omitted.

Having worked out the most important characteristics of Victorian familiar letters as discussed by Westlake, we can now turn our attention to the question of whether Wilde's letters to Douglas share some of these characteristics.

5.3 Characteristics of Victorian Familiar Letters in Wilde's Letters to Douglas

Typically of familiar letters, as discussed before, all of the 33 letters (with one exception) begin with a salutation such as "My dearest Bosie"²⁷ (e.g. *CL* 545 and 620), "My dearest Boy" (e.g. *CL* 577, 588 and 589) or "My own dear Boy" (e.g. *CL* 594 and 607). Only the letter dated May 1895 starts with "As for you, you have given me the beauty of life [...]" (*CL* 650). However, this might be due to the fact that this letter is incomplete.²⁸ While 22 of the letters bear the writer's current address, only seven of the letters are dated (day and month; the year is omitted), not counting those which bear such unspecific dates as "Monday Evening" (letter dated 29 April 1895²⁹, *CL* 646). Hence, scholars often had to revert to postmarks and textual hints (such as mentions of the weather) to be able to date Wilde's letters or make an educated guess about their time of composition (Holland *Letters* xvii).

In the first sentence, in which, as Westlake suggests, one should say "[w]hatever is uppermost in the mind" (87), Wilde usually makes some reference to the letter or telegram by Douglas to which he writes in response:

"Your sonnet is quite lovely [...]" (*CL* 544)

"Your letter was delightful [...]" (*CL* 559)

"Thanks for your telegram which I got last night [...]" (*CL* 571)

"Your telegram has just arrived;" (*CL* 588)

"How sweet of you to send me that charming poem." (*CL* 601)

"Your sweet letter arrived this morning [...]" (*CL* 607)

"I have just got your letter [...]" (*CL* 880)

"Thanks for your letter received this morning." (*CL* 906)

"I received your letters all right [...]" (*CL* 910)

²⁷ *Bosie* was Wilde's (and other close friends') personal term of endearment for Douglas.

²⁸ The history of this letter will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter on page 38.

²⁹ In cases like this, the date has been reconstructed and added in square brackets by the editors of *CL*.

“I got your telegram half an hour ago [...].” (CL 932)

In one case, the absence of such a letter seems to be Wilde’s incentive to write to Douglas: “No letter from you yet” (CL 565). Other letters begin with responses to the content of Douglas’ letters, such as “I am so glad you are better” (CL 538) or “Yes: the Scarlet Marquis made a plot to address the audience on the first night of my play!”³⁰ (CL 632). This matches with McDougall’s finding that the correspondence itself was one of the most frequent topics in the letters she analysed, often revolving around “letters received, letters sent, what was in the last, what will be in the next [...]. [...] [T]he anxiety of the writer to account for every item is an indication of the letters’ importance” (557).

In the main part, the letters often revolve around the latest events in Wilde’s life, his current location or state of mind (“I lunched with Prince Troubetzkoy” (CL 565), “I am terribly busy in town” (CL 539), “I am rather unhappy as I can’t write” (CL 545)). Another frequently recurring topic is Wilde’s monetary problems:

“[N]o money, no credit, and a heart of lead” (CL 560)

“I am overwhelmed by the wings of vulture creditors [...].” (CL 577)

“I have no money, as usual [...].” (CL 594)

“I have not a penny.” (CL 598)

“I dare not lodge the money in the bank, as I have overdrawn £40, but I think of hiding gold in the garden.” (CL 607)

“I have been [...] worried by money matters.” (CL 622)

“I simply do not know how I shall live after the summer is over [...].” (CL 872f)

“I must try and get some more money.” (CL 935)

Wilde’s continuing monetary problems stemmed from his extravagant lifestyle, which had already brought him into financial troubles well before he met Douglas, but once he began to entertain Douglas, “his expenses became formidable and soon outran his large earnings. [...] [H]e borrowed heedlessly right and left and had therefore to bring forth play after play with scant time for thought” (Harris 151). What is noteworthy here is that Wilde never accuses Douglas of being responsible for his dire financial situation in these letters – in *DP*, however, such accusations abound. Apart from that, Wilde incorporates calls for response, such as “Try to let me hear from you soon” (CL 647) or “Pray do not fail to write at once on receipt of this”

³⁰ Wilde wrote this line as a response to Queensberry’s attempt to humiliate Wilde at the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at St James’s Theatre on 14 February 1895 with a bouquet of rotten vegetables (CL 632). Wilde learnt of it in time and denied Queensberry entry to the theatre.

(CL 899)³¹ and, of course, writes of his love to Douglas (see above), expressing his affection or complimenting him, especially at the end of the main part. This, again, is typical of late Victorian personal letters (Westlake 87).

Considering Westlake's suggestions regarding paragraphing (40), it can be said that, while the shorter letters sometimes lack paragraphs (e.g. letter dated March 1893, CL 559f), the longer ones do indeed express different ideas or topics in different paragraphs. Whether short or long, the transitions from one idea or topic to the next are often abrupt as the ideas can be unrelated and not connected. The following beginnings of the paragraphs of Wilde's letter dated 13 August 1894 (CL 601f) illustrate this quite well:

My own dearest Boy, How sweet of you to send me that charming poem. [...]
 Percy left the day after you did. [...]
 Yesterday (Sunday) Alphonso, Stephen, and I sailed to Littlehampton in the morning.
 [...]
 Your new Sibyl is really wonderful. It is most extraordinary. I must meet her. [...]
 Dear, dear boy, you are more to me than any one of them has any idea; [...]
 Write to me soon [...]

Wilde usually concludes his letters with a complimentary close, e.g. *Ever yours*, *Always devotedly yours* or *Yours with all love* and signs off with *Oscar*. The only letter that does not end with a complimentary close and that is not signed is the one dated May 1895 (CL 650). The reason why this letter is incomplete is most likely this: In 1895, Douglas intended to publish an article in the *Mercure de France* in an attempt to defend Wilde. This article was to include French translations of some of Wilde's letters to Douglas. Enraged, Wilde prevented the publication of this article. Since Douglas claims to have destroyed the original of above-mentioned letter (and many more of Wilde's letters), this letter is a translation from the French translation made for the *Mercure de France* (CL 646, footnote).

To conclude this subchapter, it can be said that Wilde's letters to Douglas share indeed many characteristics with Victorian familiar letters and can, thus, be regarded as such, i.e. as personal letters not written to be read by a larger audience. Having established that is an important step towards being able to argue that *DP*'s intended audience is larger, as we have now identified a pool of letters from a genre to which, according to this thesis statement, *DP* does not belong, but to which it *does* belong (at least the parts not published by Ross in 1905 and 1908) according to scholars such as Small (*Epistola*, "Love-Letter"). If we, in a comparison between these letters and *DP*, encountered many similarities or if we identified similar characteristics in *DP* as those laid out in chapter 5.2, the thesis statement would be

³¹ This point will be further elaborated on below in chapter 6.2.1.

significantly weakened and an argument would have to be made for *DP* being a Victorian familiar letter, i.e. a piece of life writing composed with Douglas as the sole audience in mind. An absence of these characteristics, in contrast, would strengthen my hypothesis that *DP* is indeed not an exclusively personal piece of writing, but was written with a larger audience in mind.

5.4 Characteristics of Victorian Familiar Letters in *De Profundis*

We will now look for Westlake's characteristics in *DP* one by one in the order followed in the previous chapters, starting with the heading.

As was described as typical of Wilde's letters in the preceding chapter, there is no date given at the beginning of *DP*. It would, in fact, have been a little surprising if a date had been indicated given that *DP* was composed in fits and starts over weeks and months. A place, in contrast, is mentioned: "HM Prison, Reading" (CL 683). The salutation, "Dear Bosie" (ibid), might be more formal than the ones in his other letters (where Wilde would put a "My" (e.g. CL 571) at the beginning or use the superlative "Dearest" (e.g. CL 539)), but he still calls Douglas by his name of endearment, Bosie. With the introductory sentence, "After long and fruitless waiting I have determined to write to you myself [...]" (CL 683), Wilde continues his habit of referring to past correspondence between them, even if, in this case, it is the absence of correspondence that seems to be an important element in the composition of this letter. The complimentary close Wilde chooses is "Your affectionate friend" (CL 780), again comparatively formal, and he signs with "Oscar Wilde", which is not only unprecedented in his familiar letters to Douglas but also unexpected after a complimentary close comprising the words *affectionate* and *friend*. This, of course, also signals a significant change in Wilde's and Douglas' relationship and ties in with the accusations voiced against Douglas in the letter.

