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Oscar Wilde and Victorian Actresses: The Influence of Victorian Actresses on Wilde's Dramaturgy

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Wilde's plays in the 1890's, *Salomé*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, embody his famous theory of art that "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life." The theory emphasizes the importance of creativity and Wilde finds the creative nature in actresses. His plays reflect the images of the actresses he admired, such as unconventionality and trans-genderism. He understands what he aims for when writing plays through his friendship with four actresses, Lillie Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt, Ellen Terry and Elizabeth Robins. The story of Sybil Vane, a young actress, in his novel called *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and debate on the acting mode in the late 1880's also help us see how important the existence of actresses was for Wilde's dramaturgy.

(key words: Oscar Wilde, theatre, Victorian period, actresses, acting, creativity)

A variety of actresses, from the first-rate to the lower ranks, flourished on the Victorian stage. Their numbers had increased since the first appearance of actresses in the Restoration. According to an 1881 census, female performers outnumbered male performers.¹⁾ In Victorian male-dominant society, the theatre, in particular, attracted women because it was a rare place where women had a chance to be self-supporting and independent. Only a handful of actresses, however, became social climbers; to obtain employment at a decent company was difficult, and unsuccessful actresses often had to lead impoverished lives.²⁾ On the other hand, the actresses who had luck and talent enjoyed their fame and popularity. Famous and successful actresses were valued as attractive guests in Society whose existence appealed to the public's collective vanity. For example, Lillie Langtry, although she became an actress after her debut in Society, became the mistress of the Prince of Wales, a leading figure in Society. The diversity of their ranks in society illustrates the complicated identity of these actresses. Like the Victorian actresses, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) tried to be a social climber, but was, in fact, a social outcast. Both of them were considered an embarrassment to society. Wilde came to know many actresses in his time through his association with the theatre both as a playgoer and playwright. It seems that Wilde always saw the theatre as the most suitable place for an aesthete like him on which he hoped to try his artistic skill even before starting his career as a playwright. In this

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paper four eminent actresses Wilde knew well are selected to study Wilde's dramaturgy: Lillie Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt, Ellen Terry and Elizabeth Robins. They vary in character, talent, and kind of plays in which they appeared, but, they all influenced Wilde himself as well as his idea of acting and dramaturgy. This paper discusses the influence of these actresses on Wilde's plays in the 1890's and the characteristics of his plays that are induced by the existence of Victorian actresses at large.

There was one thing, quite important, that Wilde learned from Lillie Langtry. It was to be 'demonstrative.' Langtry, regarded in Society as the most beautiful woman of the time, shared the aspiration for fame in London Society with Wilde. According to Richard Ellmann, Wilde "was engaged in the same storming of London by his wits that she was achieving by her looks."³⁾ Wilde also creates a dandy Wilde while creating a different Langtry through his friendship with her. He acted like her adviser in the process of her social climbing in exclusive London Society and in his making her an actress. As a result, he became not only demonstrative but also histrionic enough to "burst into tears" and to "be helped out" by his friend when he saw her with the Prince in the auditorium of a theatre, because Langtry favoured the Prince of Wales and other celebrities more than him at that time.⁴⁾ It does not matter for Wilde whether he was attached to her or not. The important thing for him was that he played the role of a love-sick young man. Through his friendship with her, he acquired exhibitionist skills and the consciousness of being always looked at.

