

A Study of Oscar Wilde and Adaptations of His Works

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to open new perspectives on Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) through a multifaceted analysis of Wilde's works and adaptations of his works. This thesis consists of two parts: Part 1 is comprised of ten chapters and Part 2 of seven chapters. Part 1 examines Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), several preceding short stories such as those in *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* (1891), and Wilde's significant dramatic works, namely, *Salomé* (1896) and all of his four comedies: *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). It includes several comparative studies of different genres of Wilde's works and reveals intertextual connections.

Chapters 1 to 3 analyse various theatrical elements in Wilde's works of fiction, which play a pivotal role in many of his works preceding the successful comedies, particularly in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and in all the four stories comprising *Lord Arthur Savile's Crimes and Other Stories*: "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime: A Study of Duty"; "The Canterville Ghost: A Hylo-Idealistic Romance"; "The Sphinx without a Secret: An Etching"; and "The Model Millionaire: A Note of Admiration".

Chapters 4 to 9 scrutinise Wilde's significant dramatic works such as *Salomé* and his four society comedies, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Three of these chapters, namely, Chapter 4, Chapter 6, and Chapter 10, include comparative studies between Wilde's plays and some of the preceding works of fiction. Chapter 5 is devoted solely to *Salomé*, and Chapter 7, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9 to the comedies. The final

chapter of Part 1 deals with all these dramatic works and relates their analyses to the earlier discussion of theatricality in the works of fiction. It analyses diverse kinds of theatrical and metatheatrical devices and their background in a range of Wilde's works, treating such elements as vital components in connecting different types of his texts.

Part 2 explores a range of adaptations of Wilde's works in Japan and in the West. It gives particular attention to the early Japanese reception of Wilde in the Meiji and Taisho eras, when Japan had a unique situation with its Westernisation in various fields including literature and theatre. It also examines the contrast in Japan's reception of Wilde's comedies and tragic works with the Western reception of Wilde.

Chapters 1 to 3 compare Wilde's texts and diverse international adaptations of his works. Chapter 1 explores both how Wilde incorporated elements of performing arts in his works and how his works have been adapted into different genres of arts including films. Chapter 2 analyses a film adaptation of Wilde's third comedy, *An Ideal Husband*, by Oliver Parker and compares it with Wilde's original text in minute detail as a case study of an adaptation of Wilde's work. Chapter 3 traces how Wilde described America and Australia and created American and Australian characters in his works such as *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and "The Canterville Ghost". It then examines how these countries received Wilde and reacted to his scandal after his arrest in 1895, and extends the argument with an analysis of Wilde's text.

Chapters 4 to 7 are devoted mainly to the Japanese reception of Wilde but with comparison to the Western reception. Chapter 4 analyses the earliest reception of Wilde in Japan during the Meiji era, focusing on its less than animated reception of

his comedies. Chapter 5 particularly features Junichiro Tanizaki as one of the most significant Japanese writers who has contributed to the Japanese reception of Wilde and analyses the intertextual connection between texts by Tanizaki and those by Wilde. Chapter 6 compares the earliest Japanese productions of *Salomé* starring the early modern actresses with the contemporary productions of *Salomé* starring a contemporary female impersonator, and analyses the extraordinary preferences for *Salomé* in Japan. Chapter 7 explores how Wilde has been introduced to Japan through diverse paths and how they have developed and expanded nationally and internationally through the contributions of generations of writers, artists, and scholars within and beyond Japan.

This thesis has firstly explored both Wilde's works and adaptations of his works through a textual and intertextual analysis. It has examined Wilde's works beyond genres and revealed multiple intertextual connections between them. It has resulted in the re-evaluation of Wilde's less-estimated works such as his short stories and *A Woman of No Importance*, both by themselves and in their connections with Wilde's major works. This study has also connected the analysis of Wilde's original text with the study of adaptations of his works and achieved a better understanding of both sides. It has examined the transcendence of genres both in Wilde's works and adaptations of his works, and has thus transcended the boundaries between studies of Wilde's original text and those of adaptations of his works. It has also analysed Wilde's own adaptations of his previous works as well as other writers' works based on Wilde's texts, and revealed new interpretations of Wilde through analysing the adaptations not only as works of art in themselves but also as a critical comment on Wilde in forms of arts.

Secondly, this study has revealed multiple characteristics of different

receptions through comparative studies of the reception of Wilde in Japan and in the West. It has presented new outcomes of the research into the Japanese reception of Wilde. It has not only examined what Japan has positively received such as *Salomé*, but also what Japan has not so enthusiastically received such as his comedies. Investigation has been made into the unique situation that Japan had especially at the outset of its modern Westernisation, and also into the cultural differences between Japan and the West in terms of theatre, language and religion. As a result, diverse grounds for such contrastive reception in Japan and in the West have been revealed, bringing new insight into Wilde's original texts as well.

Thirdly, exploring his world from the perspective of theatre in a wider sense of the word has led to enriching our comprehension of the artist as well as of theatre as something essentially connected to life for the playwright. This thesis has grown out of the observation of Wilde as a theatre lover and a performer as well as a playwright. Wilde's theatrical world is multifaceted, comprising not only his plays, but also various references and connections to theatre in his life and art.

This study has thus unveiled a diverse range of essential connections among different works by Wilde as well as between Wilde's original texts and the adaptations of his works: connections through shared language, themes, motifs, characterisation, and so forth. Both Wilde's original text and various adaptations of his works in Japan and in the West have been examined. This thesis has also explored multifarious phases of Wilde's theatrical world from multiple angles, investigating how Wilde was related to theatre in his life and art and how it contributed to his development as a playwright. It has examined a wide range of works from earlier works of fiction through the major dramas to the later *De Profundis* (1905).