

STAFF PICK:
Magedah Shabo
STAFF WRITER

As a prose poem, Oscar Wilde's "The Artist" combines the concision and lyricism of poetry with the verseless narrative structure of a short story or fable. With a few simple images, it strikes deep—as any good poem should do.

On one level, the story may seem to describe the creative temperament in particular, which Wilde embodied perfectly. Indeed, Wilde seemed to see "The Artist" as somewhat autobiographical, at least after the fact; in *De Profundis*, he would name it among several of his works that seemed to presage later developments in his life and his perspective on suffering.

Even so, the story's protagonist is also unmistakably an everyman, embodying a universal human experience. Like the statue the Artist creates in the narrative, the prose poem is itself an ironic celebration of a tragic but seemingly inescapable human exchange: the eternal for the transient, the substance for the shadow.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)



Born in Ireland, Oscar Wilde was a dramatist, novelist, and poet. He led an aesthetic movement in Britain that emphasized an ideal of "art for art's sake," emphasizing beauty above didactic or political goals in the arts. Best known for his play *The Importance of Being Earnest* and his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde enjoyed great success during the 1890s. Towards the end of his brief life, however, he experienced notoriety and imprisonment, which inspired his famous letter on suffering that has been published under the title *De Profundis*, Latin for "from the depths."

The Artist

BY OSCAR WILDE

One evening there came into his soul the desire to fashion an image of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment. And he went forth into the world to look for bronze. For he could think only in bronze.

But all the bronze of the whole world had disappeared, nor anywhere in the whole world was there any bronze to be found, save only the bronze of the image of The Sorrow that Endureth Forever.

Now this image he had himself, and with his own hands, fashioned, and had set it on the tomb of the one thing he had loved in life. On the tomb of the dead thing he had most loved had he set this image of his own fashioning, that it might serve as a sign of the love of man that dieth not, and a symbol of the sorrow of man that endureth forever. And in the whole world there was no other bronze save the bronze of this image.

And he took the image he had fashioned, and set it in a great furnace, and gave it to the fire.

And out of the bronze of the image of The Sorrow that Endureth Forever he fashioned an image of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment.

