

THE THREE PEOPLE IN REFERENCE TO OSCAR WILDE'S FIRST LECTURE TOUR IN AMERICA

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This paper offers a new approach to the study of Oscar Wilde's first lecture tour in America in 1882 with reference to three people: Richard D'Oyly Carte, Charles Guitau, and Emma Speed. Although a large number of studies have been made on the tour, little is discussed these three people. Indeed it seems natural that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow should have been mentioned in the context of Wilde's tour in America. Emerson's great influence on Wilde is widely known, and Wilde's meetings with Whitman and Longfellow were one of the most striking events during the tour. I think, however, the former three people also brought about Wilde's drastic change both in his manners and in his appearance. Hardly have the former people been mentioned in the study of Wilde, for they are not so famous as the latter three.

As for his change, Lady Wilde, his mother, wrote of it in the letter to her son, which says, "How changed you will be." Ellmann(1987) added the adverbial phrase, "in some trepidation," to the citation.¹ His experience of the lecture tours made him change drastically and caused her to tremble. When he came back to London, he was said to have learned a good deal about playing up to audiences. His change came to shadow the rest of his life, which was tragic in the end. This change will be discussed in detail in the latter part of this paper.

It is without Richard D'Oyly Carte that Wilde would have had no chance to visit America. Charles Guitau, the murderer, impressed Wilde so intensely that Wilde began to make use of such criminals in his works. Furthermore, it is Emma Speed who made him interested in the poet, Keats, much more than before. Therefore, it is natural that the three people should be regarded as more important factors than ever before in Wilde's tours to America.

Richard D'Oyly Carte was born on May 3, 1844 on Greek Street, Soho. His father, Richard Carte, a famous flutist, was a partner in the firm of Rudall, Carte & Co., which was one of army musical instrument makers. He entered London University in 1861 and then began to work at his father's office. After leaving his father's firm, he set up as a concert agent in Craig's Court. Archibald Forbes, and Sir Henry Morton Stanley were among his clients. Soon he was absorbed in theatrical management.² In 1875, he was the manager of Selina Dalara, who played 'La Perichole' at the Royalty Theatre. On 25 March 1875 an operetta, "Trial by Jury," was produced by him. The operetta was composed by Arthur Sullivan and written by Sir William Schwenck Gilbert.

Wilde's lecture tour would not be carried out without Richard D'Oyly Carte, the producer of *Patience*. Carte planned to let American people know what kind of people the athletes were before the opening of *Patience* at the Standard Theatre, Broadway, in New York, on 22 September 1882,

when Carte was the proprietor of the Savoy Theatre in London. The original idea of the tour, however, does not seem to be D'Oyly Carte's or W.F. Morse's. According to Morse, it was suggested by Mrs. Frank Leslie, the editor of *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine*.³ She called Wilde to recommend the lecture tour, which Wilde accepted "if offer good."⁴

Although he knew that he was made fun of, he accepted the offer by Carte. His acceptance does not seem to be due only to his financial difficulties. At the same time Wilde was mentally irritated. Frank Miles, Wilde's congenial fellow—tenant, had already been popular, for Miles won the Turner Prize at the Royal Academy in 1880.⁵ On the other hand, Wilde was nobody in those days, when he first published his poems. The university library refused to accept his book. He, therefore, had no alternative but to accept the tour. At first Wilde did not have at least thought that he acted as such an aesthete as in *Patience*.

Patience was first produced at the Opera Comique, London on April 23, 1881.⁶ The operetta was composed by Gilbert and Sullivan, who satirized the contemporary aestheticism. It presents Bunthorne, the "Fleahly Poet," whose model is said to be Wilde. He sent a letter to George Grossmith, the actor of Bunthorne, as follows:

I should like to go to the first night of your new opera at Easter—and would be very much obliged if you would ask the Box Office to reserve a three guinea box for me, if there is one to be had; on hearing from the office I will forward a cheque for it. With Gilbert and Sullivan I am sure we will have something better than the small farce of the Colonel. I am looking forward to being greatly amused.⁷

This letter shows how much Wilde was looking forward to seeing the operetta, in which he was made fun of. It is quite doubtful that he did not have pleasant feelings about *Patience*, but rather he seemed to amuse himself by seeing it.

