

## Introduction

The modern times, first consists of individualism. In the middle ages, European feared exaggerated hell which Catholicism created in order to gain a huge sum of money by means of an indulgence. Then people did not aware that they were being use of by the Roman Catholic because they thought only the churches could lead them to heaven. They were released from Catholic authority, and people had the thought of humanism under the Renaissance. Individualism, moreover, sprang from humanism with the rise of the citizen in the Industrial Revolution. Ken'ichi Yoshida points out, "In modern literature, we must firstly address to ourselves and to the readers who understand that." The main intention of literature altered groups of each society into individuals.

Oscar Wilde is increasingly appreciated in recent years. The reason comes from his modernity and individualism. When we read Wilde's works, his modernity is worth reconsidering. In fact, we can regard Wilde's modernity as significant.

First, "The critic as the Artist." is the important criticism, he emphasized the doctrine of art for art's sake. We may think that this criticism is most representative of his thought, as can be seen in the following quotation:

You have told me that all Art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative

than creation, and that the highest criticism is that which reveals in the work of Art what the artist had not put there; that it is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it; and that the true critic is unfair, insincere, not rational. (407)

Wilde's essay is like a play, and included his copy Intentions. It is a dialogue between Gilbert and Ernest. Why did Wilde write the essay like a dialogue? First, the reason must be that he was a journalist. When Journalists edit, they try to attract and entertain readers. He was an executive editor of a magazine, Ladies World, for two years.<sup>3</sup> The title of the magazine was changed to Womens Women's World by Wilde's idea, and the magazine enjoyed popularity with readers. He thus could concentrate his leisure on writing. Examples of this are "The Decay of Lying," in Nineteenth Century, and "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." in Balackwood Magazine in 1889.<sup>4</sup>

Second, Wilde liked to write plays. Indeed, the performance of plays was popular with Europeans in his period, as can be seen in the following phrase:

In those days, the estheticism was popular among people, on the other hand, it was made target of harsh criticism. The play of "patience," which was a joint production of Gilbert and Sullivan, became a record-breaking hit work. This hit play made a cynical about Wilde's esthetic clothes.<sup>5</sup>

Wilde also wrote a lot of very great plays, for example, Lady Windermere's Fan and Salome. Therefore, we may say Wilde hit on the idea which he wanted to write "The

critic as Artist" by means of form of a play. Reading this criticism, we can enjoy every bit of a tense dialogue. Let us go to the Wilde's play.

## Chapter 1

### I The peculiarity of Language in Literature

Wilde mentions that the old Greeks were a nation of art critics. That is, they invented criticism and left us its system about life and literature.

The principles of the latter [literature], as they laid them down, are, in many cases, so subtle that we can hardly understand them. Recognizing that the most perfect art is that which most fully mirrors man in all his infinite variety, they elaborated the criticism of language, considered

in the light of the mere material of that art, to a point to which we, with our accentual system of reasonable or emotional emphasis, can barely if at all attain. . . (350)

Wilde thinks that the Greeks estimated words to be more important than the rhythm of language. However, today, the importance of words does not change. Indeed, this view is clearly reflected in the superiority of prose. In today's world, prose seems to be more major than poetry because people forget the pleasant tone and rhythm in the daily language. The feature can be seen in Wilde's following remarks:

Since the introduction of printing, and the fatal development of the habit of reading amongst the middle and lower classes of this country, there has been a tendency in literature to appeal more and more to the eye, and less and less to the ear which is really the sense which, from the standpoint of pure art, it should seek to please, and by whose canons of pleasure it should abide always. (350-351)

It is actually difficult to return to the Greek times

or Wilde's period, because today's world takes uncountable huge information, a flood of words, and stimulus fascinated with pain. It is the eye that is our most important sense in modern times. Thus, we will be not able to return back to the ear's world. That is, the modern tendency changed from tone to text and picture, for example, we can read poems which is made visual arrangement of the words, using many question marks and exclamation marks, and capitalization. The Greek criterion is "the test was always the spoken word in its musical and metrical relations." (351) When we read the above quotation, we have a question whether Wilde was influenced by the Greeks when he wrote "The Critic as the Artist." Judging from the above, he did take a form of play, dialogue, in order to represent that his criticism itself is the ear's art and prove to us that criticism is art.

## II The Form and The Critic

Wilde states "Start with the worship of form, and there is no secret in art that will not be revealed to you." (389) The form has the important part of the work's content. Choosing one from all artistic forms, then we already analyze our artistic emotion through which the form is most suitable. "Technique is really personality." (401) Art of writing like rhetoric also is included in the content in the sense of amplifying the communication of our emotion.

