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著者	HIRATA Yoko
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Oscar Wilde and Honma Hisao, the First Translator of *De Profundis* into Japanese

Yoko HIRATA

Chūō University, Tokyo

This essay focuses on the activities of Honma Hisao, who merits attention as the first Japanese to translate Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*. Honma also introduced Wilde's other works relating to the theory of aestheticism and wrote a doctoral dissertation with the title "A Study of the Aesthetic Movement in Modern England." I am concerned to highlight the sequence in which Wilde's works were introduced, those aspects of Oscar Wilde's oeuvre that were—and were not—readily received by young Japanese intellectuals of the late Meiji and early Taisho periods, and the influence Oscar Wilde exerted on Japanese literature. Through this process, it will become apparent that the social and literary needs of the time and the interest and enthusiasms of those involved in the translation endeavor were necessary conditions for the successful introduction of not only Wilde but any Western writer into Japan. The possibility that Honma's very distinctive personal and provincial background may also be an important factor in the process will be considered.

Keywords: OSCAR WILDE, HONMA HISAO, *DE PROFUNDIS*, AESTHETICISM, TRANSLATION, *SALOMÉ*, *SHIZENSHUGI*, YONEZAWA, TAISHŌ

Translate Oscar Wilde's works into Japanese? An impossible task! Wilde's works are characterized by their wit and humor; his dramas abound in the play of words and epigrams. How can they be translated effectively into a language so different from English? Could it ever be possible to enjoy his plays without some understanding of the life-style of English society of the time? What hope, say, of a Japanese actress rendering into Japanese the particular nuance of that one word line uttered by Lady Bracknell: "A hand-bag"?

If such is the typical reaction of English intellectuals discussing the translation of Wilde's works into Japanese, there may be some validity to it. To a twenty-first-century English audience, Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) is best known for his society plays. In Japan, however, the name evokes an image quite different. This may be due to the way Wilde's works were first introduced in Japan and to the role of a young literary critic, Honma Hisao 本間久雄 (1886–1981), who made the first full translation of Wilde's *De Profundis* into Japanese. In this paper, I discuss the little known Honma in connection with his role of introduc-

ing Wilde and his works into Japan. To what aspects of Oscar Wilde were intellectuals like Honma drawn at the end of Meiji and the beginning of Taishō period, and why? In short, what influence did Oscar Wilde have in Japan? In trying to solve these questions, it will be important to reflect on the social and literary needs of the time, the interests, enthusiasms and even the backgrounds of those involved in the task of translation. One must be sensitive, too, to the way in which ideas born in one culture are transplanted into another, generating in the process new ideas in the culture that adopted them. I hope that this paper may also offer a clue to understanding the cultural transition from Meiji to Taishō.

The Translation of Western Literary Works

However ambitious the translation of Wilde's works into Japanese may seem today, Japanese translators of an earlier age took on still more daunting tasks. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Japanese scholars translated a book on anatomy from Dutch without the aid of a dictionary.¹ All through the Edo period, scholars engaged in the study and translation of Dutch works of a medical or scientific nature. A major spur to this translation endeavor was of course the opening of the country.² Drastic changes in Japan's political, economic and social institutions, induced by rapid modernization, demanded the common Japanese man and woman cultivate an awareness of basic Western ideas. The champion of this activity in the beginning of Meiji was Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901). His *Gakumon no susume* 学問のすすめ and *Seiyō jijō* 西洋事情 were hugely popular in the early years of Meiji as guide books for basic information about the West. The translation by Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832–1891) of Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* in 1871 as *Saigoku rissshihen* 西国立志編 inspired the young and ambitious to embark on successful careers. They saw the changes of the Meiji era as a great opportunity to improve their wealth and status. In the 1880s, the third decade of Meiji, intellectuals' greatest interest shifted to politics. Intellectuals aspired to become politicians and to participate in the policy making of the nation. Many became active participants in the freedom and popular rights movement, and consumed books of political thought including John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (translated into Japanese as *Jiyū no kotowari* 自由之理) and Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* (translated as *Shakai heikenron* 社会平権論). Popular preference tended more toward political novels and adventure stories. Translations of works by Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli as well as Stevenson and Verne circulated widely. The translation of Shakespeare's works also began at this time.

Another theme worthy of attention here is a new understanding of literature. In the 1880s Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遙 (1859–1935) penned a first work of literary theory styled *Shōsetsu shinzui* 小説神髓 or the *Essence of the Novel* which defined the role of literature in the new society. Whereas reading fiction was once considered a pastime for women and children, literature as Shōyō articulated it was a pursuit worthy of a man. Literature flourished as various schools sprang up, each in turn asserting its own literary or stylistic ideas. Among these groups were the Ken'yūsha 硯友社 of Ozaki Kōyō 尾崎紅葉 (1868–1903), the *roman-ba* movement of the Bungakukai 文学界, and the naturalist or *shizenshugi* school with Shimazaki Tōson 島崎藤村 (1872–1943) and Tayama Katai 田山花袋 (1872–1930). Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862–1922) and Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916) were among the great names of this period. Living in a rapidly “modernizing” society, many writers sought

inspiration from the latest literary trends of the modern West. Foreign authors introduced to Japan at this time included the following: Tolstoi, Turgenev, Dostoevski, Gogol, Chekhov, and Kropotkin from Russia; Nietzsche, Hauptmann, Goethe, and Schiller from Germany; Zola, Maupassant, Flaubert, Balzac, and Hugo from France; Ibsen, Strindberg, Bjørnson, and D'Annunzio from elsewhere in Europe. Of literature in English that exerted an influence, the works of Whitman, Dickens, Thackeray, Kipling, Shaw, and of course Wilde are especially noteworthy. Some Japanese translated, others adapted and still others created their own works borrowing ideas from these Western models, all with the utmost stylistic care. Any Western writer of renown was worth reading and quite often, translating. Shōyō translated all the works of Shakespeare, motivated by a desire to improve Japanese theatre. However, it was Oscar Wilde who had the greatest impact on the young literary critic Honma Hisao, just graduated from Waseda 早稲田 in 1909.

Honma Hisao and Oscar Wilde: Their Lives and Works

Honma Hisao was born in Yonezawa 米沢 city in 1886, the year in which Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Shōsetsu shinzui* appeared. Yonezawa, a small but strategically important town, rich in culture and tradition, was ruled during the Edo period by the famous Uesugi 上杉 family.³ Honma's grandfather, a talented noh player of samurai background in the service of the Uesugi, was forced into retirement at an early age as a result of the Meiji government's abolition of samurai privileges. Honma's father was the bread-winner of the family, but his business collapsed just about the time Honma graduated with excellent grades from Yonezawa Middle School.⁴ Honma was fortunate to find a wealthy man to sponsor his further education in Tokyo. Attracted by the fame of Tsubouchi Shōyō, he entered the Department of Literature at Waseda University in 1906, one year after the end of the Russo-Japanese War.⁵ He was tutored there by Shimamura Hōgetsu 島村抱月 (1871–1918), who had just returned from a three and a half year stay in Europe. Honma launched his career as a literary critic writing chiefly for the journal *Waseda bungaku* 早稲田文学, edited by Shimamura. Soon, Honma was penning articles on a range of topics, and he began to translate the works of Oscar Wilde, William Morris and Ellen Key. Honma succeeded Shimamura as editor in chief of *Waseda bungaku*, before taking up a teaching post at Waseda. During the Taishō period, he was a popular journalist and critic, contributing to the *Kokumin shinbun* 国民新聞 and *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 as well as to literary, art and kabuki journals. He also participated in radio broadcasting from the end of Taishō through to the Shōwa period. Increasingly, however, he inclined to academic research, which took him to Europe in 1928. The first fruits of his research appeared in 1934 as *Eikoku kinsei yuibishugi no kenkyū* 英国近世唯美主義の研究 (A Study of Aestheticism in Modern England), and he was awarded his doctorate in 1936. Subsequently, Honma directed his academic interest to the study of Meiji literature, and after the Pacific war in 1964 he completed his five-volume work *Meiji bungakushi* 明治文学史 (A History of Meiji Literature). Honma was also one of the instigators of the genre of comparative literature. He remained active in research until his death in 1981 at the age of ninety-four. At first sight, Honma's career and life seem to have little in common with that of Oscar Wilde, a flamboyant playwright in fin de siècle London, Irish by birth, homosexual by inclination, a man condemned for the crime of "gross indecency," who was to die abroad in poverty and illness.⁶



Fig. 1. Honma Hisao in his twenties.

