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## **Lost Body: The Case of the Missing Christ Child in Nishimoto's Adaptation of *The Selfish Giant***

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### **Abstract**

In 1989, Tokyo-based publisher *Chairudo Honsha* issued *The Selfish Giant* [Wagamamana Kyojin], by Oscar Wilde as the twelfth installment of their illustrated *Children's World Masterpieces* series. It was translated into the Japanese by Nishimoto Keisuke, a well-known translator and children's author in his own right, who retold the Christian-themed fairy tale in a novel way: without the figure of Christ. The central conceit of Wilde's original story involves the revelation of the Christ Child through the appearance of the Stigmata on a young child's hands. However, in Nishimoto's translation *Wagamamana Kyojin*, this symbolism is absent, with the figure of Christ supplanted by that of an 'angelic boy'. The aim of this paper is to examine Nishimoto's use of omission within the context of other illustrated Japanese translations of the story, and to discuss the varied cultural, functional and ethical specificities that may have informed this choice of translation strategy.

### **Introduction**

In 1888, Oscar Wilde, having established himself as a journalist and editor for the women's magazine *The Woman's World*, emerged as a writer of fairy tales and parables with the publication of his collection *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*. The stories found within this collection reflect a clear Christian sentiment and sensibility (Umetsu 2), with one in particular – *The Selfish Giant* – exploiting the potent Christian symbolism of the Stigmata at the very crux of its narrative framework. This story and its translation into Japanese by Nishimoto Keisuke (Japanese name order preserved) will be the focus of this essay, with the arguments put forth here stemming from two relative but fundamental assumptions made in connection with the source text, namely: (1) The revelation of the Christ Child by the Stigmata is the central conceit of the story, and as such is of significant importance, and (2) The displacement of the figure of Christ by a proxy agent represents a 'watering down' of the Christian element.

Nishimoto's translation of Wilde's tale, entitled *Wagamamana Kyojin*, first appeared in 1989 for the *Children's World Masterpieces* (my translation) imprint of Chairudo Honsha Ltd. (currently Chairudo Bukku Ltd), and is noteworthy precisely because the figure of Christ is displaced – in this case, by the more generic and easily recognizable symbolism of an angel:

ST: And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, 'Who hath dared to wound thee?' For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet. 'Who hath dared to wound thee?' cried the Giant; 'tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him.' 'Nay!' answered the child; 'but these are the wounds of Love' (Wilde, "Complete Short Fiction" 22).

TT: きよじんは おとこのこを だきしめようと して、おもわず てを とめました。おとこのこは まるで てんしのような きよらかな す がたを していたのです (Nishimoto 34). [The giant went to embrace the child, but suddenly his hands stopped still. The boy had completely taken on the appearance of an angel; pure and chaste] (my translation).

Just as Wilde's source text was first published with a frontispiece by Walter Crane, so too is the source text illustrated, but with numerous pictures by Fukuhara Yukio. While the two styles differ considerably, they both appear 'gentle' and aimed at an audience of children.



Fig. 1 (Left). Walter Crane. *The Selfish Giant*. 1888. In *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. By Oscar Wilde. London: David Nutt. 1st ed. Plate 2.

Fig. 2 (Right). Fukuhara Yukio. *Untitled illustration*. 1989. In *Wagamamana kyojin* [The Selfish Giant]. By Oscar Wilde (Trans. Keisuke Nishimoto). Tokyo: Chairudo Honsha. 1989. P. 37

The publisher, in response to my inquiry (see Appendix), states that the target demographic of the target text is 4 to 5 year-old children, and as such, certain concessions have been made. Although it is evidently a retelling and a retranslation, the syntax, expression and overall length are comparable to the original. There are, however, a number of minor omissions; for instance, there is no mention of the Cornish ogre in Nishimoto's rendition, nor has Nishimoto rendered many of Wilde's anthropomorphisms. These considerations aside, the purpose of this paper is to examine Nishimoto's omission of Christ, as a departure from other illustrated Japanese translations of the story,<sup>1</sup> and to discuss the varied cultural, functional and ethical factors that may have informed this choice of translation strategy.