It is likely that Sarah Bernhardt, the great French actress, influenced Wilde most in an artistic sense. In May of 1879, Wilde was among the crowd welcoming Sarah Bernhardt in Folkestone.⁵⁾ His relationship with Bernhardt was not as close as that with Langtry, but she was one of the actresses who inspired him most in his dramatic writing. Though he denied that he had written *Salomé* for Bernhardt at first, he later wrote to his publisher, Leonard Smithers, "The only person in the world who could act Salome is Sarah Bernhardt, that 'serpent of old Nile', older than the Pyramids," alluding to a metaphor used for Cleopatra in *Anthony and Cleopatra*.⁶⁾ As this metaphor signifies, the words people rendered to describe her were always associated with something inhuman and monstrous, while she, as an actress, was admired and enthusiastically accepted as "the Divine Sarah." In fact, it was Sarah herself that promoted this extraordinary image. In Paris, people rumoured that Bernhardt "smoked cigars, wore men's clothes," and "fenced and boxed, threw a kitten in the fire and poisoned two monkeys" which she kept at her home.⁷⁾ All these anecdotes as well as the roles that she liked to play such as Phèdre, La Dame aux Caméllias and Frou-Frou contributed to creating the image of Sarah Bernhardt as an unconventional female artist. She tried to establish a new position in the world of art, which was inevitably different from the image of femininity that the actresses of her time usually expressed. Whether these were true or not, an idiosyncratic and trans-gendered image of Bernhardt, and this very image of unconventionality and trans-genderism was what Wilde utilized when writing his plays.

In addition to Langtry and Bernhardt, there are two other actresses who had some indirect influence on Wilde's plays: Ellen Terry and Elizabeth Robins. It was not themselves but their theatre that influenced him. As Henry Irving's leading lady at the Lyceum Theatre, Ellen Terry was trained

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and won fame as the greatest British actress in her time. Because of her agreeable personality, Wilde and Terry remained on good terms even after his debacle in 1895. The English theatrical scene in the 1880's and the 1890's was controlled by actor-managers, and Henry Irving was the most distinguished among them. What was characteristic of the actor-manager system was not experimental spirit but "meticulous attention to detail in production, and to quality, elegance and refinement in playhouse organization."⁸⁾ Their elaborate production appealed to Wilde's aesthetic sense. He was comfortable with the actor-manager system. On the other hand, Robins theatre did not attract Wilde and led him to developing a different direction from what Robins aimed at. Among these four actresses, she was the one who discussed theatre and its future with Wilde most extensively. Influenced by the experimental theatre in the continent and the realism of Ibsenites, Robins had a vision of a new theatre in which actresses played the most important part to enlighten and rationalize women's political and social awareness. In spite of Robins's expectations and of the fervent discussion on the new theatre, Wilde did not help her actually except by introducing her to Herbert Beerbohm Tree who was an actor-manager in the Haymarket Theatre at that time, only to disappoint her with a part Tree gave her, in which she did not have any interest at all. Eventually, Robins managed to give an independent matinee of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890) at the Vaudeville Theatre for the first time in England in 1891 without Wilde's help. Wilde saw Robins's *Hedda* twice and complimented her on her performance, but he never liked the atmosphere of the theatre and its audience.⁹⁾ In less than a year, Wilde's first society comedy, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), opened at the St. James's Theatre, the most fashionable theatre of the time. By seeing both Terry's and Robins' theatre, Wilde seems to have confirmed what kind of plays he was going to write and what kind of theatre he was going to be involved in: plays that were not too realistic for the bourgeois or upper class audience.

Despite the achievement of the great actresses such as those mentioned, Victorians, in general, did not cease to see actresses as morally and socially questionable, although some well-known actresses gained social acceptance over the Victorian period. Their existence challenged social rules of genderized roles. Some of the plays and novels of the time depict how different actresses' lives are from those of ordinary women. For instance, Peg Woffington, an actress-heroine in one of the popular Victorian plays called *Masks and Faces* (1852) asks in a defiant manner, "But what have we to do. . . with homes, and hearts, and firesides? Have we not the theatre, its triumphs, and full-handed thunders of applause?"¹⁰⁾ Her speech discloses an incompatibility between professional actresses and wives and mothers. Therefore, their existence would have seemed iconoclastic of the masculine image towards women in Victorian society. According to Kerry Powell in *Women and Victorian Theatre*, Victorian masculine discourse found suitable metaphors that forced actresses into a marginal area. Victorian society tried to draw a certain line between actresses and ordinary women by assigning "nonhuman terms" to actresses.¹¹⁾ For instance, Rachel, a French actress famous for her performance of Racine's heroines, was described as "the panther of the stage," and Charlotte Cushman, an American actress outstanding for her performance of Lady Macbeth was described as "inhuman, incredible, and horribly fascinating."¹²⁾ Powell also points out that Wilde was one of those who used the image of monstrosity