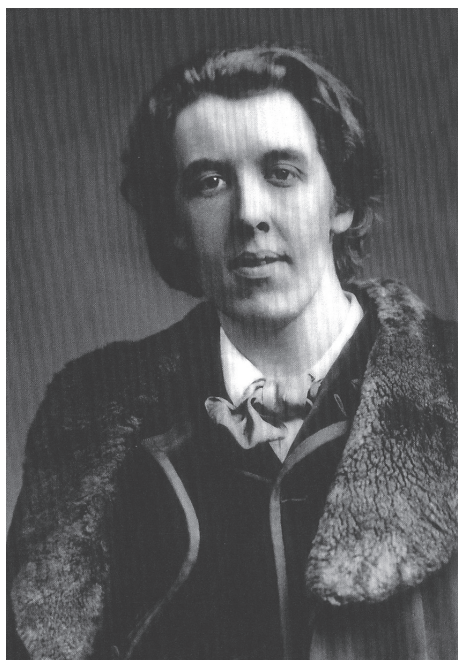


Fig. 2. Oscar Wilde in 1881.

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854. England at the time was enjoying the height of Victorian prosperity, but there were political problems aplenty, especially concerning Ireland. After the great famine of the 1840s, political unrest in Ireland continued unabated and led eventually to the founding of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Indeed, both Wilde's father and mother had strong nationalistic leanings.⁷ Wilde was brought up under the domineering influence of his mother, a very talented woman who cut a striking figure in Dublin society, extravagant in her behavior and unusual in her moral sensibility. He was educated at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, where his academic achievements were outstanding. He was awarded a scholarship to Trinity College, Dublin, and there showed a keen interest in the aesthetic poetry of Rossetti and Swinburne.⁸ With a scholarship to Magdalen College, Wilde moved to Oxford in 1874. This was around the time the great depression hit England, prompting the transformation of Victorian society. In Oxford, he encountered John Ruskin and Walter Pater. He was anyway an excellent student and, in 1878, won the Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna" before graduating with a First in Classics. Oscar Wilde was a good talker, and quickly became a favorite in London society. At the beginning of his career, and unable to find a publisher for his poetry, he sought to attract attention by donning what he termed "aesthetic costume." His social "performances" were effective in making his name known, so much so that he and his aesthetic ilk were even ridiculed in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience* in 1881. In 1882, Oscar Wilde embarked on a lecture tour to America to promote the American production of *Patience*.⁹ It proved a great success.

In 1884, Wilde married Constance Lloyd with whom he later had two sons, and soon began to distinguish himself as a writer. Between 1889 and 1891, he wrote a succession of important works pertaining to aestheticism: *The Decay of Lying*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,

The Critic as Artist and *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. Wilde's aesthetic theory was much influenced by continental artists and men of letters. He visited Paris frequently, where he became acquainted with André Gide, Stéphane Mallarmé, Toulouse-Lautrec and the American painter James Whistler. Among French writers, he venerated Baudelaire and Balzac. Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* and Gustave Moreau's *Apparition* inspired him to write his play *Salomé*, which in turn inspired Richard Strauss to compose an opera of the same title. Wilde soon became a well-known figure on the continent. Max Nordau, a Vienna-resident psychopathologist who analyzed fin de siècle European literary trends in his *Entartung*, concluded that Oscar Wilde's aestheticism was decadent and degenerate.¹⁰ Certainly Wilde was an incisive critic of Victorian society and its values.¹¹ He saw that patriotism and duty—both Protestant-inspired ethics—and a masculine, stoic way of life, coupled with self-restraint and perseverance, had all helped establish Britain as a strong wealthy nation. If pursued too far, however, these values would create a morally stifling society, in which hypocrisy would prevail. Those who ridiculed Wilde for donning his “aesthetic costume” were now offended by his social criticism.

Self-indulgence accompanied Wilde's success, and it was not surprising that the Marquis of Queensberry was enraged when Oscar Wilde's infatuation with his third son, Lord Alfred Douglas, began to attract public attention. Oscar Wilde was arrested after hostile exchanges with the Marquis, and put on trial in 1895, at the height of his fame. *The Importance of Being Earnest* was just now enjoying great success in the West End. The Marquis did not hesitate to use all his social influence, and had no difficulty in rallying to his anti-Wilde cause the support of those offended by Wilde's ideas and behavior. Oscar Wilde was found guilty on a charge of “gross indecency,” and sentenced to two years' hard labor. When released from prison after two years, he had hopes of resuming his career as a writer. Unable to do so, he moved to France and died of meningitis in a cheap hotel in Paris in 1900 at the age of forty-six. This was incidentally the year in which Honma Hisao entered Yonezawa Middle School aged fourteen. It was not until much later, in the wake of changes in the general attitude towards homosexuality that Oscar Wilde recovered his fame and honor. In 1995, he was commemorated in a stained glass window in Westminster Abbey.

The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Japan

The reception of Oscar Wilde in Japan began during his lifetime.¹² In fact, Honma Hisao came across the following reference to Wilde in *The Japan Punch* of March 1883: “Oscar Wilde, not having been able to come to Japan, his envoy arrives instead.” This snippet of news was directed at the foreign residents of Yokohama amongst whom the name of Oscar Wilde was apparently well known. Wilde did, indeed, mention a plan to proceed to Japan during his lecture tour of the United States.¹³ Another early reference to Oscar Wilde could be found in the column “Jibun hyōron” 時分評論 in *Waseda bungaku* published on 15 October 1892, where he was bracketed as a playwright alongside James M. Barrie (1860–1937) and Henry James (1843–1916).¹⁴ It was in February of this year that *Lady Windermere's Fan* was produced at St James's Theatre.

During Wilde's lifetime, only one essay of his was translated into Japanese. This was an abridged version by Masuda Tōnosuke 増田藤之助 (1865–1942) of *The Soul of Man under Socialism*.¹⁵ Masuda, who taught himself English after graduation from elementary school, translated it as “Bijutsu no kojinchugi” 美術の個人主義 and published it in the 28 May

1891 issue of *Jiyū* 自由, a newspaper closely connected to the Jiyūtō 自由党 (Liberal Party). The essay had appeared originally in *The Fortnightly Review* only in February of that year, so the translation was completed and published just three months after the original. The section that Masuda translated dealt with art and individualism. He then joined the *Ise shinbun* 伊勢新聞 in his late teens, and was an active supporter of the Jiyūtō at the height of the freedom and popular rights movement. Driven by a strong desire to further his study of English, he headed for Tokyo. After an extended period of study, he became a teacher of English at Kokumin Eigaku Kai 国民英学会 in 1889. Occasionally, he would still submit articles to the *Ise shinbun* and other newspapers. He sent his translation of Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* to the afore-mentioned *Jiyū*. He also published *Nihon Eigaku shinshi* 日本英学新誌, whose English title was *The New Magazine Devoted to the Study of the English Language and Literature*. Masuda later told Honma Hisao that he was moved to translate Wilde's discussion of art and individualism because of the deep impression it had left on him. In 1894, Masuda took up a post at Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō 東京専門学校, before transferring to Waseda University, where he taught for forty years. Honma Hisao was one of his students. Masuda's knowledge of English and his skill in translation were greatly appreciated not only by students but by Tsubouchi Shōyō. Nonetheless, his translation of *The Soul of Man under Socialism* failed to attract much attention among supporters of the Jiyūtō.