Gilbert was said to make two characters different; Reginald Bunthorne is fleshly and Archibald Grosvenor spiritual. Wilde was the model for both characters.⁸ Grossmith played Bunthorne as Whistler, for he had black curls interrupted by a white lock of hair, a moustache, a tuft, an eyeglass, with the famous Whistler 'Ha Ha.' Dante G. Rossetti's ethereality, Algernon Charles Swinburne's sensuality, and Ruskin's gothicizing were said to be amalgamated, in one aesthete or the other. It is, however, clear that both Bunthorne and Grosvenor have aspects that come unmistakably from Wilde as the most articulate standard—bearer of aestheticism at the time.⁹ Besides, it is easy to find that the flower of lily is associated with Ruskin's *Sesami and Lilies*.

Reginald Bunthorne is a fleshly poet, who falls in love with *Patience*, a dairymaid. Bunthorne is adored by a lot of girls around him, for his style is quite refined and smart. *Patience* has, however, loved Archibald Grosvenor ever since he was a boy. Though she does not love Bunthorne, she decides to accept Bunthorne's proposal for her belief that true love must be "utter unselfishness." After the other maidens hear of Bunthorne's marriage, they are disappointed. When they see Grosvenor aesthetic, they transfer their affections to him. As Grosvenor is changed and adored by the maidens, Bunthorne feels jealous of his charm and threatens to curse him unless Grosvenor consents to cut his hair and become more commonplace. She breaks her engagement to Bunthorne, for she finds that Grosvenor becomes a common young man, and that Bunthorne looks

happy. Finally Patience gets married to Grosvenor, and Bunthorne is left only with a lily.

The warp of the story is Bunthorne's love for Patience, and the woof of that is a satire on the aesthetes who were quite popular in those days. The point in controversy is that Bunthorne, who loves artificial beauty, falls in love with Patience, who looks like only a simple countrywoman. The reason he loves her is that she first ignores him, though the other maidens adore him. Besides, Patience looks beautiful like a lily. Bunthorne reveals his secret to her, saying, "Patience, you don't like poetry—well, between you and me, I don't like poetry. It's hollow, unsubstantial—unsatisfactory." He is a poet. The audience seem to smile when they hear his speech. His affectation, shallowness, and ignorance are regarded as a target for biting criticism. When he confides in her, saying, "If you like, I will cut my hair," the model for Bunthorne is considered Wilde. After Bunthorne is rejected by Patience with great sorrow and desolation, people around him sing as follows:

He will have to be contented
 With a tulip or li—ly !
 In that case unprecedented,
 Single he/I must live and die—
 He will/I shall have to be contented
 With a tulip or li—ly !
 Greatly pleased with one another,
 To get married we/they decide.
 Each of us/them will wed the other,
 Nobody be Bunthorne's Bride !¹⁰

The comical ending of the story is in fact regarded as all the more hard to Bunthorne because he was brokenhearted. The audience, however, must have made fun of his tragic love. Bunthorne has no alternative but to live only with a tulip or lily. The feminine poet is ridiculed not only by all the people around him, but also by the audience. Wilde realized that he would have been at the risk of his honor if he had accepted the offer of the tour. Therefore, he got ready for the lecture lest he should be made fun of. In his lecture, "The English Renaissance of Art," he spoke in front of the audience, who expected to see a living aesthete, as follows:

It is only through the mystery of creation that one can gain any knowledge of the quality of created things. You have listened to *Patience* for a hundred nights and you have heard me for one only. It will make, no doubt, that satire more piquant by knowing something about the subject of it, but you must not judge of aestheticism by the satire of Mr. Gilbert. As little should you judge of the strength and splendour of sun or sea by the dust that dances in the beam, or the bubble that breaks on the wave, as take your critic for any sane test of art. For the artists, like the Greek gods, are revealed only to one another, as Emerson says somewhere; their real value and place time only can show. In this respect also omnipotence is with the ages. The true critic addresses not the artist ever but the public only. His work lies with them. Art can never have any other claim but her own perfection: it is for the

critic to create for art the social aim, too, by teaching the people the spirit in which they are to approach all artistic work, the love they are to give it, the lesson they are to draw from it.¹¹