for describing actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt. Moreover, Powell notes that Wilde portrays Bernhardt as a vampire in his poem, "Phèdre."¹³ However, in contrast to general Victorian view on actresses, Wilde used these inhuman images in a positive way.

The Sybil Vane episode in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), written just before the beginning of his brilliant career in West End, shows that Wilde was not troubled with the deviation of actresses from the line of ordinary women. It articulates his idea of actresses more clearly than any other work by Wilde including his plays and criticism. Sybil Vane is an actress performing at "an absurd little theatre with great flaring gas-jets and gaudy play-bills," and with whom Dorian is in love.¹⁴ Dorian can appreciate the diversity of identities which Sybil appropriates during performances. While the various Shakespearean heroines she plays excite him, he asserts, "Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century. No glamour ever transfigures them. . . . There is no mystery in any of them" (Wilde, *PDG* 51). The inconstant identities of actresses were usually abhorred in the Victorian period. Powell notes that "the 'myriad lives' of actresses could seem only the more disconcerting to thoughtful Victorians who conceived of identity as fixed."¹⁵ However, Dorian highly estimates the transcendence of Sybil's existence and her deviation from ordinary women unlike ordinary Victorians, as Wilde worshipped these characteristics in his contemporary actresses. For example, when Dorian declines to dine with Lord Henry in order not to miss even one repertoire of Sybil's, saying, "To-night she is Imogen, . . . and to-morrow night she will be Juliet," Lord Henry mischievously asks Dorian, treating reality and fiction alike, "When is she Sybil Vane?" "Never," Dorian answers with confidence and explains that she is "all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual" (*PDG* 53). But, she becomes "an individual" when she falls in love with Dorian. Her real experience of love with him makes it impossible for her to believe anything fictitious presented on the stage and play, "the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant"(75). It is ironical that this change on Sybil brings Dorian nothing but disappointment, for, he loves Sybil as an actress and appreciates her performance. As a result, Sybil is deserted by Dorian and poisons herself. What is she, then, if she is not considered an individual? We find the answer in Lord Henry's ultra-artificial perception of life. Seeing Dorian upset and agonized by her hideous end, Lord Henry tries to console him with his interpretation of the disaster:

She has played her last part. But you must think of that lonely death in the tawdry dressing-room simply as a strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy, as a wonderful scene from Webster, or Ford, or Cyril Tourneur. The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died. (86)

In this interpretation, the life of Sybil Vane is completely confined in the realm of imagination and turns into art itself. Sybil Vane does not exist anywhere but in the creative imagination of the audience. The only feeling that she had for the first time in her life is thus rejected, and her death is treated like one of the scenes from a tragedy. An actress is the exquisite form of fiction for Wilde as well as for

Dorian Gray and Lord Henry.

Wilde also deals with actresses' unique involvement in reality in *Dorian Gray*. The relation between life and art is explored through their mediator that is the theatre. Sybil explains the reason of her bad acting, "Before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in theatre that I lived. . . . I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came ---- oh, my beautiful love! ---- and you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is" (74). Sybil's performance devastated by her being carried away by Dorian means that real emotion such as affection is of no help for good acting. In fact, it can mutilate art. Lord Henry says, "I love acting. It is so much more real than life" (70). To Lord Henry and Dorian, life or reality has no place in making performance admirable, but it even has a bad effect on acting.