By the time Honma enrolled at Waseda University in 1905, the name of Oscar Wilde had reached him through various channels. One was undoubtedly Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, the second edition of a work originally published in German in two volumes in 1892–1893 as *Entartung*.¹⁶ Max Nordau (1849–1923), a Jewish psychopathologist born in Budapest and active in Vienna, was esteemed for his wide ranging knowledge of current European literary trends as well as his analysis of culture in the 1860s–1880s. He analyzed such literary phenomena as the Pre-Raphaelites, symbolism, Tolstoism, the Wagner cult, the Parnassians, the diabolists and decadents, aesthetes, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Zola. Deploying his psychopathologic method, Nordau concluded that these phenomena were all of them degenerate and retrogressive. He discussed Oscar Wilde in the section on egomania as a representative English esthete. Nordau would have known of Wilde, the exponent of aesthetic theory of and Wilde, the author of *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, *Intentions* (comprising *The Truth of Masks*, *The Critic as Artist*, *Pen, Pencil & Poison*, and *the Decay of Lying*), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *A House of Pomegranates*. Whether he was aware of the production of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, which started in February 1892, is unclear. *Degeneration* was anyway widely read, and some years later in 1914 a Japanese translation by Nakajima Kotō 中島孤島 appeared.¹⁷ By 1905, then, knowledge of Oscar Wilde in Japan possibly extended to Wilde's activities up to 1892. We may safely assume that, with the exception of Tsubouchi's brief comment on Wilde as a playwright, there was a vacuum of information relating to Wilde's theatrical activities and, indeed, his subsequent disgrace, imprisonment and death.

The Publication of *De Profundis* in England in 1905 and Its Repercussions in Japan

The 1905 publication of *De Profundis* created a sensation in England, and prompted a reevaluation of its author. Wilde's name appeared once again in the West End, memoirs of Oscar Wilde were penned by those who had known him, and in 1908 Methuen published the complete works of Oscar Wilde in 15 volumes. Japanese in England at this time and others

resident in Europe or America, were quick to catch the news. Already in 1905, Yone Noguchi (1875–1947), who became a professor of Keiō University upon his return from the United States, noted Wilde’s reevaluation, attributing it to *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and *De Profundis*. In 1906, Natsume Sōseki referred to a passage from *De Profundis* in his *Kusamakura* 草枕.¹⁸ Hirata Tokuboku 平田禿木 (1873–1943), in London at the time of the publication of *De Profundis*, witnessed its reception and commented on it after his return to Japan in 1906 in a lecture entitled “Eikoku shikai no kinjō” 英国詩界の近状 (Recent trends of English poetry); the lecture was subsequently published in the journal *Myōjō* 明星.¹⁹ Hirata, who once served as a co-editor of the journal *Bungakukai* and contributed to the roman-ha movement, was much influenced by Walter Pater and was responsible for translating poems by John Keats and Rossetti. In describing the current poetical world of England, he commented on *De Profundis* and compared Wilde with Keats. Hirata wrote a series of articles styled “Shijin Oscar Wilde” 詩人オスカー・ワイルド (Oscar Wilde Poet) for the *Tōkyō niroku shinbun* 東京二六新聞 in June 1907. Hirata had witnessed first hand Wilde’s reevaluation in England, and described it in considerable detail. In these articles, he sketched a biography of Wilde that covered his disgrace, imprisonment, and life after release; he appended a bibliography of works by Wilde such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Duchess of Padua*, *An Ideal Husband*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

De Profundis does not account for all of the Japanese interest in Wilde, however. Mori Ōgai’s introduction to *Salomé* is a case in point. Ōgai introduced the play in the journal *Kabuki* 歌舞伎 in August 1907, and in 1909 published an abridged translation from the German. In Germany, Wilde’s disgrace had not adversely affected theatrical productions of his works, and Ōgai was inspired, it seem, by the success of Max Reinhardt’s production of *Salomé* in Berlin in 1903, and of Richard Strauss’s opera of the same name in 1905.²⁰ Ōgai’s primary concern here, it might be noted, was the improvement of the Japanese theatre. *De Profundis* and its author nonetheless came to attract the attention of many Japanese who had never left Japan. Most notable among them was Iwano Hōmei 岩野泡鳴 (1873–1920) upon whom the influence of Nordau is apparent. The poet, novelist and critic, Iwano, known for a dramatic life of business failure and love affairs, encountered *De Profundis* in 1908. He appears to have been familiar with the works of Wilde’s biographer, Robert Sherard and contributed a summary of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and the *Importance of Being Earnest* to the journal *Waseda bungaku*. Iwano’s identification of Wilde with the “diabolism” of Baudelaire betrays Nordau’s influence, but there is little evidence of any depth to his understanding of Wilde. Others who wrote about Wilde at this time include Kuriyagawa Hakuson 厨川白村 (1880–1923), a student of Koizumi Yakumo 小泉八雲 (otherwise known as Lafcadio Hearn; 1850–1904), Natsume Sōseki, and Ueda Bin 上田敏 (1874–1916). Ueda, who later taught at the University of Kyoto, considered Wilde to be representative of the decadents in England, and located him in the same lineage as Rossetti. He made an abridged translation of Wilde’s *Epigrams and Aphorisms*.

Information concerning Oscar Wilde reached Japan in fragments, and it was only gradually that a complete picture of Oscar Wilde began to emerge. For Honma Isao, a 1906 lecture by Shimamura Hōgetsu 島村抱月 (1871–1918), “Eikoku no shōbishugi” 英国の尚美主義 (Aestheticism in England) was definitive. The lecture, later published in the aforementioned *Myōjō*, introduced Oscar Wilde as a practitioner of aestheticism.²¹ Shimamura, a professor

of aesthetics at Waseda University, had just returned from a three and a half years' sojourn in Europe in May of the previous year. Shimamura, who was informed both by Nordau and Walter Hamilton, saw Wilde's aestheticism as an extension of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Hamilton's book *The Aesthetic Movement in England* had appeared in 1882, before Wilde had established himself as a writer, and the image of Wilde he projected there was influenced by Wilde's aestheticism, by his wearing "aesthetic costume."²² Shimamura understood Wilde's aestheticism to have found mature form in *The Decay of Lying*, and he made a point of citing the following aesthetic aphorisms: "Art never expresses anything but itself"; "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature"; and "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."²³

Honma Hisao on Oscar Wilde: Towards *De Profundis*

Much impressed by Shimamura, Honma himself wrote successive articles on Wilde from 1909 to 1910. The first of these was "Genjitsu o hanaren to suru bungei" 現実を離れんとする文芸 (Art Poised to Part from Reality), which appeared in December 1909.²⁴ Here, Honma introduced general features of Wilde's aestheticism and then explored some points discussed in *The Soul of Man under Socialism* and *The True Function and Value of Criticism*. These he believed to be the works most worthy of attention.²⁵ In each of his articles, Honma chose one or two essays by Wilde to introduce, but typically he did not summarize the whole essay; he focused rather on a few key points and paraphrasing Wilde's ideas. Sometimes, Honma inserted English words and sentences into his text to make for clearer understanding, but these were not always exact quotations from the essay he was introducing. Honma may well have been adopting ideas from other writers such as Shimamura, Hamilton, Nordau or Wilde's biographers but, as was customary at that time, his essays were not annotated, and so his sources of information remain unclear. He also interjected his own comments, too, which were sometimes inextricably mixed with Wilde's ideas.