The main part of *DP*, apart from its length, differs significantly from the main parts in all of Wilde's familiar letters to Douglas. While Wilde – if at all – usually began a new paragraph to introduce a new idea or topic in his familiar letters to Douglas, the paragraphs in *DP* are not only significantly longer, but also often thematically connected and are introduced by cohesive markers or temporal references. Consider, for example, the following beginnings of successive paragraphs (CL 690-694):

The warrant once granted, your will of course directed everything. [...]
On our return to London [...]. [...]
Of course I should have gotten rid of you. [...]
Three months later, in June, [...]. [...]

On my return to London next day [...]. [...]
 In the meantime you are writing to me by every post from Egypt. [...]

This strongly suggests that Wilde was not “writ[ing] of little things” (Westlake 92) or “naturally” and in an “unstudied” way, as Westlake (92) expects it from familiar letters, but put considerable effort into organising paragraphs and sentences in a way that is logical and meaningful even if, as a whole, *DP* might be repetitive, stylistically inconsistent, contradictory (Guy and Small “Reading” 124 and 131) and “disjointed” (Ellmann 484). After all, it must not be forgotten that Wilde wrote it in the course of three months and with limited access to previously written sheets.

To conclude this subchapter, it can be said that *DP* shares certain generic characteristics with Victorian familiar letters, in particular key characteristics such as a heading, a salutation, a complimentary close and a signature. Again, this is certainly one of the main reasons why some scholars jump to the conclusion that *DP* is a personal letter or love letter. However, *DP* also differs in a number of respects from Wilde’s familiar letters to Douglas, most notably the fact that Wilde signed *DP* with both first and family name, the length as well as the paragraphing. It must be noted, though, that Wilde had a habit of writing longer letters with connected paragraphs to other people, such as his close friends Robert Ross and More Adey. One example is Wilde’s letter to Ross dated November 1896 (see chapter 6.3). Hence we cannot rule out that *DP* was meant for Douglas’ eyes only simply by comparing it to the familiar letters by Wilde to Douglas and by looking through the lens of Victorian letter writing conventions. Therefore, we need to view the work through another perspective.

A genre that is strongly associated with letter writing and also catered to the taste for, and popularity of, the same is epistolary fiction. Delafield, for example, observes that “Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* emerged from the market for letter-writing manuals, reinforcing the recognition that factual and fictional letters shared the same models of composition” (10). And indeed, if *DP* was written with a wider audience in mind, i.e. an audience consisting of more than the one person it is addressed to, we can expect it to share certain characteristics with letters such as the ones epistolary novels are composed of. The reason for this is that such letters are always written with more than one reader in mind – the *internal* reader, i.e. the fictional addressee, and the *external* reader, the person reading the epistolary novel (Altman chapter 3). Delafield also raises the issue that the possibility exists that, in the heyday of epistolary fiction in the 18th century, correspondences that were presented as “real” might in fact have been fictional and “were maybe destined for publication

all along” (11). Therefore, the next chapter is devoted to looking at *DP* through the lens of epistolary fiction, which will turn out to be more revealing than one might expect.

6. *De Profundis* through the Lens of Epistolary Fiction

When comparing *DP* to epistolary fiction, one has to bear in mind that, first, *DP* is not a fictional account, even though Wilde might have taken some liberties in his account of Douglas’ behaviour (Guy and Small “Reading” 131); second, that there is no exchange of letters between two characters as is typical of epistolary fiction; and, third, that the author, Wilde, coincides with what in epistolary fiction is referred to as the *internal writer* (see Altman chapter 3), i.e. the fictional letter-writing character or one of the fictional letter-writing characters, not to be confused with the *external writer* (ibid), i.e. the author of the epistolary work. Still, a number of surprising parallels can be drawn. In the following, let me outline just a few of these parallels.

6.1 Parallels between *De Profundis* and Epistolary Fiction

The “formula”, as Perry calls it, of epistolary fiction, according to which the addresser and the addressee always encounter an obstacle that forces them to resort to letter writing in order to remain in contact (93), applies to *DP* as well. In fact, Wilde and Douglas are separated by what can be seen as the “ultimate” obstacle: prison. Ultimately, also the Marquess of Queensberry, or rather, Victorian society, can be made responsible for why Wilde sat down to write *DP* because if Queensberry had not sued him and Victorian society had punished homosexuality less severely, Wilde might not have gone to prison.

Closely related to this is another characteristic of the epistolary formula: isolation. Like Wilde, characters in epistolary fiction usually experience and suffer from their separation from their beloved one in solitude, which triggers

a self-conscious and self-perpetuating process of emotional self-examination which gathers momentum and ultimately becomes more important than communicating with anyone outside the room in which one sits alone writing letters. (Perry 117)

As the nun in Roger L’Estrange’s 1701 translation of Gabriel Joseph de Lavergne Guilleragues’ *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*, who, during writing to her lover, makes herself fall out of love with him and realizes that “[‘t]is not so much for your sake that I write as my own” (Guilleragues qtd. in Perry 111), Wilde, already in the first sentence of

DP, makes it clear that he writes the letter “as much for [Douglas’s] sake as for [his]” (CL 683). Letter writing – for the fictional character as well as for Wilde – thus presents a possibility for introspection and organising one’s thoughts, which seems particularly effective when carried out in seclusion. In epistolary fiction there are even examples of letter writers who, because of “some psychological thirst for externalized consciousness” (Perry 112), address letters to imagined addressees, keeping the letters in order to re-read them themselves. In *The Adventures of Lindamira, A Lady of Quality. Written by her own hand, to her Friend in the Country. In IV Parts. Revised and Corrected by Mr. Tho. Brown*³² the hero writes letters (addressed to a fictional mistress) for himself to read as a means of helping him through his unhappy marriage and over the fact that he is in love with a woman he cannot have. Some would call such letters diary entries, which only underlines how “[fluid] distinctions become [...] when writers adopt the forms [letter and diary] as fictional devices” (Brindle 3). Also Douglas can, to a certain extent, be seen as an imagined correspondent because of the isolation in which Wilde was writing. To be cut off from the rest of the world means that the images which writers (real or fictional) conjure up of their lovers are “the writers’ own projections and can have little or nothing to do with the other correspondent” (Perry 102). The external reader³³ – to use a term from the literary analysis of epistolary fiction – has to rely completely on Wilde’s recollections of, and accusations against, Douglas, some of which were challenged as “purely imaginary” (qtd. in Guy and Small “Reading” 143) by Douglas. However, it is not only Wilde’s representation of Douglas, but also his self-presentation, that is not always truthful (Guy and Small “Reading” 142). It can be argued, though, that the reader, knowing that letters are usually written “in the heat of the moment” (Lee 24), does not expect the story told by the letter writer to be truthful, but to be a “representation – at times, we might even say a fiction” (Karlin xii). Even Guy and Small admit that “Wilde’s prose is dependent not upon its truth-functions, but upon its artifice, its self-conscious manipulation of certain sorts of discourse” (“Reading” 147).

Another similarity concerns the repetition of material, which can especially be found in self-directed letter writing such as in the above-mentioned case of *The Adventures of Lindamira*. The reason why such writing is usually quite repetitive is that writing letters to oneself as a means of dealing with one’s problems does not change the problems (Perry 112). As suggested above, Wilde was also writing the letter, if not *to* himself, than at least *for*

³² This anonymous text is one of the earliest English epistolary novels. It was originally published in London in 1702 and later edited by Benjamin Boyce and published in 1949 under the title *The Adventures of Lindamira* (Kinsley 285).