Wilde tries his aesthetic strategy which he adopts later for his own theatre when developing Lord Henry's interpretation of Sybil Vane's death into a radical and highly artificial perception of life. Facing Dorian who starts thinking that what has happened to Sybil Vane "has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy," Lord Henry reinforces the idea of his disciple, Dorian:

It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style. They affect us just as vulgarity affects us. They give us an impression of sheer brute force, and we revolt against that. Sometimes, however, a tragedy that possesses artistic elements of beauty crosses our lives. If these elements of beauty are real, the whole thing simply appeals to our senses of dramatic effect. Suddenly we find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are both. (84)

This actor/ spectator theory of Lord Henry leads Dorian Gray to the horrifying catastrophe. After learning this theory, Dorian sees things, including his murder of Sybil's brother, as mere presentations of fiction. He remains young and beautiful as a living miracle, but only by making his portrait a vessel of all the reality he rejects, such as the crimes he commits and his own aged wrinkles. Dorian confines the representation of reality in his portrait so as to preserve his youth, beauty and purity. Therefore, in this theory of life, an egotistic emphasis on the artificial view of life cancels the real experience. Reality and experience are useless in Wildean world of art, and Wilde places this theory at the centre of his dramatic writing.

Actually, whether real experience works for performance or not was widely discussed in the late 1880's. The most active speakers on this subject were Henry Irving and Constant-Benoît Coquelin, a French comedian. Wilde must have known of the debate because it involved actors and critics such as Dion Boucicault, and William Archer, whom Wilde knew well.¹⁶ This subject contains some important aspects of acting which Wilde's plays demand of performers. The debate started from Coquelin's criticism of the British style of acting, which he considered fortuitous. As a vehement defender of the great French tradition in which "a studied control was everything," Coquelin despised the actor's

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personality-oriented style of the British theatre.¹⁷⁾ Although Coquelin admitted that there should be a difference of performance between tragedy and comedy, he criticized Irving's acting for being too original and swerving from what he was supposed to express. In spite of their disagreement over the acting mode, it was the expression of human nature that both Irving and Coquelin strove for. Nonetheless, they argued against each other because of the difference in employing an emotional experience. Coquelin introduces the episode of Talma, a great French tragedian, who studied how his voice turned when he wept over the death of his father.¹⁸⁾ On the other hand, Irving notes that "the actor who combines the electric force of a strong personality with a mastery of the resources of his art, must have a greater power over his audiences than the passionless actor who gives a most artistic simulation of the emotions he never experiences."¹⁹⁾ Coquelin probably was not convinced of Irving's beliefs such as "the electric force of a strong personality." However, they did not differ in terms of learning acting techniques through experiences.

The mode of acting Wilde's plays in the 1890's required seems to have been influenced by the controversy between Irving and Coquelin. The problem lying at the bottom of this controversy is thoroughly discussed in *Masks or Faces* (1888) by William Archer. He divides actors and actresses into "emotionalists" and "anti-emotionalists," and he collected a vast amount of episodes and stage experiences from both sides. Among them is Mrs. Bankroft, one of the emotionalists, who remarks on the importance of experience, which obviously opposes Wilde's interpretation of the relation between art and life.

'The performance of a moving situation,' Mrs. Bankroft writes, 'without the true ring of sensibility in the actor, must fail to affect anyone. . . . An emotional break in the voice must be brought about naturally, and by a true appreciation of the sentiment, or what does it become? . . . I cannot simulate suffering without an honest sympathy with it. . . . I hold that without great nervous sensibility no one can act pathos. . . . It is impossible to feel the sentiments one has to utter, and but half the author's meaning can be conveyed. It is a casket with the jewel absent. . . . The voice in emotion must be prompted by the heart; and if that is "out of tune and harsh," why, then, indeed, the voice is "like sweet bells jangled." Art *should* help nature, but nature *must* help art. They are twin sisters, and should go hand in hand, but nature must be the firstborn. . . .'²⁰⁾

Unlike Sybil Vane, Mrs. Bankroft insists that performance should be vitalized by real emotion. She touches the ideal fusion of art and nature, giving priority to nature, which obviously conflicts with Wilde's famous line in "The Decay of Lying" (1889), "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life" (Wilde, 982). In Wilde's case, he makes a casket with the jewel absent look as if the glittering jewel were actually there. This is his art. It is clear that Wilde is grouped with anti-emotionalists in Archer's classification.