Honma argued that so-called aestheticism, like naturalism, sprang from romanticism. Naturalism developed in France, while aestheticism found its place in England with Rossetti, William Morris and Oscar Wilde. For Honma, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* and *The True Function and Value of Criticism* were part of Wilde's strategy for defending his aestheticism in the aftermath of the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, for example, Wilde had placed individualism above socialism, and Honma followed the outline of Wilde's essay very approximately, inserting his own discussions of the role of socialism, of art from the point of view of individualism, and of the relationship between the artist and society. Honma extracted sentences and phrases from Wilde and attempted to interpret their meanings. As Honma saw it, Wilde was insistent on the artist producing "solely for his own pleasure" (*kare mizukara no kairaku no tame ni* 彼自らの快樂の爲めに) and divorcing himself from the world.²⁶

Honma also made selections from *The True Function and Value of Criticism*. He defined its central theme as "criticism of art." Before discussing the function of criticism, however, Honma felt it necessary to clarify the aim and value of art. For this purpose, Honma appears to have partially adopted Wilde's ideas as expressed in the *Decay of Lying* on which Honma was to focus in "Jinsei mo shizen mo geijutsu no mohō nari" 人生も自然も芸術の模倣なり (Life as Well as Nature is the Imitation of Art). Honma cited Wilde's insistence that

“Art should be above life” and “All bad art comes from returning to Nature and Life.” He wrote of Wilde’s valuing “contemplation” over action as the highest profession of man; of his dismissal of realism, his praise of romanticism, and his identification of Balzac as the champion of “new romanticism” or “imaginative reality.” For Wilde, Honma wrote, “form is everything,” and he understood Wilde’s view of art might to be encapsulated in the words “Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life and develops itself purely for its own sake.” Honma proposed that here was to be found the reason why Wilde identified aestheticism with the contention “Art for Art’s sake.” In discussing the relationship between art and morality, Honma observed that Wilde’s view was that “All art is immoral,” and that “Aesthetics are higher than ethics.” Honma concluded the essay in question by observing that aestheticism declined after Oscar Wilde’s fall from disgrace. In Honma’s reading, *De Profundis* was evidence of Wilde’s understanding that sorrow occupied a higher plane than pleasure, that content and form were important; it demonstrated his new appreciation, too, of the significance of reality.

Honma’s essay on “The Decay of Lying” appeared in the journal *Bunshō sekai* 文章世界 in March 1910.²⁷ “The Decay of Lying” takes the form of a dialogue between two men, Cyril and Vyvyan, and is set in a library. Honma introduces Wilde here as the “authority” on aestheticism in England, describing him as an “extreme fanatic of art” (*kyokutan na geijutsu kyō* 極端な芸術狂). For Honma, Vyvyan represented Wilde’s view of “the supreme value of art” (*geijutsu shijō shugi* 芸術至上主義); he understood Wilde to be rejecting realism, advocating romanticism, and deploring at the same time a decline in the creation of imaginative and unreal stories. Wilde, in Honma’s view, dismissed the naturalism and realism to be found in Maupassant and Zola, and advocated rather the romanticism of Balzac. Honma duly quoted Wilde’s assertion that “In reality, it is Life, and it is Nature, that should imitate Art,” and his example of how Life can indeed imitate Art. Wilde wrote of a woman he had met whose behavior imitated a character in a Russian novel. In the story, the heroine runs away with a man who deserted her six months later. Wilde saw this woman after some years, and found that she had done exactly as the story said because “she had felt an absolutely irresistible impulse to follow the heroine step by step in her strange and fatal progress . . .” and that “she was compelled to reproduce them in life, so she did so.”²⁸

Honma was all the while seeking out new materials on Wilde, expanding his reading and writing new articles.²⁹ So, for example, the March 1910 issue of *Waseda bungaku* carried his article “Inshōroku” 印象録 (Impressions). It was a discussion of Wilde in the context of Nordau’s egomaniacs; it referred to Wilde’s *Impressions of America* and carried a portrait of Oscar Wilde taken from Robert Sherard’s 1905 biography.³⁰ In the April issue of *Waseda bungaku*, Honma had a longer article entitled “Taihaiteki keikō to shizenshugi no tetteiteki igi” 頹廢的傾向と自然主義の徹底的意義 (The Tendency toward Decadence and the Thorough-going Significance of Naturalism).³¹ Here his purpose was to consider the course of Japanese naturalism through a comparison with Russian nihilism and English decadence. He first depicted the *weltschmerz* or decay in Russian literature evident in the protagonists of works by Turgenev, Gogol, and Dostoevsky. In Honma’s view, decay achieved its most mature form in nihilism. Comparing Russian nihilism with English or Western decadence, represented by Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* and his life of pleasure, Honma reflected on the Japanese naturalist movement, and identified feelings of pain or sorrow as features it shared in common with

Russian nihilism and English decadence.³² He was keen for the Japanese naturalist school to find its own path in the future. Honma was clearly well acquainted now with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and he was able, moreover, to interpret its significance freely. In the July issue of *Waseda bungaku*, we find Honma commenting on a volume of Wilde's poetry, singling out "Symphony in Yellow" for special praise.³³ Honma's first full translation of Wilde's *The Sphinx Without a Secret*, appeared as "Himitsu o konomeru onna" (秘密を好める女), a few months later.³⁴ This he followed with a translation of the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with its famous concluding sentence "All art is quite useless," which Honma rendered as *arayuru geijutsu wa zenzen muyō nari* あらゆる芸術は全然無用なり.³⁵ The Preface was short but important to Honma because it featured a clear statement of Wilde's aestheticism, especially his view of the relationship between beauty and morals.

In March 1911, Honma penned what is widely regarded as the first Japanese research paper on Oscar Wilde, "Oscar Wilde ron" オスカア・ワイルド論 (On Oscar Wilde). Honma's essay comprised twelve sections, each dealing with a different aspect of his subject. The first ten sections were mostly on Wilde's ideas, which Honma had already introduced in earlier essays. The last two were devoted to *De Profundis* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. In the first section, he portrayed Wilde as a man of letters whose life was one of extreme vicissitudes, and whose views on art and life were extreme. In a second section, Honma briefly recounted Wilde's early life, discussing the aestheticism of Wilde's poetry along the lines of the account given by Walter Hamilton.³⁶ The characteristic of an aesthete's expression of passion was a mixture of the sensuous and suggestive with unreal and artificial elements, he suggested. For Honma, Rossetti and Swinburne successfully blended these opposing elements, but Wilde's poems inclined to the unreal and artificial; Wilde might be more fruitfully compared, he argued, to James McNeill Whistler in art. In a third section, Honma took up Wilde's "aesthetic costume," which he saw as an expression of those unreal and artificial inclinations; Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* and Wilde's lecture tour of America. Honma noted Wilde's talent in conversation, his charisma and generosity, before addressing *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The former, he concluded, was a tragedy of love and death, which demonstrated the truth that all who loved died in the end. For Honma, the sensuality of *Salomé* was detached and unreal. As regards the latter, Honma noted its reception as morbid, anti-social and immoral by many critics, with the notable exception of Walter Pater. He himself regarded this work as divorced from reality, and he had no expectation it would describe a realistic sensuality. Honma turned next to *The Decay of Lying* and *The Critic as Artist*.³⁷ No doubt it was his deepening understanding of Wilde that prompted him now to make some refinements to earlier assertions. For example, in this essay, he added to his emphasis on life and nature imitating art more moderate statements such as "*Geijutsu wa jinsei no mōsha de nakute, sono kaizō de aru. Shitagatte jinsei wa kaette sono kaizō sareta geijutsu o mohō subeki de aru*" 芸術は人生の模写でなくて、その改造である。従って人生は、却ってその改造された芸術を模倣すべきである ("Art is not the imitation but the invention of life. Life should rather therefore imitate the invention that is art").³⁸ Honma paraphrased the essence of Wilde's aestheticism in *The Decay of Lying* as follows: "Lying" means to tell a story which is beautiful but unreal, and which may be termed "romance"; the creation of unreal stories from the imagination, that is romance, is in decline; this has been caused by the rise of realism, and the belief that artists should imitate nature and describe real life; the reverse should be true;

Balzac is a romanticist because his works are “imaginative reality” (*sōzōteki jitsuzai* 想像の实在) as opposed to Zola’s which are “anti[sic]-imaginative realism” (*hisōzōteki shajitsu shugi* 非想像の写実主義). Honma observed that Wilde discussed the relationship between art and life as the essence of his aestheticism, and placed art above all things. After all, he advocated “Art for art’s sake.” Writing at the end of Meiji period, Honma could not escape the influence of Nordau, and he duly referred to Nordau’s opinion of Wilde as a champion decadent and an ego-maniac, noting Wilde’s wearing of “aesthetic costume” as a strategy to attract attention, the better to locate a publisher for his poetry.³⁹ Honma followed Nordau in grouping Wilde with Baudelaire and other French aesthetes, insisting he was a decadent, who sought pleasure not in strong, stimulating sensuousness but in elegant and artificial pleasure.

