Europe with *Europe Without Baedeker*
Koichi Nakamura (Kyoto University)

The winter in Paris is just as cold as in Kyoto. I am now at Charles DeGaule Airport, tired from 13-hour flight. The University of Paris VII and Kyoto University have had an exchange program of professors for more than two decades and this year I was granted to spend a month in Paris from February 6, 2006.

Edmund Wilson (1895–1972) made many trips to Europe. The first trip was in 1908 with his parents. In an autobiographical essay "The Author at Sixty" which he wrote in the Old Stone House at Talcottville, upstate of New York, Wilson says, "I see, on the tops of the bookcases, . . . a plaster reproduction of a gargoyle that I bought at Notre Dame at the age of thirteen. . . . But it reassures and rather surprises me to find (it) still with me here, and to know that through all my experiences, different interests, different women, different homes, I can still recognize myself as authentically the same individual who climbed the steep spiral of Notre Dame." The souvenir of Paris reminds the almost bald-headed and sophisticated Wilson of the cute and innocent Wilson nicknamed "bunny" by her mother.

Wilson served in the U.S. Army in France as a private at base hospital and as a sergeant at G.H.Q., Chaumont in 1917–19.

Immediately after the war, he returned home and joined editorial staff of *Vanity Fair*, but again traveled in England, France, and Italy from June through October, 1921. His *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* was published in 1931, where he discussed such European writers as W.B. Yeats, Paul Valery, Marcel Proust and James Joyce.

In 1935 he traveled in the Soviet Union, which promoted finishing *To the Finland Station* and, moreover, developed a life-long interest in Russian literature.

*Europe Without Baedeker, Sketches Among the Ruins of Italy, Greece and England*, published in 1947, was "the result of a trip undertaken for the New
Yorker magazine in the spring and summer of 1945.” In this trip, Wilson had
to go around Europe without Baedeker, a once-most authentic guidebook
which, however, he could no longer rely on among the bombed ruins of
Europe.

In this book Wilson reports on the French novelist André Malraux and
the Italian Ignazio Silone as for a literary topic, and as for another topic,
paying attention to the resemblance between the shape of the island of Crete
in Greece on modern maps and the bulls in ancient frescoes, he writes, “I do
not know what the state of map-making may have been in Minoan days, but
I imagine that it would only have been necessary to ascend the highest
mountain on Crete to get a pretty good idea of its shape.” Vladimir
Nabokov, a meticulous novelist, argues against this in a letter to Wilson,
who patronizes him all his life, “I think you are wrong in your bovine
theory, . . . no summits is high enough to afford a complete view of the
island.” Wilson’s reply to him is “a good idea of its contours could have been
gained by combining a number of views from high spots. In driving along
the north coast at some distance above the sea, you can see the shoreline—
its indentations and promontories—quite clearly.” Wilson is elusive, and the
topic discussed here seems to be trivial. Nevertheless, if I fly to Crete and
have a real view of bull-headed island, I am sure to be able to appreciate the
argument by two prominent American writers and speculate their remarka-
ble mentality, which caused the final catastrophe of their friendship.

Perhaps it is owing to my narrow puritanical sense of conscience that I
have not visited any other place than those in the U.S.A. in order to do
research in the work of Edmund Wilson or any work of American literature.
I visited Red Bank, New Jersey, where Wilson was born, Hill School in
Pottstown, Pennsylvania, which he attended, and the Old Stone House in
Talcottville, New York, where he loved most to live and spent his later
years. After his death, Wilson’s descendants sold the Old Stone House to an
utter stranger. It had been built at the end of the eighteenth century, but still
stood rather faded but still solid when I drove to it for 8 hours from New
York City in summer, 2004. I hesitated to knock the door for a while and
then an old lady appeared from the house. She cried, acquainted with my
purpose, “My God, there have been many American scholars to visit the house, but you are the first Japanese.” But I have never been to Europe to do any research in American literature.

Edmund Wilson, in his lecture “Historical Interpretation of Literature” delivered at Princeton University in 1940, advocates Thaine, the French critic in the middle of the nineteenth century and his method of (not “New-”) historical interpretation. Thaine in the Introduction of his History of English Literature (1863), “made his famous pronouncement that the works of literature were to be understood as the upshot of three interfusing factors: the moment, the race and the milieu.”

There is no royal way to studying literature or interpreting a literary work. Nevertheless or therefore, I would rather like to admit that Thaine-Wilson’s method is worthy to be considered and practiced as one of the valuable ways.

Thus Wilson’s Europe Without Baedeker, also, should be understood in terms of the three factors. The moment, 1945 and 1963–64 (of New Edition): I must study history in order to regain the past years. The race: I cannot be an American (journalist). The milieu (of the topic), Europe (Paris, Rome, Crete, etc.): I can appreciate it to some extent if I endeavor with my eye and my ear kept open.

This is the reason why I am now in Paris with Europe Without Baedeker, trembling with cold, but excited with great expectations.

Disclosure of Other Jameses:
Translating Henry James’s Autobiography
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Professor Yoko Funasaka (Kyoto Women’s University), Professor Mikako Ichikawa (Osaka City University) and I have spent more than ten years translating Henry James’s Autobiography. In 1994 we published a Japanese translation of A Small Boy and Others (1913), the first volume of James’s autobiographies. To that translation we attached numerous notes