<sup>1</sup> Wilde, Oscar. *Koufuku no ouji* [The Happy Prince and other Tales] (Trans. Kouji Nishimura). Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1968.

Wilde, Oscar. *Wagamamana ootoko* [The Selfish Giant]. (Trans. Tarou Kitamura). Tokyo: Fuzanbou, 1987.

Wilde, Oscar. *Koufuku no ouji/Wagamamana kyojin* [The Happy Prince/The Selfish Giant]. (Trans. Tomoko Nakayama). Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1998.

Wilde, Oscar. *Wagamamana kyojin* [The Selfish Giant]. (Trans. Hiroshi Yuki). 2000.

<http://www.hyuki.com/trans/selfish.html>.

## History

Oscar Wilde had a long and difficult personal relationship with Christianity, which eventually saw him convert to Catholicism on his deathbed (Quintus). The importance of this relationship should not be understated, especially with regard to the way in which Christian themes inform the stories in *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (Umetsu 2). While his relationship was never strictly orthodox – Quintus (1) suggests that “instead of rejecting Christianity, Wilde modified it to suit his own needs” – a number of researchers have made a point of mentioning his life-long fascination with the religion, and particularly the figure of Christ (Umetsu 7).

This certainly seems apparent in *The Selfish Giant*, but it also appears odd that Wilde should depict the complex and violent religious symbolism of the Stigmata in a children’s story, unless, of course, the story was not aimed at children in the first place. While fairy tales from the nineteenth century were commonly violent (in contrast to the children’s stories written today), Wilde’s inclusion of the Stigmata was likely a unique case in Victorian children’s literature. Upon the release of *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*, Alexander Ross (brother of Wilde’s literary executor, Robert Ross) observed in the *Saturday Review* (Beckson 57) that “Mr Oscar Wilde, no doubt for excellent reasons, has chosen to present his fables in the form of fairy tales to a public which, though it should count among its numbers most persons who can appreciate delicate humour and an artistic literary manner, will assuredly not be composed of children.” In fact, in response to a review of the later *The House of Pomegranates*, Wilde stated indirectly that he was scant interested in pleasing the British child (Kaylor 360). In 1989, Tokyo-based publisher *Chairudo Honsha* issued the twelfth installment of its illustrated *Children’s World Masterpieces* series, *The Selfish Giant/Wagamamana Kyojin* by Oscar Wilde. With regard to the source text, we can safely assume from the above comments that Wilde’s intended audience was composed of adults. But this was not uncommon at the time Wilde was writing, as Wall explains in *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction*. Wall states that this phenomenon, whereby the author writes mainly for the adult ‘listening in’, was the “prevailing mode used by writers (of children’s literature) in the Victorian era” (9). As for the target text, *Chairudo Bukku Ltd* clearly states that the book was aimed at 4 to 5-year-old children, but upon inquiry as to whether they believed the Stigmata was too violent an image for children, they replied:

*Depending on the manner in which it is drawn, we don’t necessarily feel that it’s violent, but for children with no knowledge of Christianity, we don’t think they’ll understand what it is (for this book’s target age group of 4-5-year-old children we felt that this would be the case.) This book being a picture book, we intended it from the beginning to be an abridged translation, leaving out anything we thought young children would have difficulty understanding (see Appendix).*

Bearing this in mind, Nishimoto’s omission of Christ and the Stigmata can perhaps be better understood by discussing the functional characteristics that govern the target text (i.e. what were Nishimoto and the publisher trying to achieve with their translation?). This line of reasoning will be further expanded upon under the section titled ‘Skopos’.

## A Cultural Perspective

Nishimoto may have had good reason to do away with Christ on cultural grounds. According to recent government statistics (Japanese Ministry of Culture 35), people living in Japan who identify as Christian make up only 1.6 percent of the population. While this statistic alone only tells part of the story, it does serve as a general indicator of the level of Christian knowledge an ‘average’ Japanese may possess. In contrast, certain Christian holidays such as Christmas are highly visible events (though not officially recognized) on the Japanese cultural calendar.