Wilde clearly declared that what he wanted to appeal was not the same aestheticism as Gilbert made fun of. He talks here as if John Ruskin talked on art and society. From this standpoint, it is clear that Wilde tried to make best use of the chance Carte gave him. He preached his idea on art and beauty, making use of Pater's style. Wilde would not define the beauty as concrete formula, for the beauty is so relative that one cannot define it simply. Describing the beauty of Nature, Wilde discusses the value and the charm of real beauty.

Generally he persuaded the audience to believe in his ideas of beauty, when his witty lecture came to end. There were too many people in America to be persuaded of the beauty by Wilde. The more Wilde stressed the importance of beauty, the more he was made fun of by the audience. Wilde had no alternative but to wear a mask, in case he was seriously criticized by people. The cartoon in the Daily Graphic, New York, January 11, 1882 explains how much they made a fool of Wilde. It is reasonable that he decided to wear the mask of Bunthorne, for the play, *Patience*, is successful. He tried to make use of it as much as possible in order to be famous and popular in America. Indeed he was attacked so hard by the papers. He complained of it to Carte:

I must never be left again, and please do not expose me to the really brutal attacks of the papers. The whole time of feeling is turned by Morse's stupidity. I know you have been ill, and it has not been your doing but we must be very careful for the future.¹²

Wilde, however, had no intention of giving up his own opinion on beauty. As he mentioned Goethe's ideas about art, he explained that there are characteristics of his ideas about beauty. He tried to introduce the beauty into a domestic life. In spite of his declaration that beauty is useless, it does not mean that he did not recognize beauty in a daily life. He says, "Among the many debts which we owe to the supreme aesthetic faculty of Goethe is that he was the first to teach us to define beauty in terms the most concrete possible, to realize it, I mean, always in its special manifestations."¹³

In *The Renaissance*, Pater stresses the importance of recognition when one truly appreciates beauty. He also points out the uselessness to define beauty in the most abstract, for he thinks that beauty is relative.

The other reason Wilde accepted the offer is to produce *Vera, the Nihilist*.¹⁴ Wilde sent a letter to Carte in March 1882, in which he said, "I agree to place it entirely in your hands for production on the terms of my receiving half—profits, and a guarantee of £200 paid down to me on occasion of its production, said £200 to be deducted from my share of subsequent profits if any."¹⁵

Wilde declared that he would cut the prologue in *Vera* shorter if Carte thought it too long, which means that Wilde was ready to accept Carte's ideas about the play and change it as he was pleased. Wilde considered Carte not only as producer, but also as a good adviser.

Carte succeeded in the production of *The Sorcerer* with Gilbert and Sullivan. It was first produced at the Opera Comique, London, on November 17, 1877. The opera is a comical and

happy farce with a full of fun. After the production of the opera, a series of comical operas like this began to be produced one after another. Carte built the Savoy Theatre on the Thames Embankment, and the continuing productions of the comical operas were called The Savoy Operas.

There are, *H.M.S. Pinafore or the Lass that Loved a Sailor* (1878), *The Pirate of Penzance or The Slave of Duty* (1880) among them. In *Pinafore* the secret of Ralph's birth is the key to developing the story. When they were told that Ralph was quite noble in birth, Ralph was allowed to get married to Josephine, the captain's daughter, at last. Besides, in *Penzance* there was a misunderstanding that the Pirates were orphans, which was disclosed at the last scene. The two operas look like each other, especially in the disclosure of the hero's identity. This reminds us of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*, whose story is also developed by means of Ernest's identity. A series of these light operas produced by Carte seem to have an influence on Wilde's plays in the 1890s. Wilde succeeded in the production of the farcical comedies such as *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

Carte produced the operas which had great influence on Wilde's later comedies. Carte gave Wilde a big chance to be famous in the world, at the same time he let Wilde know the effective usage of identity. Wilde came to know how to wear his mask mentally in the lecture tour, though he was said to realize his identity as an Irishman with a warm welcome from people who were familiar with the verses of Speranza, his mother.