First of all, Oscar Wilde presented in the beginning of "The Critic as Artist" whether art-criticism is useful. "Why should those who cannot create take upon themselves to estimate the value of creative work?"(344) This question is a consistent theme through his work. Wilde intends to show the opposition between creativity and criticism. As Wilde lets one of characters say, "If a man's work is easy to understand, an explanation is unnecessary. . ."(344). Here the author takes an example of the relationship between journalism and literature: "Journalism is unreadable and literature is not read."(349) Journalism may be a low level of criticism in ordinary life. Thus, I suppose whether the critic really grasps the essence of a work. Indeed, today anyone can get ideas from all over the world. Furthermore, because of the development of the Internet people enjoy the splendid chance that they are able to present their own view. Thus they have little need of joy from literature.

Some limitation might well, and will soon, I hope, be placed upon some of our newspapers and newspaper writers. For they give us the bald, sordid, disgusting facts of life. They chronicle, with degrading avidity, the sin of the second-rate, and with the conscientiousness of the illiterate give us accurate and prosaic details of the doings of people of absolutely no interest whatsoever. But the artist, who accepts the facts of life, and yet transforms them into shapes of beauty, and makes them vehicles of pity or of awe, and shows their colour-element, and their wonder, and their true ethical import also, and of loftier and more noble import. (394)

The fact is not the truth. It is the fictional world

that is the way to lead to the truth. If journalists enumerate hundreds of facts like the ocean, we cannot scoop up any fish of the truth, because we can understand our world only through the fiction which is the form of language, art, and criticism. Wilde also points out this idea, as can be seen in the following quotation:

the objective form is the most subjective in matter. Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth. (389)

The relationship of art and the critical faculty is a delicate problem in the point of creating art.

The aesthetic critic, and the aesthetic critic alone, can appreciate all forms and modes. It is to him that Art makes her appeal. (401)

Is it necessary for the artist to have a critical faculty of the same level as an academic scholar?

They [the Greeks] were, as you have pointed out, a nation of art-critics. I acknowledge it, and feel a little sorry for them. For the creative faculty is higher than the critical. There is really no comparison between them.

*Gilbert.* The antithesis between them is entirely arbitrary. Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of the name. You spoke a little while ago of that fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection by which the artist realizes life for us, and gives to it a momentary perfection. Well, that spirit of choice, that subtle tact of omission, is really the critical faculty in one of its most characteristic moods, (355)

Wilde goes on to say: "the importance of the critical element in all creative work," (355) and also states:

The critic may, indeed, desire to exercise influence; but, if so, he will concern himself not the individual, but with the age, which he will seek to wake into consciousness, and to make responsive, creating in it new desires and appetites, and lending it his larger vision and his nobler moods. (399-400)

When we regard critics as creative person, they are the most political human being in the academic field, because the critics feel himself to be an incongruity within a society. Creative critics thus can conceive an inconsistency within the social system; furthermore, they can create even their vision of a perfect society. In contrast, almost all practical scholars, who are political scientists and economists, can only present a proposed revision of the system within their real society. This is one of the important reasons that Western people require the elite to possess both the social studies and the knowledge of liberal arts. This is what Michael S. Fordy has to say on the matter:

To Wilde's way of thinking, cultural and intellectual "capital" was infinitely more valuable to posterity than social or economic capital.

It is not so beautiful that future generations enjoy the "capital" of vision. Although they can inherit the past and the present from us, they cannot succeed to the future, because it is "posterity" who must realize their vision based on the inheritance.



### III Creative Process

How do we participate in the creative process? I will use the term "creative process" to refer to each stage when we create an art.

Criticism is itself an art. And just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without it cannot be said to exist at all, so Criticism is really creative in the highest sense of the word. Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent. (364)

Wilde says that criticism is artistic. This idea is fresh because we tend to divide criticism and literature into different types. We may say that he thinks criticism partakes of the creative process when the critic composes a work.

Criticism is no more to be judged by any low standard of imitation or resemblance than is the work of sculptor. (364)

The first stage of art is not creation but choice. The artist just represents the internal fact chosen from what s/he is surrounded with. Thus, art and criticism are already formed at the point when the artist chooses the idea of the work.