However, as Kimura and Belk (1) point out, Christmas in Japan is often secular, lacking in any Christian meaning, and readily aided by foreign multi-nationals such as KFC, Disney, Visa, etc. While Christ remains a very well-known figure in Japan – appearing alongside Buddha in the popular manga series and film *Seinto Oniisan* [Saint Young Men] (Trans: Nakamura Hikaru), for instance – it does not necessarily follow that the historical or Biblical Jesus is known to the same extent. The crucifixion may be well recognized, but in all likelihood the Stigmata are not, outside of Christian private schools and church groups.

This clearly presents a problem for any Japanese translator of Wilde's story. From this perspective, substituting the Christ Child for an 'angelic boy' could surely be expedient, if simply to avoid the problematic Stigmata. Nevertheless, it still seems unlikely that Nishimoto replaced Christ *solely* because he felt the Stigmata placed unreasonable demands on the child reader. A quick look at some other translations (two illustrated and aimed at an audience of children) show that Nishimoto's approach was unusual, with Wilde's central metaphor repeatedly reproduced at a word-for-word level elsewhere:

ST: “‘Nay!’ answered the child; ‘but these are the wounds of Love.’” (Wilde, “Complete Short Fiction” 22)

TTa: 「いけないよ！」その子供は答えました。 「だってこれは愛の傷なんだもの」 (Nishimura 49) [“You mustn’t!”, answered the child. “For these are the wounds of love.”] (my translation) *Target audience: not stated.*

TTb: 「いや、そうではないのだよ。」それは、子どもの声ではない、すきとおった、しづかな声でした。 「そうではなくて、これはみな愛のきずなんのだ。」 (Nakayama 99) [“No, you don’t understand”. The voice was not of a child, but soft and crystal clear. “That’s not it. These are all wounds of love.”] (my translation) *NB: Nakayama’s translation was completed under Nishimoto’s supervision. Target audience: 6 to 12-year-old primary school children.*

TTc: 「いけません！」と男の子はこたえました。 「だって、これは愛のきずなのですから」 (Kitamura 20) [“You mustn’t!”, answered the boy. “For these are the wounds of love.”] (my translation). *Target audience: 6 to 12-year-old primary school children.*

TTd: 「そうではない！」その子は答えました。 「これは愛の傷なのだよ」 (Yuki) [“You don’t understand!”, answered the child. “These are the wounds of love.”] (my translation) *Target audience: not stated.*

There are no extra or intratextual strategic glosses (Franco Aixela 66) to aid understanding in any of the above translations, and it is unlikely that many Japanese children without a certain level of Christian knowledge would understand the complex symbolism, whether pre-school or primary-aged. But while the existence of certain target-culture norms may be a compelling reason for the disappearance of Christ, the publisher suggests it was more of an ethical consideration:

*Our company sells picture books to both kindergartens and nursery Schools. We try as much as possible to avoid putting out texts of a particular religious slant, as the religious nature of these institutions vary, from Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, etc. (see Appendix).*

## **Skopos**

From the late 1970s, a number of translation theorists (including Justa Holz-Mäntäri, Christiane Nord, Katharina Reiss, and Hans J Vermeer) advocated approaching translation as

an action primarily governed by a purpose (Skopos) or function (Vermeer 191). They reasoned that by asking what the text was trying to achieve, for whom it was written and for what purpose the translation serves, translators may shift their focus away from the primacy of the source text and onto the needs of their target audiences. Translators can then make appropriate choices regarding which translation strategies are most suitable for any given audience. This idea is significant when discussing both Nishimoto's rendition and Wilde's source text. As discussed above, Wilde's "ambivalent text" (Shavit 63) appears to have been written almost exclusively for a readership of adults, however it is difficult to define the purpose of his story with any certainty. Some critics (Aoife Bryne, Jarlath Killeen and others) have suggested The Selfish Giant is an allegorical capitalist critique (Bryne 91) – a theme Wilde would later explore in his essay "The Soul of a Man Under Socialism" (23-54) – which seems reasonable given its more overt theme on the virtues of selflessness. To understand the purpose that guided Nishimoto, it is first necessary to identify the agents involved in and around his translation, for translators do not often have complete autonomy and generally must negotiate the terms of the translation within a larger network of agents. Nord (20) argues that the main players involved in the process of translation are the initiator and the translator, with the former specifying the purpose for which the target text will be used. Here, then, the role of initiator is filled by Chairudo Honsha Ltd – a publisher of children's picture books and educational materials (<http://www.childbook.co.jp>) – with the role of translator belonging to Nishimoto. Chairudo Bukku Ltd, upon inquiry, stated that they likely requested from Nishimoto a translation which didn't depict any one particular religion (and as mentioned previously, was intended for an audience of 4 to 5-year-old children):