The next person who seemed to have an influence on Wilde in this tour is considered Charles Guiteau, who shot President James A. Garfield once in the arm and once in the back in a train station next to Capitol Hill on July 2, 1881. At that time, Garfield was going to depart for a vacation from Baltimore and Potomac Station. After he was shot, he was said to have languished through medical foibles for three months until he died. Guiteau was immediately arrested and remanded to jail. He first stood trial for murder on November 14, 1881. The neurologists pleaded his insanity, but they were rejected. Finally Guiteau was hanged at the District of Columbia jail on June 30, 1882. The case was so shocking that there were a lot of news reports about it in papers. Among them, there seemed to be such a song like this.

My sister came in prison
 To bid her last farewell.
 She threw her arms around me;
 She wept most bitterly.
 She said, "My loving brother,
 Today you must die
 For the murder of James A. Garfield
 Upon the scaffold high."

And now I mount the scaffold
 To bid you all adieu,
 The hangman now is waiting,
 It's a quarter after two.
 The black cap is o'er my face,

No longer can I see,
 But when I'm dead and buried,
 Dear Lord, remember me.

This song brings about deep sympathy for the murderer. It is quite unclear that Wilde heard of this song. It is, however, possible to read the articles which caused sympathy for his tragic destiny. We can easily trace in Wilde's later works the same intentions.

The case led Wilde to set about such works as *Pen, Pencil and Poison* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. In *Pen, Pencil and Poison* he maintained the reasoning of the murderer from the viewpoint of aestheticism. Wilde admired Wainwright for his aesthetic crime. Wilde began to sympathize with Giteau, whose name can easily remind us of Guido, the name of the hero in *The Duchess of Padua*, for they sound alike. In *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde describes the misery and grief of the man who committed the fatal crime. It is indeed that the original idea of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* hit on Wilde when he was in the dock, 1895, but it is quite impossible to declare that there was no relation between that case and his works.¹⁶

The third person who we have to mention when discussing Wilde's tour is Emma Speed, who happened to go listening to Wilde's lecture on English Renaissance in the Masonic Temple, Louisville, Kentucky, on February 21, 1882. He happened to deliver a speech on John Keats.

After that, she invited Wilde home and showed him Keats's letters and manuscripts, for she was the daughter of George Keats, the poet's younger brother. It was said that she sent him the manuscript of Keats's "Sonnet on Blue." He showed her gratitude in the letter as follows:

What you have given me is more golden than gold, more precious than any treasure this great country could yield me, though the land be a network of railways, and each city a harbour for the galleys of the world.¹⁷

This letter tells how grateful to Mrs. Speed he was for Keats's manuscript. It is true that he regarded it as more golden than gold. In 1886, he contributed a review, "Keat's Sonnet on Blue" to the *Century Hobby Horse* for July 1886. Comparing the two versions, one given by Mrs. Speed, the other published by Lord Houghton, he tried to make clear Keats's original idea of the poem.

His analysis was done so intensively that even a comma might not be ignored. After his close examination, he pointed out the improvement and characteristics of Keats's method. Wilde criticized Lord Houghton's collections in some places, only to mar the fine personification of Hesperus.¹⁸ The poem begins as follows:

Blue! 'Tis the life of heaven, —the domain
 Of Cynthia, —the wide palace of the sun, —
 The tent of Hesperus and all his train, —
 The bosomer clouds, gold, grey and dun.

His deep interest in this poem had never been lost until *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* was finished. Wilde repeats the phrase of "tent of blue" six times in the same poem as follows:

I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by.¹⁹

This mere fact that he repeated "tent of blue" six times shows how much Wilde was impressed by the phrase of the "tent of blue." The reason Wilde makes use of the colour blue might be that the "blue" has a special meaning to him. It is possible to say that the "blue" symbolizes liberty, with which the wide and clear sky is easily associated. Liberty is all the prisoners want, when they look up at the sky in a gaol. Under the blue sky everything evil, such as murder, is clearly revealed. Wilde makes the best use of the contrast of colours, for he never forgets the effective use of red colour.