³³ The *external reader* (Altman chapter 3) is the reader in the non-fictional world as opposed to the *internal reader*, who is the, or a, fictional letter-reading character.

himself: he wrote it to a completely unresponsive addressee (he had not received a letter from Douglas in many months) and could not even be sure that Douglas would read it once he could finally send it to him upon his release from prison. Also, Wilde knew that he had time until his release to decide whether to actually send the letter to Douglas or not. Hence, *DP* can also be seen as self-directed – a work of “an obsessive mind working out its demons” (Guy and Small “Reading” 140). This is one reason why “unsignalled repetition of material” (ibid 139) can also be found in *DP*, for example regarding Douglas’ attempts to publish some of Wilde’s love letters, a topic that is mentioned seven times in total (e.g. *CL* 716, 717, 761 and 779), sometimes seemingly without Wilde realising that he had already mentioned it previously. Another reason is certainly that Wilde wrote *DP* in the course of several weeks without having continuous access to folios he had already written. Holland and Hart-Davis quote a passage from a letter by the Governor of Reading Goal to his superiors saying that “each sheet was carefully numbered before being issued and withdrawn each evening at locking” (*CL* 683, footnote). As most of the sheets end mid-sentence and as some of the sheets are most likely fair copies of previous drafts (ibid), Wilde – contrary to the Governor’s claims – “must have had access to more than one sheet of paper at any one time” (Small *Epistola* 7). Still, the limited access in combination with the long period of time over which Wilde worked on *DP* explains the repetitiveness of some of the material as well as certain inconsistencies. Wilde’s views on Douglas’ behaviour, for example, are so conflicting at times that they can only be explained as the result of Wilde’s “loss of narrative or structural control” (Guy and Small “Reading” 141). Time lags also play an important role in epistolary fiction, but there, rather than time lags during the writing process of one single letter (as in Wilde’s case), it is time lags between the sending of a letter and the receipt of the reply which are responsible for the fact that “misunderstandings [...] continue at great length, bringing many complications in their train” (Perry 108). Still, the mechanism is the same: in both epistolary fiction and *DP* time lags and the fact that the sender cannot go back to what they have written (either because previous letters are now in the hands of the addressee or because sheets previously written are now with the prison authorities) are responsible for repetitions and inconsistencies.

Another noteworthy similarity is making the recipient’s voice heard, for example through rhetorical questions or by paraphrasing or quoting lines from previous correspondence. In epistolary fiction it is a common technique for letting the reader “glimpse the other half of the conversation in novels that present only one correspondent’s letters” (Altman 138). This conjures up the recipient and helps to keep the illusion of a conversation

intact. It can also be found to a great extent in *DP*, which is why it deserves to be discussed in a subchapter of its own.

6.2 Making Douglas Heard

6.2.1 Rhetorical Questions

Typically, letter writers such as Wilde include phrases like “Write me a line” (*CL* 594) or “Write to me soon” (*CL* 602) in order to encourage the letters’ recipient(s) to write back. A big part of these calls for response are questions to which the writer desires an answer. In his familiar letters to Douglas, such questions can frequently be encountered. Here are some examples:

- “Are you really going to the Scilly Isles?” (*CL* 538)
- “Are you working?” (*CL* 545)
- “Have you been writing lovely sonnets?” (*CL* 545)
- “Shall I come to Salisbury?” (*CL* 560)
- “Are you coming up on Wednesday?” (*CL* 566)
- “Could you meet me at Newhaven on the 15th?” (*CL* 607)
- “Is Basil here?” (*CL* 608)
- “Will you do this for me?” (*CL* 886)
- “Who posts your letters?” (*CL* 898)
- “Why are you alone in London, and when do you go to Salisbury?” (*CL* 544)

The majority of these questions are so-called closed questions, i.e. questions that can often be answered simply in the affirmative or negative. Only the last two questions are open questions, i.e. questions that cannot be answered with *yes* or *no*, but need further elaboration.

Notably, there are also calls for response in *DP*. Near the end, Wilde, for example, asks Douglas to “[w]rite with full frankness about [him]self: about [his] life: [his] friends: [his] occupations: [his] books” (*CL* 779) and to “say it without fear” (*ibid*). Interestingly, though, the type of questions Wilde asks differs notably from Wilde’s familiar letters to Douglas. Here is a list of selected direct questions, i.e. interrogative clauses ending in a question mark, in *DP*:

- 1) "I spoke of your conduct to me on three successive days, three years ago, did I not?" (CL 696f)
- 2) "I have now got as far as the House of Detention, have I not?" (CL 710)
- 3) "Is it necessary for me to state that I saw clearly that it would be a dishonour [...]?" (CL 699)
- 4) "You can now understand – can you not? – a little of what I am suffering." (CL 706)
- 5) "*Then* surely was the time when *you* should have come forward [...]" (CL 708)
- 6) "But surely there were many real names in history which would have suited you much better [...]" (CL 717)
- 7) "Do you think that I would have allowed you to eat your heart away in darkness and solitude [...]" (CL 726)
- 8) "Don't you see that [...]" (CL 764)
- 9) "What had occurred? In your hideous game of hate [...] you happened to have lost." (CL 709)
- 10) "Do you think I am here on account of my relations with the witnesses on my trial? My relations, real or supposed with people of that kind were matters of no interest [...]." (CL 718)
- 11) "Did you ever wait to be asked to dinner? Never." (CL 763)
- 12) "Do you think that would have satisfied your father? You know it would not." (CL 764)
- 13) "What was there, as a mere matter of fact, in you that I could influence? Your brain? It was undeveloped. Your imagination? It was dead. Your heart? It was not yet born." (CL 767)
- 14) "Do you still say, as you said to Robbie in your answer, that I '*attribute unworthy motives*' to you?" (CL 684)
- 15) "Do you really think...?" (CL 714, twice)
- 16) "Is your imagination wakening from the long lethargy in which it has lain?" (CL 715)
- 17) "Don't you feel now...?" (CL 764)
- 18) "You surely must realise that now? You must see now that [...]." (CL 686)
- 19) "Don't you realise now that you should have seen it [...]" (CL 709)
- 20) "Don't you understand now that your lack of imagination was the one really fatal defect of your character?" (CL 709)
- 21) "Do you realise now what Hate blinding a person is?" (CL 713)

- 22) “Am I right in saying that Hate blinds people? Do you see it now? If you don’t, try to see it.” (*CL* 714)
- 23) Are you beginning now to understand a little?” (*CL* 715)
- 24) “Why did you not write to me?” (*CL* 725, twice)

This list clearly shows that the vast majority of all direct questions are rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question can be defined as “a question asked only to produce an effect or make a statement, rather than to elicit an answer or information” (“rhetorical”). It is usually posed to make the reader reflect on and be persuaded of a certain point that is being made. In his familiar letters to Douglas, there are hardly any rhetorical questions, while in *DP* practically no other type of question occurs. The only example in the above list that comes close to an open question is number 25: “Why did you not write to me? Was it cowardice? Was it callousness? What was it?” (*CL* 725). Here Wilde genuinely seems to look for an answer, even though he goes on to anticipate and refute Douglas’ possible excuses: “If you thought my letter just, you should have written. If you thought it in the smallest point unjust, you should have written” (*ibid*). Hence, one could also argue that it is a special type of rhetorical question, namely an anthypophora, in which case the writer answers the rhetorical question themselves. More obvious cases of anthypophoras are examples 9 to 13. Number 13 is a particularly impressive example as Wilde not only answers his own question, but answers it by anticipating some of Douglas’ possible answers (brain, imagination, heart), completely invalidating them one by one. Another subtype of rhetorical question that is frequently featured (examples 14 to 23) is loaded questions, i.e. questions “containing a hidden trap or implication” (“loaded question”). No matter whether the person being questioned answers yes or no, they will admit that the assumption contained in the question holds true for them, at least to a certain degree. Let me clarify by giving an example. “Are you beginning to understand a little?” (*CL* 715) presupposes that Douglas has problems understanding Wilde. If Douglas’ answer is no, he admits that he still does not understand. If his answer is yes, he admits that he did not understand Wilde in the past. Many of the questions (e.g. examples 15, 17, 18, 20) can also be called leading questions, allowing other readers to guess Douglas’ answer or at least to deduct the answer that Wilde wants Douglas to give.

Wilde also has a habit of imagining Douglas’ answers or objections to his questions or points only to dismiss them, as visible in the above-mentioned example 13 or the following passage:

How could you dare to do such a thing?³⁴ Will you give as your answer that in the days of my greatness and fame I had consented to receive the dedication of your early work? Certainly, I did so; just as I would have accepted the homage of any other young man beginning the difficult and beautiful art of literature. (CL 721)

This way of making the version of Douglas that has taken shape in Wilde's imagination heard, of conjuring him up, is also closely related to the before-mentioned techniques of paraphrase and quotation known from epistolary fiction. In Wilde's familiar letters to Douglas, one searches for this specific kind of rhetorical strategy in vain.

One reason for the abundance of rhetorical questions and Wilde imagining Douglas' answers may well be that Wilde was not actually expecting a reply from Douglas. However, it is also a way of making Douglas' (imagined) opinion heard, which only really makes sense if Wilde intended these parts to be read by parties other than Douglas. If Wilde had asked Douglas closed or open questions such as the ones that can be found in his familiar letters to Douglas, it would have required direct answers, and their absence would have made the text much less accessible for a larger audience.