The critic discovers value from the natural world; moreover, the role of criticism is what extracts the philosophical and artistic value from a mixture of chaff and grain. Indeed, it is the mission of the critic to present the unrecognized fact and value to us. Relevant to this point is Wilde's following remark: "Criticism is itself an

art." (364)

I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end. Certainly, it is never trammelled by any shackles of verisimilitude. No ignoble considerations of probability, that cowardly concession to the tedious repetitions of domestic or public life, affect it ever. One may appeal from fiction unto fact. But from the soul there is no appeal. (365)

Here, it appears that Wilde attaches significance to "impression." He confirms criticism is just "impression." As mentioned before, criticism is choice and draws out "impression" from this world. Furthermore, the critic, in my opinion, goes through at least the following chain of stages: observation, impression, thinking, organizing and actual creation. Therefore, because both criticism and art is composition of observation, impression, and creation, it is right that Wilde says criticism is "the purest form of personal impression." (365) He also states that "the highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as impressive purely" (366). Criticism, different from art, can express a raw impression and thought because it passes through no reconstruction like an artistic work. That is, impressive criticism is less artificial than fiction, in respect of the authors' emotion, because the novel has another stage of constructing a fictitious world. Wilde

also emphasizes the importance of a subjective attitude in the different parts:

All artistic creation is absolutely subjective. (389)

Ah! not fair. A Critic cannot be fair in the ordinary sense of the world. It is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiassed opinion, which is no doubt the reason why an unbiassed opinion, which is always absolutely valueless. The man who sees both sides of a question, is a man who sees absolutely nothing at all. Art is a passion, and, in matters of art, Thought is inevitably coloured by emotion, and so is fluid rather than fixed, and, depending upon fine moods and exquisite moments, cannot be narrowed into the rigidity of a scientific formula or a theological dogma. (392)

When we choose a thought, how does our reason work?

The origin is not reason but our fundamental taste in most cases. That is, the choice of the thought basically can be traced to whether suitable or unsuitable, not whether correct or not, because an appropriate theory is something else. After all, a theory is a fictional hypothesis.

## Chapter 2

### 1 A Comparative Survey of Culture

What is literature? Are books useful and meaningful? It is an eternal mystery for people who aspire to appreciate a literary work which they love. While we realize keenly that this is a meaningless question when we study the grand history of literature, we must not forget that, in Wilde's view, entertainment is the intention and essence of literature. Take fiction, for example. General readers will read a novel because they want to enjoy a work. They never have any intention of analyzing by literary theory and extracting an idea from a novel. We must pay attention to emotion rather than reason for literary works. On the other hand, literature possesses a playful side. Haiku, the Japanese short poem, for example, has an aspect that the general reader expresses and plays positively. It is not only passive entertainment like reading. Seventeen-syllables can transform an ordinary person into a small poet. In a haiku gathering, each participant composes a poem, shows it, appreciates and criticizes. Needless to say, this playful manner is superior to the stuffy analytical approach of literature. Learning is in playing. Indeed, simultaneous with making verses, they offer criticism in this sort of literature.

Modern literature, however, clearly separates critics

and artists on the grounds that the study of literature should maintain specialty and a scientific mind. Though we may say I. A. Richards is the founder of 'scientific' analysis, if his theory is developed in the future, it may not be useful for us. The main reason is that science cannot command literature and the complete human mind. Moreover, if science is completely developed, we will understand people's minds. Thus, in the future, we may not ask for literature when we want to understand the human mind. Incidentally, the usefulness of modern criticism in literature, as it were, may resemble the future relationship between science and literature. Here is Wilde again:

Whatever, in fact, is modern in our life we owe to the Greeks. Whatever is an anachronism is due to mediaevalism. It is the Greeks who have given us the whole system of art-criticism, and how fine their critical instinct was, may be seen from the fact that the material they criticised with most care was, as I have already said, language. (354)

The times do recur repeatedly. In Japanese modern history, for instance, the external pressure, which lasted from the last Edo Period to the Meiji period, removed the feudalistic consciousness of people. In fact, the threat from the West gave Japanese modern thinking, yet that did not infiltrate into a middle part of the whole mind. The people thus suffered a conflict between primitive heart and western cannon. The same may be said of Europe after going through various historical stages. Those are, for

example, the restraint to Catholic authority, and the increase of democratic power which came from the Industrial Revolution. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, Europe was the age of revolution, in politics, social values, culture, above all, in each individual mentality.

Today Europeans keep holding these features, and an enormous historical memory dwells in their spirits.

And so, it is not our own life that we live, but the lives of the dead, and the soul that dwells within us is no single spiritual entity, making us personal and individual, created for our service, and entering into us for our joy. (383)

What Wilde's passage makes clear at once is that this his idea resembles "the historical sense" which T. S. Eliot shows us in "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.\*

Writers discover their present point through the historical survey, thus they can realize their modernity. Modernity does not appear without relative evaluation, because the parties concerned most cannot understand their situation.