Wilde makes use of the colour red in a sharp contrast to the colour blue. The blood and crime are symbolized by the colour red. In *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, he repeated the red colour as well as blue. The cruelty and brutality are symbolized by the colour red. He, however, did not stress the importance of the colour red. He seems to regard the colour red as the means by which he stresses the splendid colour blue. This is the reason that the colour blue means to Wilde the unforgettable thing, which reminds him of liberty and the holy poet Keats in 1882.

As a consequence of this paper, it has been proved that the three people, who are seldom mentioned when discussing Wilde's first American tour, are quite serious and important when researching Wilde's later works. Richard D'Oyly Carte opens Wilde's mind to give him a chance to write a comedy. Carte gave him the first chance, so that Wilde changed his mind and forgot the adherence to the tragedy. Wilde started to recognize the importance of making a comedy. Carte also gave him a chance to know the importance of a mask. During the tour he was forced to wear something remarkable and strange to the American people. He knew how to be famous as well as notorious in the tour. Finally, he learned how to behave as a Bunthorne.

Charles Guiteau's character also had a great influence on Wilde, who was quite interested in crime and murder. A variety of the rumors and topics about him appeared in the papers in those days when Wilde visited America. The articles made him interested in crime. He set to write *The Canterville Ghost* and *Pen, Pencil and Poison*. Those works are the satires on the pragmatism American people were thought to have. He accused them of having no poetic mind.

Emma Speed's manuscript also helped Wilde recognize the appreciation of Keats's poems. Especially when comparing with the former version word by word, Wilde paid deep attention to the manuscript he had just got. Under this comparative study, he appreciated the importance of the colour blue. His deep concern of the blue is shown even in his last poem, "*The Ballad of Reading Gaol*." It is six times that the word is repeated in the poem. This means that Wilde had great interest in it. The colour blue seems to have a special meaning to Wilde, for it reminds Wilde of liberty and also of Keats's poetic mind, which is serene and poisonous.

Wilde's first lecture tour in America started in Chickering Hall, New York on January 9, 1882

and ended in Opera House, Maine on October 3, 1882. He continued to travel and lecture in Canada after leaving America. It was on December 27 that he left the continent. Nevertheless, his tour was never brought to an end, partly because the experience of the tour was still alive in his mind ever after, and partly because it played a vital role in writing his works until the last poem was finished. In other words, his experiences in this tour were so impressive that he could not forget them for life. In the tour he started to learn that what the audience expected of him was totally different from what he wanted to tell them. Deeply as he realized it, he forgot that there was such a danger as he might lose his own identity. His mental division was caused by his loss of identity. Finally, it is possible to say that his divided self caused a criticism on his pluralism, which is to form the core of Oscar Wilde's whole works.²⁰

NOTES

- 1 Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p.200.
- 2 Lloyd Lewis and Henry Justin Smith, *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* (New York : Benjamin Blom, 1967), p. 4 .
- 3 Ed. Karl Beckson, *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia* (New York : AMS Press, 1998), p.188.
- 4 Oscar Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Robert Ross, vol.14 (London : Routledge / Thoemmes Press, 1993), p.76.
- 5 Ellmann, p.105.
- 6 *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*, p. 7 .
- 7 Ellmann, p.129.
- 8 *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia*, p. 3 .
- 9 Ellmann, p.130.
- 10 *Patience*, Act II, Finale.
- 11 "The English Renaissance of Art" in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol.14, pp.262-3.
- 12 Rupert Hart-Davis, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London : Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., 1962), p.89.
- 13 "The English Renaissance of Art" p.243.
- 14 *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*, p.25.
- 15 *The Letters*, p.103.
- 16 *Ellmann*, p.448.
- 17 *The Letters*, p.108.
- 18 "Keat's Sonnet on Blue" in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 14, p.76.
- 19 Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed.J.B.Foreman, (London and Glasgow : Collins, 1990), p.843.
- 20 Michael Patrick Gillespie, *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity* (Florida : University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 1 -15.

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