Honma Hisao’s Introduction and Translation of *De Profundis*

After discussing Wilde’s aestheticism in his 1911 essay “On Oscar Wilde,” Honma then introduced *De Profundis* describing it as the work that best explains and defends his ideas. Honma granted that Wilde placed art above life in *The Decay of Lying*, but argued that in *De Profundis* he grounded his aestheticism firmly in life. He began with this account of the work’s provenance:

In 1895, on account of his indecent and licentious behavior against the Marquis of Queensberry, Wilde was sentenced to two years hard labor in prison. If we try to understand the cause of his licentious conduct, it may be that his Irish-ness had imbued him with the so-called Celtic temperament. He was excessively emotional, his mind tended to be unbalanced, easy to lose its composure. He may have had a fit of illness. It was probably so. At any rate, he lost his popularity overnight. In addition, abuse from society, especially from those who had had ill feelings towards the aesthetic movement, was allegedly harsh indeed. Wilde, however, bore all this with perseverance, accepting without protest that it was his own fault. While he was out on bail, his close friends advised him to escape to the continent, and in fact he had opportunities to run away, but Wilde did not agree to do so. He was ready to submit to “society’s sanctions” calmly and without complaint.⁴⁰ Three months before his release, when he was allowed a pen and paper in his prison cell, he started writing and then, on the day of his release, he finished this work *De Profundis*.⁴¹

In Honma’s interpretation, two themes run through *De Profundis*: one is Wilde’s view of sorrow, the other his view of Christ. Wilde had tasted every kind of pleasure, but having been in prison for two years he discovered the meaning of sorrow as central to life as well as to art. His view of sorrow was, at the same time, his view of life and of art. An artist could reach this conclusion only through humility, and the artist’s capacity to reflect on every experience as it is. Honma also found Wilde’s view of Christ interesting and unique. For Wilde, Christ was “the precursor of the romantic movement in life”; he manifested imaginative sympathy, the sole secret of creation, towards all mankind. Turning to Wilde’s attitude in prison, Honma observed that he impressed the people around him by his humility, and that he did not utter a word of indignation or resentment. Honma also told of Oscar Wilde’s last days, emphasizing again that he showed no bitterness or malice toward others. Honma’s conclusion was that in his life and his art were symbolized the ideal relation of life and art.

Honma's translation of *De Profundis* appeared first in *Waseda bungaku* in October, 1911, and was then published as a book in 1912.⁴² *De Profundis* was composed of extracts from a much longer work written in the form of a letter, *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*, addressed to Lord Alfred Douglas. This work was entrusted to the care of Wilde's friend Robert Ross (1869–1918), and in 1905 Ross published it under the title *De Profundis*, carefully editing it to exclude any reference that might be regarded as libelous. *De Profundis* in its unabridged form, that is, as *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*, manifests Wilde's bitter feelings against his "friend" who sent not a line to him in prison. It includes a reproach against him for daring to involve Wilde in his family strife; there are grievances too against the injustice of his trial and treatment in prison, the pain and humiliation he experienced there for the first time in his life. He writes also of the affection and compassion among the prisoners; of his shock at the news of the deaths of his mother Speranza and his wife Constance; and the sorrow of parting from his beloved sons. He dwells too on the sadness and humility of life in general. Such diverse matters were articulated some times as vivid emotions, at other times as ideas purified in profound thoughts. Unlike his other works, which were composed to achieve fame and wealth, *De Profundis* was intended to touch the depths of the human heart.

Needless to say, the text that Honma had access to at the time of his translation was not the unabridged *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis* but Robert Ross's edited *De Profundis*. All proper names were removed so that the human relations of the characters could not be detected, and the work was more an abstract presentation of philosophical contemplation. Reading through Honma's outline, we are left in no doubt that Honma and his contemporaries had limited knowledge of the homosexual relationship between Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, and little understanding either of the implication of all this in Victorian England.⁴³ It is curious to note Honma attributing Wilde's "misconduct" towards the Marquis of Queensbury to his Celtic temperament;⁴⁴ and interesting also that he was much impressed by Wilde's behavior in prison, his bearing the abuse of society and declining the opportunity to escape to France. Perhaps Honma identified in Wilde's attitude a resonance with the virtues of the obedience and perseverance, as idealized by samurai in Yonezawa.

The Publication of Honma's Version of *De Profundis* and Thereafter

While *De Profundis* is known as the work which prompted a reevaluation of Oscar Wilde, for Japanese readers, it served rather as an introduction to Oscar Wilde. English readers were moved by the depth and beauty of this work written by a man in the depths of despair and sorrow, but Japanese readers were touched rather by the severity of the punishment for what appeared, at least to non-Christian readers, to be so slight an offence. To the Japanese of the early twentieth century, little aware of Wilde's notorious life-style and of Victorian aversion to it, Oscar Wilde appeared an innocent protagonist of aestheticism condemned without just cause. Charmed by the mystery of the work, several men and women of letters followed Honma in making their own translation of *De Profundis*, each reflecting their own academic or emotional background.⁴⁵ Among the translators we find Tsuji Jun 辻潤 (1884–1944), then leaning towards anarchism, Kamichika Ichiko 神近市子 (1888–1981), who experienced imprisonment over the scandal involving Ōsugi Sakae 大杉栄 (1885–1923) and Itō Noe 伊藤野枝 (1895–1923), and Hirata Tokuboku, a scholar of English literature, editor of *Bungakukai* who was in England at the time of the publication of *De Profundis*. This work

was responsible for the image in Japan of Oscar Wilde as poetic genius, martyr of aestheticism and philosopher. Honma Hisao's translation of *De Profundis* as *Gokuchūki* 獄中記 was by no means perfect, but it was the first of its kind, and it caused a sensation. Shimazaki Tōson related in his short article "Nikko" 日光 (Sunlight) in the journal *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 that he had taken pleasure in reading Honma's *Gokuchūki* as he lay ill in bed. The book was to constitute an undercurrent of Tōson's new novel *Shinsei* 新生.⁴⁶ The work even reached the hearts of those not engaged in letters. Sekine Shōji 関根正二 (1899–1919), a painter who achieved posthumous fame for his uniquely meditative style, fell under its spell. He cited lines from *Gokuchūki* in his diary such as "Yo ni hiai ni kurabubeki shinri wa nai" 世に悲哀に比べべき真理はない (There is no truth in this world comparable to sorrow).⁴⁷ In Honma's *Gokuchūki*, there appear lines such as "Hiai no aru tokoro, soko ni seichi ga aru" 悲哀のあるところ、そこに聖地がある (Where there is sorrow, there a sanctuary is); and "Hiai no haigo ni wa tsune ni reikon ga aru" 悲哀の背後には常に靈魂がある (Behind sorrow, there is always the soul).⁴⁸

Two years after the publication of *De Profundis*, in 1912, Oscar Wilde made his Japanese debut as a playwright.⁴⁹ Alan Wilkie's Company produced *Salomé* both in Yokohama and in Tokyo,⁵⁰ but the first production which Honma Hisao saw was the one at Shimamura Hōgetsu's Geijutsu-za 芸術座 starring Matsui Sumako 松井須磨子 (1886–1919) in the title role. Shimamura set out to produce a drama that would be "glamorous from beginning to end with strong colors, enchanting style, rich and lucid lines." He employed "every sensual method or means available to appeal to sight and sound, with the result that you can easily imagine the power of the stimuli we achieved." According to Shimamura, "The central philosophic idea of the play is found in the line "The secret of love is greater than the secret of death."⁵¹ Shimamura hoped to create "a beautiful stage that would open the eyes of an Oscar Wilde, or of someone belonging to the group of aesthetes."⁵² Among Wilde's plays, *Salomé* was probably the easiest for the Japanese audience to appreciate. The story is simple, the lines are lucid and repetitive without striving for wit or humor; relatively little background knowledge is required for an appreciation of it. It invites the rendering of a glamorous and exotic atmosphere on stage. Besides, the Japanese audience was very familiar with the so-called *dokufu mono* 毒婦物 in the kabuki theatre, which featured an evil woman in the leading role. *Salomé* duly gained lasting popularity in Japan. Indeed, as late as the 1960s, we find Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970) directing *Salomé* on stage.⁵³