6.2.2 Quotes and Paraphrases

Another way of making a letter's recipient's views heard, which, as mentioned above, is especially common in epistolary fiction, is to quote and paraphrase from previous correspondence or conversations (Altman 138) so that "new letters [are shaped] around quotations from old ones" (Altman 99). In *DP*, Wilde incorporates, and comments on, a number of quotes from letters and telegrams not only from Douglas, but also from Douglas' mother (CL 763, 767) or his brother-in-law (CL 715) and even from correspondence between Ross and Douglas (CL 724). These are some examples of quotes from their letters:

"Do you still say [...] that I '*attribute unworthy motives*' to you? [...] That you were '*very young*' when our friendship began?" (CL 684)

"She told me of your two chief faults, your vanity, and your being, as she termed it '*all wrong about money*'." (CL 687)

"You did not of course know it then, and in one of the violent letters you wrote to me on the point you said that you were under '*no intellectual obligation of any kind*' to me." (CL 692)

³⁴ Here Wilde refers to the fact that Douglas intended to dedicate a volume of poems to him without asking him for permission first.

“‘*It was an ugly moment for you,*’ you said, ‘*uglier than you imagine.*’” (CL 699)

Paraphrases such as the following can be found even more frequently:

“You told me, and I know it was quite true, that you had come back at midnight simply in order to change your dress-clothes [...].” (CL 698)

“You said it was a great bore: that was all.” (CL 713)

“I received in Tite Street a telegram of some ten or eleven pages in length from you. You stated in it that no matter what you had done to me you could not believe that I would absolutely decline to see you [...].” (CL 695)

“Finally, you actually telegraphed to my wife begging her to use her influence with me to get me to write to you.” (CL 695)

In his familiar letters to Douglas, even though there are some instances of quoting or paraphrasing from literary works (Wilde’s and others’), there is no instance of quoting and only a few instances of paraphrasing lines from old letters by Douglas:

“You write that it is my duty to you and to myself to live in spite of everything.” (CL 647)

“You ask me in it to let you come on Sunday [...].” (CL 898)

So why would Wilde, if he obviously did not use quotes from previous letters in his familiar letters to Douglas, suddenly resort to quoting and paraphrasing in *DP*? This question becomes even more pressing considering that Wilde did not even have the letters he quoted from at hand, thus quoting from memory. Answering this question, however, would bring us dangerously close to falling into the trap of intentional fallacy. Therefore, we will rather focus on the effect of these quotes and paraphrases. As with the rhetorical questions discussed above, the technique of quoting and paraphrasing is meant to provide the reader with a specific image of Douglas, which, again, raises the question of whether this would be necessary if Wilde had only Douglas and no one else in mind while writing, especially given that he refrained from this technique in his familiar letters to Douglas. At the same time, the use of quotes and paraphrases contributes to the fact that *DP*, in contrast to the letters, hardly contains any ellipses, i.e. the reader does not have to fill “narrative” gaps the way he would have to if Wilde had, instead of quoting, only vaguely alluded to the content of certain letters or telegrams by Douglas.

In this subchapter it has been shown that Wilde resorted to a number of stylistic devices, especially rhetorical questions, imagined answers, quotes and paraphrases, in order to make Douglas' (imagined) voice heard. Were these devices missing (as is the case in the familiar letters to Douglas), readers apart from Douglas would be presented with numerous ellipses, which would severely hamper the text's accessibility to them. The result of the above analysis, then, strongly suggests that the extent to which Wilde makes use of such devices in *DP* as compared to his familiar letters to Douglas only makes sense if we assume that Wilde had a larger audience in mind while writing *DP*. The following subchapter will support this argument.

6.3 References to Shared Knowledge

The last parallel between *DP* and epistolary fiction, which also deserves to be treated in a subchapter of its own has to do with the tightrope act epistolary fiction has to perform between providing the (external) reader with enough information to be able to follow the plot and not providing too much information as this would make the correspondence seem artificial, or as Altman would say: "The creator of fictional letter narrative must produce an impression of authenticity without hopelessly losing his outside reader" (120). This quote needs some clarification. In real correspondence, in which the addressee is, what Duchene calls, a "complice de celui qui l'écrit dans la complexité d'un contexte vécu" (qtd. in Altman 120), i.e. an accomplice of the writer in the complexity of a lived context, the writer will, on the basis of the knowledge he shares with the addressee, adapt the letter to the personality of the addressee to such an extent that "[la lettre] est, en définitive, illisible à autrui" (Duchene in Altman 120), that the letter is unintelligible to anyone apart from the addressee. Fictional correspondence, in contrast, has to be accessible not only to the fictional addressee, i.e. the internal reader, but also to the external reader. This means that there has to be explicit reference to some of the knowledge shared between the internal writer and the internal reader (Barton and Hall 6) as a means of facilitating (external) readers' understanding while including "elliptical remarks indicating shared knowledge about people, events and meanings" (Stanley 213), which make the correspondence look more "authentic". This feature of epistolary fiction can be found in very few other genres. In other words: In hardly any genre, apart from epistolary fiction, is the author confronted with the challenging task of having to pretend to write for one audience (the internal reader(s)) while actually writing for two (the internal and the external reader(s)). In this subchapter we will compare Wilde's

familiar letters to Douglas with *DP* in order to see whether there is a match between the degrees of reference to shared knowledge and of “obscure” parts.

Before that, however, I deem it worthwhile to compare *DP* to a letter by Wilde to Robert Ross dated November 1896. In this earlier letter many of the central ideas which are dealt with in detail in the “personal parts” of *DP* appear as well³⁵, such as: Douglas’ lack of appreciation of Wilde’s genius, his violent outbursts, greed for money and appetite for life at the expense of others, his disregard of Wilde’s need for quiet, Wilde’s attempts to escape from Douglas’ presence and his function as a cat’s-paw between Douglas and his father. The following table impressively shows that the lexicon Wilde chose in this earlier letter resembles that in *DP* to such a big extent that one would only have to replace the personal pronouns *he* and *him* and the possessive determiner *his* in the left column with the second-person equivalents *you* and *your* and one would end up with a text strikingly similar to selected passages in *DP*.

Letter to Ross (November 1896) (unless otherwise specified)	<i>De Profundis</i>
My genius , my life as an artist, my work, and the quiet I needed for it, were nothing to him when matched with his unrestrained and coarse appetites for common profligate life: his greed for money: his incessant and violent scenes: his unimaginative selfishness. (CL 670)	It showed your lack of any real appreciation of my genius . (CL 771)
	You did not realise that an artist [...] requires for the development of his art the companionship of ideas, and intellectual atmosphere, quiet , peace, and solitude. [...] [Y]ou could not understand the conditions requisite for the production of artistic work. (685 CL)
	Your appetite for luxurious living was never so keen. (CL 705)
	You required, in the blindness of an inexhaustible greed , my entire existence. (CL

³⁵ According to most sources, *DP* was written “during the last months of [Wilde’s] imprisonment in Reading Prison” (Small *Epistola* 1), i.e. roughly from January to March 1897, and not between 1895 and 1897 as some, interestingly especially German, sources claim. Exactly how it is possible that the passages from *DP* shown in the table correspond almost word by word to this letter to Ross dated November 1896 is difficult to answer. Wilde might, for example, have kept a copy of the letter to Ross or he might have been so absorbed by his disappointment over Douglas’ alleged behaviour that the words used in his letter to Ross’ stuck in his mind until he sat down and began to write *DP* two months later.