Victorian actresses and anti-emotionalism have an important effect on Wilde's dramaturgy. In fact, there is similarity between them. Victorian actresses resisted the widely accepted identity of

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women, and as mentioned earlier, they were separated from ordinary women and forced into the realm of fiction. Anti-emotionalists also resist representing fact-based interpretations of life and are more inclined to portray fiction than emotionalists. Both of them are self-creative rather than representational. Judging from the Sybil Vane episode and Wilde's attitude towards art and life, it is apparent that his plays in the 1890's explore *his* new theatre through using the self-creating feature of actresses and anti-emotionalism.

Salomé (1891) is one of the plays to which many actresses are attracted and where they wanted to test their abilities. It is a play for actresses. It expresses cruelty and the violent desire of a woman together with affluent images of beauty. The two major images of an actress that Victorians had are thoroughly reflected in this play: beauty and monstrosity. These two images appear by turns and reinforce each other. Under the moon which symbolizes changeability, Salomé dances between beauty and monstrosity, with her feet like "little white doves," and bloody appetite for the head of a prophet, Jokanaan, in her mind (*Salomé* 552). The moon, Salomé and the actress: all of these intimate metamorphoses in people's imaginations.

In addition to conveying the two images, Salomé manifests her creatorship. She is the one who describes the beauty of Jokanaan, "of whom the Tetrarch is afraid" (555). There is a scene in which Salomé and Jokanaan are in conflict for the search of the metaphor of Jokanaan's body. Salomé expresses that his body is "white like the lilies of a field" (558) or "like the snows that lie on the mountains" (559). But Jokanaan tries to stop her from talking to him, which infuriates Salomé and then makes her say, "Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper." But she glorifies his hair later with metaphors such as "clusters of grapes" and "the cedars of Lebanon" (559). Usually, it is a prophet that gives a description, and Jokanaan is a mediator of God, the Creator. The verbal sparring between Salomé and Jokanaan shows her desire to excel him in creatorship. After all, Salomé fails to impress Jokanaan with her verbal creation and beheads him. The attributes of actresses such as beauty, monstrosity and thirst for creatorship are reflected in Salomé's character.

In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Mrs. Erlynne's actress-like unconventionality is focused, forming a remarkable contrast to Lady Windermere, a role model for Victorian women. The play starts like a typical story of a woman with a past and her abandoned child. The child, Lady Windermere, abhors Mrs. Erlynne without knowing she is her mother, and refuses to invite Mrs. Erlynne to her birthday party, because she suspects the relation between Lord Windermere, her husband and Mrs. Erlynne. Facing the predicament of her daughter, Mrs. Erlynne saves her by sacrificing her reputation in London Society she has regained with Lord Windermere's financial help. However, she does not accept her maternal role which should lead her to repentance for having left her daughter in the past. When Lord Windermere worries about the possibility of Mrs. Erlynne's disclosing her identity to Lady Windermere, Mrs. Erlynne accentuates her unconventionality: "Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother" (*LWF* 425). In this speech, Mrs. Erlynne treats being a mother as playing a new role, and in fact, she shares many similarities with actresses, although she is not an actress.