Honma contributed to the success of Shimamura's production of *Salomé* by writing favorable reviews, but his greater interest in Wilde's essays on aestheticism and stories remained unchanged.⁵⁴ In 1905, *De Profundis* had prompted the reevaluation of Oscar Wilde in England; six years later, Japan encountered Oscar Wilde almost for the first time through the same work with little knowledge of Wilde before his reevaluation. While other translators of *De Profundis* turned now to other themes and focused their attention on other writers, Honma continued his pursuit of Oscar Wilde. He now wished to trace backward the formation of those ideas that seemed to culminate in *De Profundis*, at the same time as he filled in gaps in his biographical knowledge. After *De Profundis*, he translated *The Model Millionaire* in 1912, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Poems in Prose* in 1913, *Pen, Pencil & Poison* and *The House of Judgement* in 1915, *A Florentine Tragedy* and *A House of Pomegranates* in 1916.⁵⁵ He did further research on Wilde and wrote essays as he collected new materials.⁵⁶ In "Gokuchū

no Wairudo” 獄中のワイルド (Wilde in Jail), Honma introduced the anecdote of Warder Martin which appeared in Robert Sherard’s *The Life of Oscar Wilde*. Martin was a warder at Reading Prison who was fired because his kindness to prisoners was against the rules. He was particularly compassionate towards Wilde and wrote an account entitled *The Poet in Prison*, which was included in Sherard’s *Life of Oscar Wilde*. There he described how in prison Wilde would spend the night walking in his cell; he wrote of his reaction to the sermon of a prison minister, and his bewilderment at appearing before his visitors in an unshaven state. In “Wairudo hyōden no hitotsu no nazo” ワイルド評伝の一つの謎 (A Mystery in the Biographies of Oscar Wilde), he described the lawsuit relating to Arthur Ransome’s 1912 biography *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*. In the same article, Honma referred to Lord Alfred Douglas’s *Oscar Wilde and Myself*, which was published in 1914. By this time, not least owing to Honma’s work, Oscar Wilde had become a much publicized writer in Japan. In 1920, *Wairudo zenshū* ワイルド全集 (The Complete Works of Wilde) appeared in five volumes from Ten’yūsha 天祐社, with Honma Hisao as one of the editors and translators.

Honma Hisao had started teaching part time at Waseda University from 1918, and from this time he began earnestly to seek a career as an academic. His doctoral dissertation, *Eikoku kinsei yuibishugi no kenkyū* explored Oscar Wilde and aestheticism, and Honma spent one year in England on his research. There he met Wilde’s son Vyvyan Holland, who gave him a lock of Oscar Wilde’s hair as a memento. He also granted Honma permission to read and copy *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*, the unabridged version of *De Profundis*. The *Epistola* helped Honma grasp the deeper meaning of Wilde’s doctrine of aestheticism, which was, as Walter Pater stated, “to live not for the fruit of experience, but for the experience itself.”⁵⁷



Fig. 3. Honma Hisao and Vyvyan Holland.

The Ethos of Late Meiji Japan and Late Victorian England

The reception of Wilde's aestheticism and the popularity of *De Profundis* at the end of Meiji owed much to the fact that they met the needs of the time. Indeed, the intellectual climate of late Meiji Japan appears to bear certain similarities with that of late Victorian England. It was almost forty years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 that Oscar Wilde's aestheticism was introduced to Japan. During the Meiji era, the energy of the nation was successfully channeled under the slogan of "Wealthy Nation, Strong Army" to attain its national goal of recognition as a civilized sovereign state. After the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, Japan even secured status as a world power. Industry grew rapidly and national wealth increased. This was achieved with patriotism, perseverance, and effort, but the cost was the welfare of the weak and the poor, and the fulfillment of individual happiness.

Moreover, by late Meiji, there was now a distinct gap between those who emerged from the confusion of Meiji as winners, and the losers who failed to keep pace with the times. Important political and administrative positions were filled by men from Satsuma and Chōshū, for these were the domains whose leaders effected the Meiji Restoration. Even in late Meiji politics and administration, the advantages of a Satsuma or Chōshū pedigree were so clearly felt that those interested in politics but without elite connections sought fulfillment elsewhere, in military service or industry. Some destined to be losers in the power structure of the now firmly established Meiji regime directed their passion to political ideologies such as socialism or communism. Others devoted themselves to Christianity and social welfare. Still others pursued new careers in academia or the literary world. As in the mid to late Victorian period, there was a new focus in Japan, too, on values which had been ignored or neglected in the push for modernization, such as a concern for the poor and the weak, and an appreciation of things frail and beautiful.

While the Japanese masses approved the nation's newly-achieved confidence and pride, a sense of skepticism pervaded the students of late Meiji. This we can see, for example, in the suicide of Fujimura Misao 藤村操 (1886–1903), a student of Ichikō (later Tokyo University). Fujimura, who committed suicide by diving into the Kegon falls, left behind a will styled "Gantō no kan" 巖頭之感 (Sentiments at the Top of the Waterfalls), in which he spoke of the incomprehensibility of life or "*jinsei fukakai*" 人生不可解. At Waseda University also, students of literature who were adherents of Shimamura Hōgetsu were prone to feelings of hopelessness and despair. In 1910, Honma himself described a sense of not knowing what to do, not being able to determine what ideas to commit to.⁵⁸ As Honma recalled while writing his *Zoku Meiji bungakushi gekan* 続明治文学史下巻 more than a generation later in the 1950s and 1960s, there was among young people of the time a feeling of pain, of servile resignation, and of apathy.⁵⁹ Given that Shimamura Hōgetsu, one-time champion of naturalism and of the so-called "Waseda school," sensed naturalism's finality, it is only natural that his followers were affected and began to yearn for new ideas and new values.⁶⁰ While some students found inspiration in German or Russian ideas, the late Victorian pursuit of new values and the meaning of life served as a model for others. Oscar Wilde and his ideas of aestheticism were particularly appealing to Honma, even though they were far removed from naturalism.

One factor that facilitated the reception of Wilde's theory of aestheticism in Japan was that intellectuals like Honma detected in it a distant echo of traditional Japanese aesthetic theory. To some Victorian readers, ideas such as "all art is quite useless" appeared exotic and

distasteful, but they sounded familiar to the Japanese. Zhuangzi's 莊子 idea of *wuyong zhi yong* 無用之用 (Jp. *muyō no yō*, the use of no-use) was only introduced to Oscar Wilde in 1890, but it had been within the range of common Japanese knowledge for centuries. It further developed into the still more familiar *wabi* and *sabi*, the core of Matsuo Bashō's 松尾芭蕉 aestheticism.⁶¹ Honma was born into a family of noh actors, and traditional aesthetic theory had informed their performances on stage. Honma's sensitive to beauty and its values was a family legacy. Indeed, Honma was trained to become a noh-actor in his childhood; his brother chose to become a professional painter. Coming to Tokyo at the end of the Meiji period with a vague hope of making his career in the literary field, Honma encountered Wilde's aestheticism. Wilde's attempt to reinstate the value of beauty and art had a particular resonance with Honma Hisao's wishes.