*I can no longer clearly remember the time the book was produced, but when we first approached Mr Nishimoto to translate the story, we probably asked him to not to produce a specifically religious version (see Appendix).*

Now, in light of the fact the source text was clearly not composed with primarily children in mind (see **History**), and in following a translation commission for a target text specifically intended for children (i.e. easy to understand and divested of any violent elements), Nishimoto's changes seem to perfectly reflect the needs of his particular target text audience – at least in terms of function, and as far as contractual obligations extend. The moral lesson of selflessness in Wilde's story also remains intact – a lesson which is arguably the main purpose of both the source and target texts.

## Ethics

Certainly, many varied ethical values collide and compete to influence the outcome of any translation undertaken. At the very least, the ethics of the translator, both personal and professional, in dialogue with the values and professional practices of a publisher will shape an end translation product. Depending on the training and relevant education of the translator, certain ethics proposed by academics working within the discipline may also hold sway. But this model is limited. There must necessarily be at least as many ethical positions as there are active agents involved in the translation process. Riitta Oittinen (35) considers that "the situation of translation also involves the patronage, which – or who – act outside the literary system, such as powerful individuals (Elizabeth I in Shakespeare's England) or powerful groups of people such as publishers, the media, a political class or party". It would follow that, due to their influence, their ethics would no doubt be better represented. With regard to Nishimoto's translation, we know from the publisher's response (see Appendix) that their particular position concerning religious representation was probably the major factor in his decision to replace the Christ-child, but how did this and other factors reason in to his decision?

Andrew Chesterman, in his essay *Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath* (139) describes four different models of translation ethics that he feels sum up the many and varied ethical perspectives translators currently hold. These are an Ethics of representation, Ethics of service, Ethics of communication, and Norm-based ethics. To each of these he assigns a different ethical value: Truth, loyalty, understanding, and trust, respectively.

*Ethics of representation:* Chesterman (139) suggests that these ethics represent a desire to render a target text as an unmodified, unadulterated version of the source text “without adding, omitting or changing anything” (139). Generally, we can assume that most translators seek to ‘sincerely’ represent a given source to the greatest extent they can under any given constraints, but without comment by Nishimoto we can only refer to the publisher’s position regarding direct representation (see above) in this instance, regardless of what Nishimoto may or may not have felt toward his omission.

*Ethics of service:* Chesterman (140) states that this model is concerned with a translator’s loyalty to his or her client (but also audience). As mentioned under *Skopos* above, Nishimoto had an obligation to fulfill his commission according to his client’s wishes – a translation suitable for a children’s picture book. There is little doubt that his professional ethics were a major influence in the omission, and indeed in all aspects of his translation.

*Ethics of communication:* From the point of view of translation as a communicative act, this model is concerned with profitable communication between the main parties involved: the author, translator and reader. Chesterman invokes “cross cultural understanding” (141), later suggesting that for him, this *understanding* is the highest value that should guide translators (152). While there is little chance a young Japanese child could understand the symbolism of the Stigmata, the figure of an angel would be easily recognized by most Japanese elementary school aged children. This model clearly reflects the publisher’s statement:

*This book being a picture book, we intended it from the beginning to be an abridged translation, leaving out anything we thought young children would have difficulty understanding (see Appendix).*

Here, both translator and publisher presumably held very similar values to those represented in Chesterman’s model, and it is reasonable to suggest that they strongly influenced Nishimoto’s adaptation.