Mrs. Erlynne declines to choose domesticity and instead, chooses to live theatrically like Peg Woffington in *Masks and Faces*. She admits that she has a “heart” to care about her daughter, but this true emotion of hers does not alter her way of living. She explains her situation objectively: “I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn’t suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn’t go with a modern dress” (425). Mrs. Erlynne ranks “a heart” below “a modern dress” and gives appearance priority over “a heart.” She shows an anti-emotionalist type of performance when she hides her true emotion behind her words and action. Consequently, she leaves London with a new partner, Lord Augustus, whom she has captivated with her charm without identifying herself to Lady Windermere. Her words also tells us that she is not absorbed in maternal feelings and that she can choose the way she lives without being interfered by Victorian prerequisite for women. All these unconventional aspects Mrs. Erlynne presents are based on Wilde’s affirmative idea of actresses.

In *An Ideal Husband* (1895), Wilde superimposes an actress figure on Lord Goring. His lifestyle is characterized by the perceived feminine characteristics although he is a man. It is Lord Goring that is given a trans-gendered image of actresses in this play. As a man who “changes his clothes at least five times a day,” Lord Goring lives like an actress (*IH* 483). In the stage direction, he is described as follows: “Enter LORD GORING. *Thirty-four, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. . . . He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage*” (488). He likes to be misunderstood because he hates being fixed and intelligible to anyone. This detailed description of his character emphasizes his similarity to actresses.

Observed in the light of Lord Goring’s analogy to actresses, the most disturbing speech of his in this play can be understandable. He is a confidant of Sir Robert who had a secret deal which financed him to start a successful career as a politician. Mrs. Chiltern thinks of leaving her husband when she is informed of this fact by Mrs. Cheveley who blackmails Sir Robert into another scheme. Lord Goring dissuades Mrs. Chiltern from deserting her husband on account of his past with a speech unsuitable for his character: “Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. . . . A man’s life is of more value than a woman’s. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions” (548). As a result, he succeeds in convincing Mrs. Chiltern that she should support her husband. However, it is uncertain whether the speech comes from his own view on women or not. He is described as a famous dandy in London Society in the play, and it is easy to see him as Wilde’s double. Oscar Wilde, who was an editor of *Woman’s World*, a magazine which was intended for sophisticated and intellectual women, is unlikely to make his dandy character say such a thing without any particular reason. Therefore, the speech sounds unnatural and makes us wonder if there is another intention. The effect of this problematic speech is similar to that of Mrs. Erlynne’s in which she pretends to be heartless. Mrs. Erlynne hides her real emotion, and Lord Goring expresses the idea towards women contradictory to his character. All the stage directions Wilde gives to Lord Goring’s characterization, for example, “*playing with life*” or “*fond of being misunderstood*,” illustrate that he can be what he originally is not. For Wilde, acting out what one is not is the most theatrical and

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artistic. In *An Ideal Husband* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Wilde realizes such artificiality through borrowing the characteristics of actresses.

Wilde's last play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), applies anti-emotionalism and self-creation to a full-scale. Wilde adapts this strategy only for the characterization of his most favorite character in any given play up to *Earnest*. But he makes it impossible for all the performers to use emotion-oriented techniques in this play. All the characters in *Earnest* speak in an artificial manner and everything is said to have an effect without true emotional conflict. Every character is like an actor as well as an spectator. In addition, the self-creation of actresses is exaggerated in the attitude of characters such as Jack and Cecily who are trying to create their ideal from nothing. Jack creates Earnest from his imagination and Cecily keeps a diary in which her desire determines what is going to happen to her. In reality, they have nothing to represent but have their fiction to present. *Earnest* is Wilde's new theatre where performers are caught short because they cannot find any equivalent experience in their lives. A new, emotionless mode of acting had to be explored in Wilde's new theatre.