Ireland's Oscar Wilde and Yonezawa's Honma Hisao

Professor Emeritus of Waseda University Nonaka Ryō 野中涼, who had been a student of Honma, remarked on one occasion that those who knew Honma still reminisce that he "was really very fond of *De Profundis*. He knew every detail of the trial records: who said what, when and so forth." What appealed to Honma's heart more than anything else was not Wilde's stories, essays, nor *Salomé* but *De Profundis* and Wilde's life as revealed through it. Honma admired Wilde because he dared to rebel against the existing value system and, by rebelling, challenged it, even if he was then defeated by the overwhelming strength of the establishment. Oscar Wilde fought against the Victorian establishment with all the cunning of generations of experience, but his only weapon was his genius, and his only means was the universal but frail value of beauty. The spirit of a provincial's challenge to central authority, the pride of an individual resisting the establishment: these had a strong appeal to Honma's own spirit of defiance as a provincial. These provided a driving force for Honma to continue research on Oscar Wilde.

Honma deepened his knowledge of Oscar Wilde's Victorian and Irish background through his extensive reading, as well as through men like Oshima (Ojima) Shōtarō 尾島庄太郎 (1899–1980), an authority on Yeats and a good friend of Honma's. Oshima helped him no doubt to make sense of statements by Wilde such as "[T]he two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison."⁶² Although it was only much later that Irish elements in Oscar Wilde's thought and writings came to attract the attention of scholars, Honma would certainly have sensed the impact on Wilde of the English establishment as represented by "Oxford," and of its indirect role in the tragedy of his imprisonment.⁶³ He would have known how Wilde encountered English society for the first time at Oxford, and how, realizing he was an outsider there, had to behave in a way more English than the English themselves.⁶⁴ Oxford also taught Wilde what it meant to be at the centre. Wilde believed that he could be as good in the centre as anybody including those who were born, raised and lived there all their lives; he learned also that in spite of his genius, life was sometimes made difficult because he was an outsider and had no connections in English society; Wilde was determined to stay and succeed in England. Born and raised in Ireland, he was more sensitive to, and critical of, English values but to engage in such criticism as an outsider was also a way of distinguishing himself. All of this would have been apparent to Honma Isao.

One may notice that the life of Oscar Wilde, the outsider, had a curious resonance with Honma's. Honma came to Tokyo from peripheral Yonezawa speaking a distinct Tōhoku 東北 dialect. He was also determined to make his name in Tokyo. He entered Waseda University to pursue a literary career, for his strength was in literature. As a Yonezawa youth, he had after all no connections in the political or administrative worlds of the capital.⁶⁵ For Honma, success in the metropolis of Tokyo was the greatest achievement a Yonezawa native could make.⁶⁶ Moreover, Yonezawa had also endured a long history of mistreatment and injustice at the hands of the bakufu. During the Boshin 戊辰 war of 1868, Yonezawa was again on the losing side.⁶⁷ This history and its consequences generated a complex ethos in Yonezawa, which may best be represented by the local dialect expression *sonpin*. *Sonpin* implies a feeling of tacit defiance against the establishment, coupled with pride in remaining on the edge of current trends, in sympathizing with the minority and in supporting the weak and persecuted. Implicit in the term, too, are a keen sense of criticism against the dominating values of society, and a yearning to escape from poverty and succeed at the center.

To a certain degree, such sentiments were shared by all provincials whose domains suffered under the Tokugawa Bakufu, and by a great number of others who failed to position themselves on the victorious side after Meiji. These were the readers of the translated version of *De Profundis*. Just as Honma Hisao was touched by it when he read it in English, readers not familiar with English were touched by his translation. Whether his sympathy with the life of Oscar Wilde was unanimously shared or not, it is evident that Honma Hisao was not the only Japanese fascinated by Wilde's aestheticism.

In exploring Oscar Wilde's influence on Japanese literature, we must not forget the name of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965). In 1911, the year that Honma translated *De Profundis*, Honma detected the influence of Oscar Wilde in Tanizaki's literature. Reviewing Tanizaki's *Himitsu* 秘密 (Secret), Honma remarked that "there is something distinctly Wildean about Mr. Tanizaki."⁶⁸ Honma observed that Tanizaki's hero resembled Dorian Gray and his heroine that of Wilde's *Sphinx without a Secret*. Tanizaki was actually to translate *Lady Windermere's Fan* later in 1918.⁶⁹ In Honma's understanding at least, the world of beauty created by Tanizaki, known as *tanbi shugi* 耽美主義, owed much to Oscar Wilde's aestheticism. In brief, Wilde impressed his influence firmly upon the soil of this remote corner of East Asia, and Honma Hisao can claim to have played a decisive role here. The lock of Wilde's hair which Honma was given by Wilde's son Vyvyan is still securely kept in the safe of the library of Jissen University, where Honma taught after retiring from Waseda University.

Conclusion

We have traced the activities of Honma Hisao as the first translator of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, and have established the sequence in which Wilde's works were received in Japan. Wilde's works were introduced not in the chronological order of their production, but almost in reverse order. Of Wilde's dramas, which are popular in England even today, only *Salomé* was staged in Japan; for the rest, there were obvious linguistic difficulties, which must have contributed to a general lack of interest. Wilde's poetry and epigrams were also neglected in Japan. His essays on aestheticism, *Dorian Gray* and children's stories were, by contrast, greatly appreciated and, as we have seen, *De Profundis* was much loved and highly influential. It is

clear then that a variety of factors are at work in the successful importation of literary products and their authors: the needs of the time, familiarity or otherwise of ideas and, perhaps more than anything, the enthusiasm of introducers and translators like Honma Hisao.

Finally, it is interesting to note a curious coincidence of birth. The aforementioned Fujimura Misao and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, as well as Hiratsuka Raichō 平塚雷鳥(らいてう)(1886–1971), the champion of the women's emancipation movement, and Matsui Sumako, the celebrated actress who followed Shimamura into the grave, and Ishikawa Takuboku 石川啄木 (1886–1912), who participated in the innovation of waka 和歌 poetry by incorporating sentiments of daily life, were all born in 1886, the same year as Honma Hisao. None of them were from southern Japan. Except for Hiratsuka Raichō, they were either from the provinces and/or experienced poverty and hardship in their youth. Perhaps their sentiments represent the transition between Meiji and Taishō. The seeds of a quest for new values and new styles were sown towards the end of Meiji when *De Profundis* appeared, and they came into bloom during the Taishō period.

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NOTES

1 The well-known struggle of these scholars of so-called Dutch learning is articulated in *Rangaku kotohajime* 蘭学事始. See Sugita 1983.

2 On the history of translation in the Meiji and Taishō eras, see Yoshitake 1959, pp. 1–63 and 181–99.

3 Yonezawa is located in the middle of the Tōhoku 東北 region in the north east of Japan. Its route to the south towards Edo blocked by the Iide mountains 飯豊山 but its route to the north opens to Sakata-shi 酒田市 by way of the Mogami river 最上川 to Kyoto. It had access then to Kyoto and Osaka by way of the Sea of Japan.

4 This was the former domain school known as the Kōjōkan 興譲館.

5 On the life of Honma Hisao, see Hirata 2005, pp. 3–67 and Hirata 2003, pp. 155–86.

6 On the life of Oscar Wilde, see Ellmann 1988. See also “Appendix A,” *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* pp. 1247–51.

7 On Oscar Wilde’s parents, see Ellmann 1988, pp. 3–15.

8 Ellmann 1988, p. 31.

9 Ellmann 1988, pp. 144–45.

10 On Max Nordau, see below n. 19.

11 For rebellious elements in Wilde’s writings at this time, see Ellmann 1988, pp. 288–311.

12 Several scholars, including Honma (1934, pp. 107–11), have conducted research on this subject. See also Imura Kimie 井村君江 on the earliest reception of Oscar Wilde (Imura 1969, pp. 39–60). Hirai Hiroshi 平井博 devoted a section to this subject in his *Oscar Wilde kō* オスカー・ワイルド考 (Hirai 1980, pp. 137–62). Hirai also compiled a detailed bibliography of Oscar Wilde literature in Japanese. More recently, Sasaki Takashi 佐々木隆 has also written on the reception of Oscar Wilde in Japan. See Sasaki 1999, pp. 133–41 and Sasaki 2001, pp. 87–96 and, for a bibliographical study, Sasaki 2006. See also Shimizu 1999, pp. 301–50.