	690)
	Your incessant demands for money [...]. (CL 687)
	Those incessant scenes that seemed to be almost physically necessary to you [...]. (CL 689) [Y]ou began to repeat the same scene with renewed emphasis and more violent assertion. (CL 698)
He really had no motives in his life at all. Motives are intellectual things. He had passions merely. (CL 671)	Ah! you had no motives in life. You had appetites merely. (CL 684)
I cannot, for eternity, allow that name to be the shield and catspaw of the Queensberrys . (letter to Ross dated 1 April 1897, CL 780)	I told you I would not be the catspaw between you both in your ancient hatred of each other [...]. (CL 707)
Do not think I do not blame myself. I curse myself night and day for my folly in allowing him to dominate my life. (CL 670)	I blame myself for allowing an unintellectual friendship, a friendship whose primary aim was not the creation and contemplation of beautiful things, to entirely dominate my life. (CL 685)
[T]he son [Douglas] [ranks] with the Infant Samuel: and I, in the lowest mire of Malebolge, sit between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade. (CL 670)	[Y]our place is with the Infant Samuel, and in the lowest mire of Malebolge I sit between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade. (CL 691)
[...] myself to be thrust into the trap Queensberry had laid for me [...]. (CL 670)	[...] the hideous trap in which I had allowed myself to be caught [...]. (CL 690)
That he should really realise what he has done would be a burden too heavy for him to bear. But he must sometimes think of it. (CL 671)	You can't treat all that you have brought upon me as a sentimental reminiscence [...]. [...] Either today, or tomorrow, or some day you have got to realise it. (CL 775)

Table 1

Comparison Between Passages from a Letter to Ross Dated November 1896 (left) to Passages from *DP* (right) with Regard to the Lexicon

Now what does this mean for *DP*? If Wilde felt that he basically only had to change the pronouns/determiners from the third to the second person to be able to re-use a text that he had written previously to another friend, the text (at least in the passages indicated) must have been written in a way that made it accessible to at least two different people, Ross and Douglas. One could also say that the information provided in the passages under consideration in both texts is the same so that Douglas would easily be able to understand Wilde's letter to Ross, and *vice versa* – hence, both texts are accessible to two people. Of course, it is not that surprising that a text accessible to Douglas is also accessible to Ross, who was not only a former lover of Wilde's, but also one of his closest friends and, after Wilde's death, his literary executor. Still, showing that *DP* is accessible to more than one person is a further step on the way to supporting the argument that *DP* was written with a larger, possibly future, audience in mind.

The next step, now, is it to see whether *DP* and Wilde's familiar letters to Douglas can be compared when it comes to the number of passages that only Douglas could understand because they require shared knowledge.

6.3.1 References to Shared Events

The familiar letters hardly contain any references to shared past events as one type of shared knowledge. If past events are mentioned, it is mostly events from Wilde's life that Douglas was not part of, such as dinners or lunches ("I have just come in from luncheon" (CL 598), "I lunched with Gladys de Grey, Reggie and Aleck Yorke there" (CL 594), "I lunched with Prince Troubetzkoy and Mrs Chanler this afternoon" (CL 565)) or meetings with people ("I went round to see Lane just now" (CL 571), "[T]hen I went and sat with my mother" (CL 594), "Yesterday (Sunday) Alphonso, Stephen, and I sailed to Littlehampton" (CL 602)). If shared past events are mentioned, they lack crucial details (that Douglas would have known, of course). In the letter dated March 1893, for example, Wilde writes: "Bosie – you must not make scenes with me – they kill me – they wreck the loveliness of life – [...]; I cannot listen to *your* curved lips saying hideous things to me" (CL 559f). He does not go into detail about the scenes and the reader is left asking themselves what Douglas might have said to Wilde. As mentioned in chapter 6.2.2, *DP*, in contrast, does contain many quotes from Douglas, including hurtful things Douglas supposedly said or wrote, so that the reader gets a better understanding of Douglas' (perceived) character. Consider, for example, the following passage:

You concluded your letter by saying: *'When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting. The next time you are ill I will go away at once.'* Ah! What coarseness of fibre does that reveal! What an entire lack of imagination! How callous, how common had the temperament by that time become! (CL 700)

In contrast to the familiar letters, *DP* is almost exclusively concerned with shared past events. This in itself is not conclusive with regard to the intended audience, of course. However, the detail into which Wilde goes to describe these events is surprising considering that Douglas was part of them (Jaksch 8). The first thing that catches the eye is that Wilde often introduces descriptions of events with particular phrases such as "I remember" (e.g. on pages 692, 693, 694, 695, 704, 706, 710, 712) or "Need I tell you what" (CL 699) and "Is it necessary for me to state" (CL 699) in order to remind Douglas of them (Jaksch 8). Even though Douglas would probably have answered the last two questions with *No*, Wilde goes on to give minute accounts. One of these accounts can be found on pages 697ff (CL). Here, Wilde reflects on how Douglas left him alone during an illness: First, Douglas keeps Wilde from writing a play by "[insisting] on being taken to the Grand Hotel at Brighton" (CL 697), where Douglas falls ill with the flu. Having tended him full-time for a couple of days, Wilde falls ill himself. Instead of staying with him, Douglas "[leaves] him entirely alone without care, without attendance, without anything" (ibid), in the meantime living at Wilde's expenses (CL 698). On his return, Douglas "[accuses] [Wilde] of selfishness [...]; of standing between [him] and [his] amusements" (ibid). On being told to leave, Douglas, "with brutality of laughter and hysteria of rage [...] [moves] suddenly towards [Wilde]" (ibid) and Wilde flees to the sitting-room, which only aggravates his fever (CL 699). In the meantime, Douglas takes all the money he can find and leaves, only to write Wilde a "revolting" (CL 700) letter on the latter's birthday saying that next time Wilde was ill he would leave immediately (ibid).

What is striking about accounts like this one is the abundance of temporal and spatial references in them. In the recollection just mentioned we find among many others: "on three successive days", "three years ago" (CL 696), "at Worthing", "suddenly", "in my house", "elsewhere, and not in my own home", "the next day, a Monday", "at the moment", "the Grand Hotel at Brighton", "[t]he night we arrive", "either with you or in the room next to yours", "every evening", "after four or five days", "[t]he morning after the day on which we were installed", "to London", "in the afternoon", "to Brighton", "till late next day", "by which time", "on the first floor", "[t]he next two days", "afterwards" (CL 697). References like these enable the reader to easily locate events chronologically and spatially and to understand the

relations between them. It goes without saying that such long, coherent recollections are missing from the familiar letters.

What is really fascinating is that, if we look at the manuscript itself, we can see that it is also spatial and temporal references that Wilde inserted when revising particular parts. As mentioned before, Wilde seems to have had – contrary to what prison authorities claimed – access to multiple sheets at once (CL 683, footnote). He seized the opportunity to make revisions, which led to (corrected) fair copies of certain folios, the originals of which were most likely destroyed (Small *Epistola* 7). On folio 9, for example, which seems to be, in Smalls terms (ibid 9), either a corrected second draft or a corrected fair copy we find the following insertions of temporal and spatial references: “three months before”, “one Monday evening”, “next morning”, “at Oxford” (see highlighted parts in the below screenshot of folio 9).

Intellectually necessary. And so I confess I saw in your letter, from which I have quoted, a very good opportunity for ending the fatal friendship that had sprung up between us, and ending it without bitterness, as I had indeed tried to ~~do~~ ^{do} on that bright June morning at Easington. It was ~~my~~ ^{one of my own friends} ~~my~~ ^{to whom you} ~~my~~ ^{had gone in your difficulty} – that you ~~would~~ ^{would} be ~~so~~ ^{much} hurt, perhaps almost humiliated at having your work set back to you like a schoolboy's exercise; till I was expecting far too much from you, ~~no matter what you wrote or did, you were absolutely good~~ ^{intellectually} ~~as that, your work~~ ^{devoted} ~~devoted~~ ^{to me}. I did not want to be the first to check or discourage you in your beginning in literature: I knew quite well till no translation, ~~and your practice~~ ^{unless one does by a poet, has}, could render the colour and cadence of my work in any adequate measure: devotion ^{seemed to me, seems to be still} is a wonderful thing, not to be thrown away: so I took the translation and you back. Exactly three months later, ~~after a series of scenes culminating~~ ^{one Monday evening} ~~in one of the last~~ ^{more than usually} ~~when you came to my rooms accompanied by two of your friends~~ ^{next morning} ~~I found myself actually flying~~ ^{sudden} ~~from you, giving my family some absurd reason for my departure, and leaving a false address for fear you might follow me by the next train. And I remember that evening afternoon, as I was in the railway-carriage whirling up to Paris, thinking in what an impossible, terrible, utterly wrong state my life had got into, when I, a man of world-wide reputation, was actually forced to run away from England, to try and get rid of a friendship that was entirely destructive of every thing fine in me either from the intellectual or ethical point of view: the person from whom I was flying, being no terrible creature sprung from sewer or mine into modern life with whom I had entangled my dog, but you yourself, a young man, ~~with a good position, and a good position~~ ^{at Oxford} ~~who had been at my own college~~ ^{an incessant guest at my house}. The usual~~

Fig. 1. Detail of Folio 9 from the Digitalised Version of the Manuscript Available from the Website of the British Library (Wilde *Manuscript*), Red Highlights Added by Author

Over the subsequent folios, many more of such instances can be found, e.g. “before your mother had written to me” (Wilde *Manuscript* folio 10), “waiting for you at your hotel” (ibid folio 11), “across Europe” (ibid folio 11), “remained either with you or in the room next to yours” (ibid folio 12), “for the first time” (ibid folio 14), “in my company” (ibid folio 15). Apart from spatial and temporal references, also insertions that would rather fall into the category of “context for a larger audience” can be found (in bold), e.g. “[...] and that afternoon, **through a letter addressed to you**, [Queensberry] began his first attack on me” (ibid folio 11).