Victorian actresses seem to have been a living textbook on theatre for Wilde. Some of the actresses mentioned above inspired Wilde with the brilliance and magic of the theatre. Some might have hinted at what kind of theatre or audience he should write a play for. The most important of all is that his association with the actresses made him aware of their self-creation on which some of them emphasized even in their private lives. They demonstrated various possible roles of women as well as representing female nature. What Wilde finds through his relationship with the actresses is the power of self-creation, which transforms them into something they are not. Actresses of that period can be defined as creators or those who are trying to be creators since they presented and created themselves rather than being moulded into a "good woman" in the male-dominant culture. The dynamism they demonstrated and the unconventionality they expressed captivated and stimulated his aesthetic mind. It can be assumed that the very being of actresses made the basis on which his idea of theatre was established. His idea of actresses extensively influenced his dramaturgy and the mode of acting he demanded.

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Notes

- 1) Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.11.
- 2) Davis, p.25.
- 3) Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), p.111.
- 4) Ellmann, p.115.
- 5) Ellmann, p.117.
- 6) Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p.834. The phrase, "serpent of old Nile" is in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, I. v. 25.
- 7) Henry Knepler, *The Gilded Stage: The Lives and Careers of Four Great Actresses Rachel Félix, Adelaide Ristori, Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse* (London: Constable, 1968), p.144.
- 8) Hugh Hunt et al., *The Revels History of Drama in English* (London: Methuen, 1978), VII, 74.
- 9) Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), p.161. Wilde wrote to Ethel Greenfell, giving his impression of the playhouse, not of the play as follows: "I went there on Thursday night, and the house was dreary ---- the pit full of sad vegetarians, and the stalls occupied by men in mackintoshes and women in knitted shawls of red wool."
- 10) Tom Taylor, and Charles Reade, *Masks and Faces in Nineteenth Century Plays*, ed. George Rowell (1953; rpt. London: Oxford UP, 1968), p.161.
- 11) Powell, p.13.
- 12) Powell, pp.13-14.
- 13) Powell, p.15.
- 14) Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. J. B. Foreman (1966; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p.49. All subsequent quotations from Oscar Wilde's works except letters are from this edition, with page numbers cited within parentheses.
- 15) Powell, p.27.
- 16) Hugh Hunt et al., VII, 72.
- 17) Roger Manvell, *Ellen Terry* (London: Heinemann, 1968), p.149.
- 18) William Archer, *Masks or Faces*, (1888); rpt. in *Two Classics of the Art of Acting*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc, 1957), p.147.
- 19) Henry Irving, *Preface, The Paradox of Acting*, by Denis Diderot in *The Classics of the Art of Acting*, p.9.
- 20) Archer, pp.112-13.

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オスカー・ワイルドとヴィクトリア時代の女優： ワイルドの劇作術へのヴィクトリア時代の女優の影響

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ワイルドの1890年代の戯曲、『サロメ』『ウインダミア卿夫人の扇』『理想の夫』『真面目が肝心』は「芸術が人生を模倣するよりもはるかに多く人生は芸術を模倣する」という彼の芸術論を実践するものである。その理論は創造性の重要性を強調し、ワイルドは女優という存在の中に創造の本質を見出す。ワイルドの戯曲は彼が評価していた女優の型破りでtrans-genderなイメージを反映している。また、ワイルドは劇作において何を目指すのかということをもLillie Langtry、Sarah Bernhardt、Ellen Terry、Elizabeth Robinsの4人の女優との親交を通して自覚することになる。女性のあり方がかなり限定されていた19世紀末の社会においてcreativeであろうとした女優は既存の女性の定義を揺るがし、フィクションの世界に近い存在となる。ここに、ワイルドの芸術論と女優という存在の密接な関係性が見出されるのである。ワイルドの小説『ドリアン・グレイの肖像』の中のSybil Vaneという女優に纏わる部分に見られるワイルドの女優論、演技論と当時の俳優と演劇評論家を巻き込んだ演技論争も手掛かりにしつつ、ワイルドの4つの戯曲における女優のイメージの反映を考察する。

(キーワード: オスカー・ワイルド、演劇、ビクトリア時代、女優、演技論、創造性)