13 Ellmann 1988, p. 177.

- 14 Tsubouchi Shōyō was in charge of “Jibun hyōron,” the aim of which was to introduce the latest news of the European literary world. For example, “Jibun hyōron” (15 October 1912) included an adaptation of William Archer’s article “The drama in the doldrums,” which had appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* on 1 August 1892.
- 15 On Masuda Tōnosuke, see *Kindaibungaku Kenkyū sōsho* 近代文学研究叢書 48, pp. 283–321 and Masuda 1952, pp. 19–34.
- 16 Nordau 1895, pp. 317–37.
- 17 Nordau 1914.
- 18 Imura 1968a, pp. 73–99.
- 19 Hirata 1907, pp. 106–13.
- 20 On Mori Ōgai’s translation, see Hirai 1980, pp. 166–67.
- 21 Shimamura 1907, pp. 1–7.
- 22 Hamilton 1882.
- 23 Shimamura 1907, p. 4 and Wilde 2003, p. 1091
- 24 Honma 1909, pp. 26–37.
- 25 The original title of the latter was “The True Function and Value of Criticism: with Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing.” The title was changed later to “The Critic as Artist” and included in *Intentions*.
- 26 The English sentences and phrases and their Japanese rendition are cited here as they appear in Honma’s text.
- 27 Honma 1910a, pp. 63–69.
- 28 Wilde 2003, pp. 1084–85.
- 29 Tsubouchi Shikō 坪内士行, Honma’s classmate at Waseda and the adopted son of Tsubouchi Shōyō, was presumably in the United States at that time, and provided Honma with Sherard’s *Oscar Wilde* and Wilde’s *De Profundis*. See Honma 1911c, p. 248 and Honma 1910d, pp. 240–42.
- 30 Oscar Wilde 1906 and Honma 1910b, pp. 74–75. Robert Sherard (1861–1943) wrote two books with *Oscar Wilde* in the title, *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship* and *The Life of Oscar Wilde*.
- 31 Honma 1910c.
- 32 For “naturalism” in Japan, the definition and bibliography in *Nippon kindai bungaku daijiten dai 4 kan* 日本近代文学大辞典第4卷 pp. 166–69. What Honma refers to here specifically is the naturalism advocated by his supervisor Shimamura Hōgetsu. According to Honma, naturalism as a literary movement roused in the minds of young people “fresh feelings” and “new trends.” (Honma 1964, pp. 163–64.)
- 33 See Honma, 1910d, pp. 240–42.
- 34 Honma 1910e, pp. 166–77.
- 35 The translation is anonymous, but attributed generally to Honma Hisao.
- 36 Hamilton 1882, pp. 95–124.
- 37 Honma had introduced *The Critic as Artist* under its initial title, *The True Function and Value of Criticism* in his “Genjitsu o hanaren to suru bungei,” Honma 1909, pp. 26–37. He also introduced *The Decay of Lying* in Honma 1910a, pp. 63–69.
- 38 Honma 1911b, p. 19.
- 39 Sherard, 1906, p. 160.
- 40 Sherard 1906, pp. 365–369 and Ingleby 1907, pp. 52–53.
- 41 Honma 1911b, pp. 26–27.
- 42 Honma 1911c and Honma Hisao 1912. Honma used Oscar Wilde, *The House of Pomegranates: De Profundis* in *Complete Writings of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 3, New York: Nottingham Society, 1905.

- 43 Wilde's biographers were generally quiet about this point, because they were afraid that their statements could be taken as libelous.
- 44 There are scattered references to Oscar Wilde's Irish temperament in all three works that Honma probably referred to at this stage, namely, Sherard 1905, Sherard 1906, and Ingleby 1907. However, no reference to Wilde's Celtic temperament associated to this particular case is to be found.
- 45 Taishō period translators of *De Profundis* and their publishers include the following: Tsuji Jun 辻潤 (Etsuzandō 越山堂, 1919); Kamichika Ichiko 神近市子 (*Wairudo zenshū* ワイルド全集, vol. 5, ed. Yaguchi Tatsu, 1920); Hirata Tokuboku (*Eigobungaku* 英語文学 4.8, 1920). The first unabridged version of *De Profundis* was translated from the German rendering by Max Meyerfeld (Neue deutsche Ausgabe, Berlin, Fischer, 1909) in 1926. Miki Tadashi 三木正 was the man responsible ("Kanpon Gokuchūki," 完本獄中記ワイルド作, *Waseda bungaku* 242 (1926), pp. 126–37). See also Imura 1967, pp. 67–99.
- 46 Imura 1968b, pp. 39–56.
- 47 Aranami 1997, pp. 42–43 and Sekikawa 1997, pp. 22, 27, 98–99.
- 48 Honma 1912, pp. 9 and 175.
- 49 On the introduction of *Salomé* to Taishō period Japan, see Sasaki 2001, pp. 87–96.
- 50 Yamamoto 1992, pp. 153–71 and Matsumoto 1966, p. 481.
- 51 Shimamura 1920a, pp. 538–39.
- 52 Shimamura 1920b, p. 540.
- 53 Mishima directed the *Bungaku-za* production of *Salomé* from the translation by Hinatsu Kōnosuke 日夏耿之介. See Honma 2005, pp. 358–359.
- 54 See, for example, Honma, 1914, pp. 50–51; Honma 1915a pp. 100–101; and Honma, 1915b.
- 55 For bibliographical details, see Hirata 2008, pp. 16, 18–19, 22 and 25.
- 56 Representative are the following: Honma 1913, pp. 293–305; Honma 1914b, pp. 26–33; Honma 1915c, pp. 17–30; and Honma 1915d, pp. 2–23. From this last article, we may assume that Honma had obtained two controversial biographies of Oscar Wilde, namely those of Arthur Ransome and Lord Alfred Douglas. See also Imura 1967, pp. 69–70.
- 57 Honma 1934, p. 443.
- 58 Honma 1910c.
- 59 Honma 1964, pp. 50–164.
- 60 Shimamura 1909, (jō) pp. 1–13.
- 61 On the similarity of Wilde's aestheticism with Japanese aesthetic ideas, see Hirai 1980, pp. 161–162.
- 62 Oscar Wilde 2003, p. 1020.
- 63 For Oscar Wilde as an Irish writer, see Kiberd 1989, pp.275–338. Kiberd 1996, pp. 1–20.
- 64 Ellmann 1988, p. 37.
- 65 Out of the eighty five students who graduated from Yonezawa Middle School in the same year as Honma, six went into the Military Academy, and three into so-called Ichikō, virtual prep school to Tokyo Imperial University. Those who became doctors received their training at Sendai 仙台 Medical School. Ten students went to schools in Tokyo, and five of them entered Waseda University. Honma was the only one who entered the Department of Literature (*Kōjōkan Heisei 13 nen kaiin meibo*).
- 66 Honma used the term "miyako ochi" 都落ち to describe a person who failed to survive in central Tokyo and went down to the provinces to make a living. See Honma 2005, p. 158.
- 67 Being close to Aizu-han and located in the heart of the Tōhoku district, Yonezawa took sides with the Edo bakufu in the Boshin civil war.
- 68 Honma 1911d.
- 69 Ibid.

要旨

オスカー・ワイルドと本間久雄

平田耀子

本稿ではオスカー・ワイルドの *De Profundis* の最初の邦語訳者である本間久雄を紹介する。本間はワイルドの唯美主義思想に関する作品を紹介し、博士論文として『英国近世唯美主義の研究』を作成した。筆者は、いつ、どの順序でワイルドの作品が紹介され、ワイルドのどの側面が明治末期から大正初期の日本の若者識者に受け入れられたか、ワイルドが日本の文学にどのような影響を与えたか考察する。西欧の作家を日本へ紹介する際、時代の要請や、翻訳者の興味や熱意、その出身地や個人的な状況も重要であることがわかる。