Looking at the manuscript thus significantly strengthens my argument that, contrary to Guy and Small’s claim, also the “personal parts” were conceived with a larger audience in mind. Part of *DP* might have “started life as a letter to Douglas” (Guy and Small “Reading” 125) in the sense that discarded first drafts might have lacked such temporal and spatial references or included more names of people that only Douglas would know, but this is now impossible to verify. However, what can be shown and what has just been shown is that the folios that have survived (be they first drafts, corrected second drafts or (corrected) fair copies) have been devised or amended in such a way that they are accessible to a larger audience since they feature many of the linguistic devices used in epistolary fiction to facilitate external readers’ understanding. The fact that Douglas (or rather the version of Douglas Wilde wanted to portray) is made heard through rhetorical questions and quotes and paraphrases from previous letters as well as the surprising amount of temporal and spatial references and context which is provided strongly suggest that Wilde did not write the entirety of *DP*, including what has been termed the “personal parts”, for Douglas alone (if he even wrote it for Douglas) but for a larger audience.

6.3.2 References to Common Acquaintances

In addition to the quotes from the letters regarding past events, such as meals and meetings (see paragraph one in chapter 6.3.1), another striking feature of the letters can be observed: They contain numerous instances of references to common acquaintances. In the letter dated 13 August 1894, for example, Wilde mentions an Arthur, Percy and Alphonso without giving any surnames or explaining in more detail who these acquaintances are, which strongly suggests that Douglas knew them and, thus, did not need this information. However, anyone but Wilde’s immediate circle of friends, in particular the present-day reader, has to refer to the footnotes to learn more about them. In fact, many of the footnotes for the familiar letters are

concerned with shedding light on the identity of the individuals whose names are dropped in the letters.³⁶ In *DP* Wilde refrains from constant name-dropping. For example, instead of using this wife's name, Constance, as he does when writing about her in his letters to friends, he refers to her solely as his wife. While in the familiar letters Wilde refers to Douglas' father as "the Scarlet Marquis" (*CL* 632) – a nickname shared by Wilde and Douglas – or "your man" (*CL* 545), in *DP* he simply calls him Douglas' father. In one instance Wilde initially mentions a name without giving a more detailed explanation of who the person is: "There is hardly one of the elders of your family – with the exception of Percy, who is really a good fellow – who did not in some way contribute to my ruin" (*CL* 762). We don't immediately get to know which place Percy occupies in Douglas' family, but a few pages later this detail is revealed: "Talk to your brother about it. Indeed the proper person to talk to is Percy" (776). On another occasion, Wilde – in a passage about Douglas' mother – speaks of "Your brother Francis" (*CL* 705). To Douglas the attribute *brother* surely must have seemed an extremely unnecessary addition here – he would have known that Wilde meant his brother. The same can be said about the following passage, the first mention of Wilde's son in *CL*: "Cyril, that beautiful, loving, loveable child of mine" (*CL* 715). In the familiar letters the information that Cyril is his child, is missing. Consider the following letter dated August 1894 (*CL* 598f):

Dearest Bosie, I have just come in from luncheon. A horrid Swiss governess has, I find, been looking after Cyril and Vyvyan for a year. She is quite impossible.
Also, children at meals are tedious.
Also, you, the gilt and graceful boy, would be bored.
Don't come here. I will come to you. Ever yours OSCAR

It can be assumed that Wilde is talking about his own sons here, but anyone unfamiliar with Wilde's personal life might miss this reference. A similar (for Douglas unnecessary) addition can be found where Wilde seems to have felt the need to mention that Robert Ross and More Adey are his friends: "But do you ever think of what my friends such as More Adey, Robbie, Robert Sherard, Frank Harris, and Arthur Clifton, have been to me in giving me comfort, help, affection, sympathy and the like?" (*CL* 762). Generally, Wilde adds much more information when mentioning names in *DP* compared to the letters. Here is another example:

³⁶ I counted 26 footnotes concerned with shedding light on the identity of names mentioned in Wilde's letters to Douglas and some names are not even explained in the footnotes – probably because their identity could not be established for certain. In *DP*, which is much longer than all the letters combined, I could find only 12 such footnotes. Regarding the footnotes: in the familiar letters, their number alone suggests that, compared to *DP*, a lot more explaining is necessary for anyone but the intended addressee to be able to understand what Wilde is writing about. In *DP*, a majority of the (comparably few) footnotes is there to point out alterations made in the text (either by Wilde during one of the revision stages or by Ross) or to explain the origin of Wilde's quotes from literature or the Bible, i.e. to give information that is merely supplemental and enhances the reader's appreciation of *DP*'s intertextual references.

“Adrian Hope, a man of high birth and culture and fine character, her own [Constance’s] cousin, whom you met once at Tite Street” (CL 766); again, the question is if all this information is necessary for Douglas to know who Adrian Hope is if he was already introduced to him once in the past. Also, as an inversion of what can be seen in the letters, where footnotes provide information on the names mentioned by Wilde, in *DP*, there are instances where a footnote by the editor provides a name for an explanatory paraphrase used by Wilde. One such paraphrase is “the manager of the theatre where my work is being performed” (CL 702) and Wilde perhaps used it as a means of avoiding a name that readers unfamiliar with London’s literary circle of the time would not recognize. The name provided by the editor in the corresponding footnote is Beerbohm Tree. In the familiar letters to Douglas, in contrast, Wilde does not explain who Beerbohm Tree is – he simply appears as “Tree” (e.g. CL 530, 578). Another such inversion concerns a spatial reference made when Wilde writes about “a public restaurant” – in the footnotes the information “The Berkeley, in Piccadilly” (CL 699) is added.

If both *DP* and Wilde’s familiar letters to Douglas had contained many passages that require the reader to share a “contexte vécu” (Duchene in Altman 120) with the writer, my argument that the “personal parts” in *DP* were written with a larger audience in mind would have been considerably weakened. However, as I have shown, only the letters require the reader to share considerable knowledge with the writer (Wilde), especially when it comes to people – in *DP* this is not the case, which bolsters the argument that it was written with a larger audience in mind whose members do not have to have Wilde’s and Douglas’ “contexte vécu” (ibid), especially when it comes to Douglas’ (perceived) shortcomings and his (apparent) role in Wilde’s imprisonment.

All in all, an analysis of *DP* through the lens of epistolary fiction does indeed support my argument as it shows that *DP* follows some of the key generic conventions of epistolary fiction, a genre written for a larger audience: The person named in the salutation, i.e. Douglas or the version of Douglas conjured up by Wilde, is being made heard through the use of rhetorical questions as well as quotes and paraphrases from previous (remembered) correspondence. Also, shared knowledge about events and names is referred to, often in detail. I would argue that this can be explained by the fact that Wilde had a larger, possibly future, audience in mind while writing.

The fact that *DP* shares characteristics with a genre of fiction immediately begs the question: What about Wilde’s fiction? Shouldn’t a comparison to Wilde’s published fictional works help us support the argument that *DP* was written with an eye towards future

publication? After all, shouldn't *DP* and Wilde's (other) published works also share certain characteristics if both were written with a larger audience in mind? The following chapter sets out to answer this question.

7. Comparison of *De Profundis* to Wilde's Short Story "The Devoted Friend"

Interestingly, parallels have been drawn between *DP* and many different genres out of Wilde's published works. Sha, for example, argues that *DP* "can in particular be seen as a dramatic work created with the signature elements of style and formal dramatic structure embodied in Wilde's plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*" (Sha 4). Losey encounters in it themes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* such as "sexual perversion, lust, lechery, and murder" (441) while also making a connection to the essays "The Critic as Artist" and "The Decay of Lying" in terms of references to Dante. And Marcovitch observes that "De Profundis reiterates a familiar narrative pattern in Wilde's fairy tales and short stories" (195).³⁷ In "The Happy Prince" and "The Young King" she discovers abject sufferers, which "[find] redemption and beauty by transforming [their] suffering into acts of compassion" (ibid), comparable to how Wilde portrays himself in *DP*. However, their comparisons focus strongly on the parts already published by Ross in 1905/1908. Two of the elements of drama Sha finds in both *DP* and the two short stories mentioned are "absent or unconfirmed mothers [...]" and the theme of unconditional resurrection" (Sha 12). The "unconfirmed mother" she encounters in *DP* is "Lady Ireland, the mother country that Wilde rejected for England" (23). Both of the references to Ireland occur in the part about Christ. The same goes for the theme of unconditional resurrection: the vast majority of the quotes Sha provides Ross had already included in his publications in 1905 and 1908. Also Losey's focus on references to Dante inevitably means that he restricts himself to the "published parts" of *DP*; none of these references occur in the "personal parts". Also, the picture of an abject sufferer finding redemption, which Marcovitch encounters in *DP*, is drawn in the part of *DP* that was already published in 1905, i.e. not in the "personal" parts.