## II The Public and Art

But in this we are merely lending to other ages what we desire, or think we desire, for our own. Our historical sense is at fault. Every century that produces poetry is, so far, an artificial century, and the work that seems to us to be the most natural and simple product of its time is always the result of the most self-conscious

effort. (356)

In this quotation, "an artificial century" points not to the development of industry but to the aspect of culture and general minds of the time. Takeshi Yoro, a brain anatomist and critic, for example, in History of Japanese Physical View, mentions an idea that the Edo period is culturally an artificial time. He use the unique words of "cerebralize society."<sup>9</sup> That means that the natural thing in modern artificial society is only our body, thus just our brains do create our world. Surely, the priod of decadence,<sup>10</sup> when modern civilization was developed, produced a lot of subsequent great poets like Baudelaire, Pound and Eliot. Today's confused world, in the sense of value, as well as Wilde's times, increasingly needs poetry in our daily life.

Everyone is able to write at least an autobiographical fiction in their life. This means people have the faculty to compose art and can express by their ordinary experience. Indeed, recently, private publishing of autobiography is popular with old people. They want to leave their private history to this world as a proof of life. One can safely state that an autobiography is one type of art form because the book will be recognized as fiction through choice. He also points out:

As a rule, the critics--I speak, of course, of the higher class, of those in fact who write for the sixpenny papers--are far more cultured than the people whose work they are called upon to review.

This is, indeed, only what one would expect, for criticism demands infinitely more cultivation than creation does. (358)

The metaphor of an autobiographical book means that if people lead a dull life, they can compose a fiction based simply on their memory. The novel, of course, is not easy to write. Nevertheless, we can write a fiction for our private motive because there is no necessity to have academic knowledge and writing technique. Criticism, on the other hand, needs huge knowledge and experience, as Wilde points out. When we read a book as entertainment, our individual experience is enough to enjoy the world of the work. Because the aim of popular reading is each person's contentment, the common people do not require to read artistic and academic means in daily life. Criticism is, as it were, a lion, the king of beasts in literature. That is, the lion has great power and wisdom, but it requires much food of knowledge to live.

### III Art for Criticism's sake

It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence. (380)

Wilde's idea of art for art's sake is made explicit in the former passage. Surely, we can express ourselves only through the form of language, art, and act. If we recognize our thinking is just one of the physical activity in our brain, like breathing and digestion, thinking as a



subjective fact is equivalent to nonexistence for the outside world. We, therefore, absolutely need form so that we put the spirit to the thinking of nonexistence. Some people use the form of art.

The Security of society lies in custom and unconscious instinct, and the basis of the stability of society, as a healthy organism, is the complete absence of any intelligence amongst its members. (388)

What is 'The Security of society'? To put the matter simply, this means the mobocracy and the despotism by a small part of the people. The society, therefore, hates the artist and the critic who brings the people out of a hypnotic trance. Indeed, it is exaggerated, because art, in most cases in history, has been accepted during only peacetime. If literature is accepted in only a peaceful and wealthy period, if it can be changed by a social system, does it an essential value? In today's society, practical science takes precedence over all other things. The public is hopeful of earning their daily bread more than mental foods. Art, for example, was powerless during the last world war. Indeed, the fascist military burned a lot of books inappropriate for the political system, imprisoned many ideological and political criminals, and moreover, made the artist create works which contributed to their country. Nobody paid attention to the artistic provisions in an extreme situation. Nevertheless, why have human beings held

fast to art? The answer is expressed best by Wilde when he says:

Gilbert. All art is immoral.

Ernest. All art?

Gilbert. Yes. For emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life, and of that practical organization of life that we call society. Society, which is the beginning and basis of morals, exists simply for the concentration of human energy, and in order to ensure its own continuance and healthy stability it demands, and no doubt rightly demands, of each of its citizens that he should contribute some form of productive labour to the common weal, and toil and travail that the day's work may be done. Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer. (381)

Art absolutely appreciates our emotion, on the other hand, all society necessarily demands to stop our mentality for the sake of the stable society. The society likes people who devote themselves to work on their everyday's life. We never stop to see the past and the future, because the thinking which has fear and doubt for the society is first step of "the dreamer." That is, the revolutionary is fundamentally the dreamer. Relevant to this point is Wilde's following remark:

Aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even a colour-sense is more important, in the development of the individual, than a sense of right and wrong. (406)