*Norm-based ethics:* These ethics emphasize the role of the reader. Chesterman (141) explains how they reflect expectations of what *translation products* should look like. They may be governed by culture, genre, or other constructs. Although violence (in this case, the wounds on the child’s hands) is common in many fairy tales and parables (Tatar 3), explicit Christian symbolism is definitely not a common feature of Japanese children’s stories. Again, both translator and publisher were no doubt aware of these norms, and quite possibly acted to preserve them.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

To excise the image of Christ from a Christian-themed fairy tale by a writer for whom Christ held a special fascination (Umetsu 7) would surely be considered drastic and imprudent by many writers, readers, translators, and of course Christians. However, Nishimoto’s decision, when “mirrored against the total situation of language, culture and translators as professionals and human beings” (Oittinen 35), starts to appear rather matter-of-fact. The sheer distance between cultures alone necessarily engenders seemingly drastic translation strategies, but given

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that these models are only a summary of the various positions translators may hold, and should not be considered exhaustive, although they are helpful to understand in a general comparison how Nishimoto and the publisher’s own ethical considerations may have come to influence their target text.

the many practical and ethical issues that translators must consider, it comes as no surprise that stories change considerably when they travel across borders. From the historical context, we can see that Wilde's purported capitalist critique was plainly intended for an audience of adults, although the main message of sharing and selflessness is universal and can easily be understood by children. It is because of this universal moral lesson that it will most likely remain a popular choice for translators with younger target audiences in mind, and will perhaps undergo further revisions just as radical as Nishimoto's. Although it may be difficult to describe his effort as a 'faithful representation' or 'true to the original', Nishimoto's translation is sensible and immediately comprehensible for a readership of young Japanese children. It also demonstrates how he, together with the publisher Chairudo Honsha Ltd, considered the gulf between his readership and Wilde's story, and acted accordingly in the interests of clarity. Many forces act on translators, and "every time texts are translated they take on a new language, a new culture, new readers, and a new point of view" (Oittinen 35). This intercultural communication, when successful, creates new common ground and new dialogues between people. This is surely something to be encouraged.

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**Note:** During the writing of this essay I contacted Chairudo Bukku Ltd to ask if they would comment on the translation Nishimoto provided them. I have reproduced their generous reply here. Their answers to the questions I posed were both relevant and insightful, and provide some concrete answers to a number of the questions posed by this essay. The original language of our exchange was Japanese but in the interests of concision, I have decided to attach only my translation of it here as an Appendix. I will also omit my initial inquiry to the company on the same grounds, but as Mr Kawamoto incorporates my questions into his reply this should not be an issue.

### **Appendix: Response from Chairudo Bukku Ltd**

*March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

*(As both the staff responsible for, and in charge of this picture book at the time of production are no longer with us, I can only answer to the extent of what we currently know about the book.)*

- 1) *Why did we replace Christ with an angel?*

*Our company sells picture books to both kindergartens and nursery Schools. We try as much as possible to avoid putting out texts of a particular religious slant, as the religious nature of these institutions vary, from Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, etc. (For Japanese, we believe the term ‘angel’ sounds less specifically religious than the name of ‘Christ’.) Furthermore, in our version of the tale, we used the phrase “taken on the form of an angel” which doesn’t specifically denote an “angel”, just as in the original story Christ is not explicitly mentioned. It was not so much our intention to “replace Christ with an angel” or to “change the story” as it was to depict the little boy who foreshadows Christ, in the form of an angel in a way that Japanese children could understand.*

- 2) *Did we feel the Stigmata was too violent for children? Or too difficult to understand?*

*Depending on the manner in which it is drawn, we don’t necessarily feel that it’s violent, but for children with no knowledge of Christianity, we don’t think they’ll understand what it is (for this book’s target age group of 4–5-year-old children we felt that this would be the case.) This book being a picture book, we intended it from the beginning to be an abridged translation, leaving out anything we thought young children would have difficulty understanding.*

- 3) *How the decision was made to replace Christ with an angel.*

*I can no longer clearly remember the time the book was produced, but when we first approached Mr Nishimoto to translate the story, we probably asked him to not to produce a specifically religious version.*

*Kawamoto Kenji  
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