I argue that parallels can be drawn also between the "personal passages" and his published work, in particular when it comes to the picture of the sufferer that Wilde draws in

³⁷ Wilde himself claimed in *DP* that his forced transition from the "sungilt side of the garden [of the world]" (739) to the gloomy side was "foreshadowed and prefigured in [his] Art" (*CL* 740), namely in works such as the short stories "The Happy Prince" and "The Young King", the novel *Dorian Gray*, the essay "The Critic as Artist" and the play *Salomé* (ibid).

the “personal parts”. In contrast to the elevated, Christ-like sufferer that appears in the last third, this sufferer, I would argue, is somewhat more relatable to readers. He is depicted as a good-natured person who is too easily influenced by others, taken advantage of by his friend and driven into ruin. Most notably, this type of sufferer makes an appearance in Wilde’s the short story “The Devoted Friend”. The focus of the comparison here lies on the narrative pattern and symbolism, not, for example, the style of writing, which is a topic I leave for future research.

“[D]evotion seemed to me, seems to me still, a wonderful thing, not to be lightly thrown away”.

“I know of nothing that is either nobler or rarer than a devoted friendship”.

Not knowing the short story or *DP*, one would probably have a hard time telling which sentence can be found in which text. The first one is from *DP* (693), the second from “The Devoted Friend” (24). The theme of devotion is by far not the only parallel that can be drawn between the two works. “The Devoted Friend” belongs to Wilde’s short story collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, which was first published in 1888, well before Wilde and Douglas first met. It is a story-in-a-story about Hugh the Miller, a self-important man, who exploits the good-natured, innocent little Hans for his own agenda and in the name of devoted friendship:

Little Hans had a great many friends, but the most devoted friend of all was big Hugh the Miller. Indeed, so devoted was the rich Miller to little Hans, that he [Hans] [sic!] would never go by his garden without leaning over the wall and plucking a large nosegay, or a handful of sweet herbs, or filling his pockets with plums and cherries if it was the fruit season.³⁸ (“TDF” 25)

Even not knowing the rest of the story, in which Hugh the Miller has the selfless little Hans run errands such as mending his barn’s roof, going to the market, working at the mill, taking a late-night journey through the moor in bad weather to get the doctor for the Miller’s son, one can tell that the Miller’s devotion is a false kind of devotion if he considers taking Hans’ flowers without asking. For everything Hans does for the Miller, he never gets anything in return; the Miller only takes – as does the version of Douglas created by Wilde in *DP*:

³⁸ Based on how the story unfolds and given that it is always the Miller who demands Hans’ flowers in return for gifts that he never actually hands over to Hans (such as the broken wheelbarrow), I deem it safe to assume that this addition was mistakenly placed after *he* instead of as [*Hans’*] after *his* in *his garden*. Also, it is missing from many other editions, e.g. the 1998 Oxford UP edition of *Oscar Wilde: Complete Shorter Fiction* edited by Isobel Murray (116).

“Having made your own of my genius, my will-power, and my fortune, you required, in the blindness of an inexhaustible greed, my entire existence. You took it” (CL 690). So, when Wilde says that Douglas was “absolutely and entirely devoted to [him]” (CL 693), he, too, is referring to a “most distressing [...] form” (CL 768) of devotion. Rather, it is Hans/Wilde, who is genuinely devoted to the Miller/Douglas, even though they suffer because of it.

Another parallel between the fictional character Hugh the Miller and Douglas – or rather the version of Douglas portrayed by Wilde in *DP* – is that both stay away when their friends experience hardship: Douglas at one point leaves Wilde even though the latter suffers from such a high fever that he can hardly look after himself and tells Wilde in a letter that “‘When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting. The next time you are ill I will go away at once’” (CL 700). The Miller abstains from his visits to little Hans in the winter, justifying it by saying “‘for when people are in trouble they should be left alone, and not be bothered by visitors’” (“TDF” 26), only to pay him a visit with a big basket for some flowers “as soon as the winter was over, and the primroses began to open their pale yellow stars” (“TDF” 27).

Little Hans, in contrast, can be compared to Wilde or rather the version of himself Wilde creates in *DP*: Having a garden, in which “there were always beautiful things to look at” (“TDF” 25), Hans is an artist like Wilde, at least according to Wilde’s famous first line in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “The artist is the creator of beautiful things” (Wilde *Dorian* 3). Both Wilde and Hans also stand in contrast to Douglas and the Miller in the sense that they are “givers” not “takers”: Hans gives the Miller his time, his beautiful flowers and in the end he even gives his life for him; Wilde (or rather Wilde’s fictionalised self) gave Douglas his time, his money, his love and “every luxury of fruit, flowers, presents, books, and the like that money can procure” (CL 697).

Both the Miller and Douglas are the reason why little Hans and Wilde, respectively, cease to produce art: the Miller keeps Hans busy so that Hans “[is] never able to look after his flowers at all” (“TDF” 32) and in *DP*, Wilde accuses Douglas of keeping him from writing: “While you were with me you were the absolute ruin of my Art” (CL 687). And both little Hans and Wilde cannot but give their respective friends what they want. Little Hans “wouldn’t be unfriendly for the whole world” (“TDF” 30) and Wilde, or rather the version he creates of himself, sounds a lot like the fictional character in his short story when he claims, “My habit [...] of giving up to you in everything had become insensibly a real part of my nature” (CL 690). For little Hans, this means death, for Wilde, it meant prison: “It was through you, for you, and by you that I was [in prison]” (CL 710). However, in contrast to

Wilde, who puts the blame on himself (CL 685), little Hans never reflects upon his weakness that makes him do as the Miller says, he only “console[s] himself by the reflection that the Miller was his best friend” (“TDF” 32). In the story, of course, little Hans has to die in Wilde’s “comic inversion of the traditional devices of moral justice” (Small *Short* xxi) with the aim of exposing society’s faults. Wilde, in contrast, in the course of months in the solitude of his prison cell, finds the time for reflection, realising that “in the case of an artist, weakness is nothing less than a crime, when it is a weakness that paralyses the imagination” (CL 687).

What has been shown so far is that the version of himself that Wilde created in *DP* shares many characteristics with his fictional character Hans and the same is true for Douglas and the Miller. This strongly suggests that the versions of himself and Douglas that Wilde gave shape to in *DP* are at least partly fictionalised. Those who find this too bold a claim might still agree that the Wilde and Douglas appearing in *DP* bear a strong resemblance to fictional characters, which makes them relatable for readers, especially considering that the narrative patterns of the two works under consideration – if we can speak of a narrative pattern in the case of *DP* – are similar as well.

The only difference in the narrative pattern between the two works is how the theme of suffering is used as a means of social critique. In *DP*, Wilde sees suffering and sorrow as prerequisites for becoming a “deeper man” (CL 755), but he makes society or, rather, the prison system, directly responsible for letting prisoners’ punishment continue after their release by abandoning them (CL 732). In “The Devoted Friend” the social critique is – typically of Wilde’s short stories (Small *Short* xxi) – far more subtle: Hans, who not only “suffer[s] a good deal from cold and hunger” (“TDF” 26) in winter, but also from the Miller’s exploitation, never realises his suffering. The Miller, in contrast, does not blame himself for Hans’ death in the slightest and rather sees himself as the victim since he does no longer know what to do with the broken wheelbarrow: “One always suffers for being generous” (“TDF” 34). Hans and the Miller thus represent the classes’ unawareness of the upper class (Hugh the Miller) exploiting the lower class (little Hans) (Liu).