After all, can we conclude morality is a problem whether our manners are beautiful or not? When we judge a

person by his/her manner, we hardly do so by our reason. It is the way of personal emotion that we judge people in almost all cases. There is no doubt that this personal emotion is equivalent to what Wilde calls "impression" and the origin of the form of criticism.

the critic as being in his own way as creative as the artist, whose work, indeed, may be merely of value in so far as it gives to the critic a suggestion for some new mood of thought and feeling which he can realize with equal, or perhaps greater, distinction of form, and, through the use of a fresh medium of expression, make differently beautiful and more perfect. (388)

Here, we notice, Wilde's art for art's sake changed into art for criticism's sake. All artistic work is only for the sake of criticism. The critic merely uses the work in order to seize an opportunity to create criticism. The importance of criticism in literature is the most prominent distinction of modernity.

## Conclusion

In the modern period, criticism is not artistic. When we read today's criticism, we have an impression that criticism is only for the sake of criticism. In fact, criticism only reproduces itself. It appears as if the critic forgot the existence of art and the works of literature. Wilde focused on the impression in criticism. It is criticism based on the impression that can directly represent the pure thought of the critic. Wilde, indeed, wrote a lot of great works. I think Wilde could create artistic criticism because he was artist. Today's society has advanced in the subdivision of the academic field and the bipolarization between the artist and the critic. We cannot have a great artist like Wilde, Eliot and Pound, in the sense that they were critics as well as artists. If Wilde had modernity, we may not have modernity, because modernity is confusion, and the challenge to aufheben (a term of Hegel's dialectic which means making conflict and unifying positively) within each subdivided field. In contrast, in our time, a lot of subdivided fields are being reproduced, and it is difficult to form a new field. We may not be able to gain Wilde's symbolic modernity now, or rather, modernity is lost from the modern people, because this world comes into collapse, which causes confusion.

The Modern epoch is the era of the form of language. On

the other hand, force is the form of pre-modern times. This century, for example, is completely the period of English; the countries that have high command of this international language gain a great advantage of diplomacy. The sword of the international problems formally changed from force to languages. To attach the importance of languages in racial self-determination is reflected in the serious international situation. If this movement heightens, it advances confusion of languages. This world, moreover, is exposed to danger that the nuclear weapons exterminate human beings from the end of the earth in an instant. Therefore, countries do not cross swords until they discuss everything, and the appearance of this diplomatic rule is formed since imperialism in the nineteenth century. Judging from the above, the modern time clearly has the importance of languages.

Here, we notice, if diplomacy is biggest daily fight by a person, the importance of languages also is a serious problem in a society. The essence of literature and criticism is language. Surely, literature, for example, is powerless to avoid an extermination by a huge nuclear bomb. If critics could present the significance of Armageddon, it would be meaningless after human beings have become extinct.

However, to put it the other way around, only literature can avoid the terrible historical events, because

it is a general prevention for extreme situations, as well as educational effects. The effect is reflected in this world through the public cultivation of their artistic and literary faculties. Furthermore, only critics can distinctly seize the essence of this world and predict the future to the public. What is criticism? It is the highest form of our creation, which contains the possibility to releases the people from all their mistakes. Critics might be the messengers from the millennium. If we regard heaven as the largest fiction which people have created, critics might be the angels, because we can live only through form and fiction. When the society is confused, our mentality also is at the mercy of the stormy world. The public thus cannot understand the situation in which they have been placed. The critic is the very person who is able to forecast the essence of this heavy storm unprecedented in history.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ken'ichi Yoshida, Eikokuno kindaibungaku. [Modern Literature in England] (1964; Tokyo: Iwanamisyoten, 1998), 86.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde, ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969) 340-408. Hereafter the paginations to this text will be given parenthetically in my thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Masaru Yamada, Oscar Wilde no Syougai: Aitobi no Jyunkyousya [The life of Oscar Wilde: A Martyr of Love and Beauty] (Tokyo: NHK Books, 1999) 100-102.

<sup>4</sup> Yamada 102.

<sup>5</sup> Yamada 102.

<sup>6</sup> Yamada 60.

<sup>7</sup> Michael S. Fordy, The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 106.

<sup>8</sup> T. S. Eliot, Tradition and the Individual Talent, Ed. and trans. with notes, Shoichiro Yasuda, 7th ed. (1978, Tokyo: Kenkyusya) 7.

<sup>9</sup> Takeshi Yoro, Nihonjin no Shintaikan no Rekishi. [History of Japanese Physical View] (Kyoto: Houzoukan, 1996) 121-141.

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