Apart from a similar narrative pattern, *DP* also features some of the symbols appearing in “The Devoted Friend”, most notably gardens and flowers as symbols of (joy in) life, beauty and art. Consider the following example sentences from *DP*:

“You yourself have walked free among the **flowers**.” (CL 685)

“I thought vanity a sort of graceful **flower** for a young man to wear;” (CL 687)

“Now and then it is a joy to have one’s table red with wine and **roses**.” (CL 688)

“The **flowers** you took from me to put on your brother’s grave were to be a symbol not merely of the beauty of his life, but of the beauty that in all lives lies dormant and may be brought to light.” (CL 701)

“[T]he memory of that little lowly silent act of Love has unsealed for me all the wells of pity, made the desert blossom like a **rose**.” (CL 723)

“One cannot always keep an adder in one’s breast to feed on one, nor rise up every night to sow thorns in the **garden** of one’s soul.” (CL 729)

I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the **garden** of the world [...]. My only mistake was that I confined myself so exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sungilt side of the **garden**, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom. [...] I went down the **primrose** path to the sound of flutes. [...] The other half of the **garden** had its secrets for me also. (CL 739f)

“I tremble with pleasure when I think that on the very day of my leaving prison both the **laburnum** and the **lilac** will be blooming in the **gardens** [...]” (CL 777)

This long list shows quite impressively how big the role is that the symbols of flowers and garden play in *DP*. Especially when Wilde writes in *DP*, “You yourself have walked free among the flowers. From me the beautiful world of colour and motion has been taken away” (685), the reader familiar with Wilde’s works is almost automatically transported to “The Devoted Friend” as these words sound very much like what Hans would say if he could speak to the Miller from his grave.

This chapter has shown that the versions of himself and Douglas that Wilde created for *DP* strongly resemble the characters of Wilde’s short story “The Devoted Friend”. In addition, the two works have a very similar narrative pattern and some symbols, in particular gardens and flowers as symbols of life, art and beauty, appear in both texts. As unintentional as these similarities may be, they support the argument that *DP* is accessible to a larger audience in so far as readers of Wilde’s works and “The Devoted Friend” in particular, are, upon reading *DP*, not presented with a new narrative pattern or unknown “characters”, but already know them from “TDF”³⁹. Taking this argument one step further, it could be argued that, since it is accessible to the audience of one of Wilde’s published works, *DP* shares an audience with a published work, which supports the argument that it was written with publication in mind.

³⁹ Of course, this also works the other way round, with one noteworthy exception: Readers only familiar with *DP*’s narrative pattern will, on reading “TDF”, be able to assume at some point that the story will end badly for Hans because they know from *DP* that good-natured artists who let themselves be exploited by friends are denied a happy ending. In *DP*, in contrast, Wilde’s end as a prisoner is already clear from the very beginning. Not only does it say “HM Prison, Reading” (CL 683) at the top, but in line three, Wilde also writes about having “passed through two long years of imprisonment” (ibid).

8. Conclusion

The generic identity of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* has been debated for a long time. Most scholars are divided between letter, autobiography and piece of art/literature (cf. in particular subchapters 4.1 and 4.2). By focussing on these labels scholars seem to have lost sight of the underlying question of whether *DP* was written with one person (Douglas) or a larger audience in mind; in short, whether Wilde might have written *DP* with publication in mind. After all, letters can be autobiographical, autobiographies can be written in the form of a letter and concepts such as "art" and "literature" involve outdated ideologies of value. To remedy this oversight, this thesis is concerned with answering the above question.

In the late Victorian period the postal service might have experienced a sudden change from an exclusive and expensive to an affordable network used by the masses and Wilde might have been an avid letter writer and receiver. However, calling *DP* a personal letter only because it is addressed to one specific person and exhibits structural elements typical of letters would mean reducing it to its formal appearance. Even before any textual analysis it can be said that history and Wilde's biography point towards *DP* being a piece of life writing written with a larger audience in mind. Historically, Victorians, like the Romantics, would still strive for eternal fame in opposition to immediate celebrity and, personally, Wilde had even more reason to strive for posthumous fame because his conviction and time in prison did not only leave him bankrupt, but also meant that scandal and stigma tainted his image as one of the most influential celebrities of his time. Thus, providing his own personal account for a larger audience, possibly posterity, would give him a chance for vindication, for saving some of his reputation.

The close reading of Wilde's 33 letters to Douglas and *DP* has shown that Wilde's letters conform to J. Willis Westlake's characteristics of Victorian familiar letters, while *DP* differs from them in a number of respects, not only in length, but also in the thematic connection of individual paragraphs and the use of cohesive markers and temporal as well as spatial references. Notably, *DP* also shares certain characteristics with epistolary fiction, which is always directed at an audience greater than one, which consists of what Altman calls the *internal* reader(s) and the *external* reader(s). These characteristics include an obstacle between writer and reader (prison), the isolation experienced in the moment of composition, the writing to an imagined correspondent and the repetition of material and inconsistencies due to time lags in the writing process. Two similarities are especially striking. The first is the conjuring up of the recipient/addressee, i.e. the fact that Douglas (or rather his imagined

voice) is made heard by means of rhetorical questions or questions Wilde immediately sets out to answer for Douglas and by quotes and paraphrases from previous correspondence. The second is the references to shared knowledge, in particular shared past events, which are related in detail and under excessive use of spatial and temporal references, and to common acquaintances, which are introduced even though Douglas would have been familiar with them. Finally, *DP* also shares characteristics with Wilde's published works. The aspect considered in this context was the narrative pattern of Wilde's short story "The Devoted Friend", which can also be encountered in part in *DP* and makes the latter more easily accessible to a larger audience if this audience consists of connoisseurs of Wilde's fictional works, especially the short story in question.

To conclude, this thesis has provided ample support for the argument that *DP* was written with a larger, possibly future, audience in mind. It is my contention that none of the parts of the surviving manuscript and its published transpositions have been devised with Douglas alone in mind. Some aspects that might even further strengthen this hypothesis, such as a comparison between *DP* and Wilde's published works with an eye towards stylistic similarities or differences, or a comparison between *DP* and an epistolary novel, could not be included in the present thesis as they would have gone beyond its scope. Future research will hopefully give them the attention they deserve.

Last but not least, my research adds to and enriches existing Wilde scholarship by substantially simplifying *DP*'s anthologisation, which has so far been based on unfruitful attempts to assign *DP* to a certain genre, mostly by scrutinising Wilde's personal correspondence, and has often entailed the entanglement in ideologies of literary value. By asking the sole question of whom *DP* is accessible to and answering it by resorting to a simple close reading of the text while looking through the lens of epistolary fiction (see chapter 6), anthologisation becomes easy. In fact, this innovative approach might not only help Wilde scholars in anthologising *DP*, but might also help others who face similar challenges with other letters and the like.

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The quote in the title, "Some day the truth will have to be known", is taken from Wilde's letter to Robert Ross dated 1 April 1897 (CL 780).

10. Annex: Abstracts

This master's thesis approaches Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* from a point of view of establishing its intended audience by analysing the text itself. After an introduction to *De Profundis*' textual history and the problematic debate about its generic identity, the conventions of letter writing and life writing in the 19th century as well as the rise of a new social category, the literary celebrity, are analysed in order to ascertain whether, historically and biographically, Wilde might have had reasons to make *De Profundis* accessible to a larger audience. On the basis of a close reading of *De Profundis* and Wilde's other letters to Alfred Douglas and a comparison of these texts to one another as well as to Victorian familiar letters, the characteristics of epistolary fiction and Wilde's published short story "The Devoted Friend", the author argues that *De Profundis* is written in its entirety with a larger, possibly future, audience in mind and serves Wilde as a means of public vindication.

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit nähert sich Oscar Wildes *De Profundis* von dem Standpunkt, dass die Leserschaft, für die der Text geschrieben wurde, durch die Analyse des Texts selbst festgestellt werden kann. Nach einer Einführung in die Geschichte von *De Profundis* und die problematische Debatte über die Zuordnung zu einer Gattung werden die Konventionen des Briefeschreibens und des Life Writing im 19. Jahrhundert sowie das Auftreten einer neuen sozialen Kategorie, der „literary celebrity“, analysiert, um zu beantworten, ob Wilde historisch und biographisch Gründe dafür gehabt haben könnte, *De Profundis* einer größeren Leserschaft zugänglich machen zu wollen. Anhand einer genauen Textanalyse von *De Profundis* und Wildes anderen Briefen an Alfred Douglas und eines Vergleichs dieser Texte sowohl miteinander als auch mit persönlichen Briefen aus dem späten 19. Jahrhundert, den Besonderheiten von Briefromanen und Wildes publizierter Kurzgeschichte „The Devoted Friend“ (dt. „Der Ergebene Freund“) argumentiert die Autorin, dass *De Profundis* in seiner Gesamtheit für eine größere, möglicherweise zukünftige, Leserschaft verfasst wurde und Wilde als Mittel zur öffentlichen Rehabilitation dient.