オスカー・ワイルドの初・中期詩における音楽の表象

著者	中村 仁美
雑誌名	環太平洋大学研究紀要
巻	9
ページ	135-145
発行年	2015-03-30
URL	http://doi.org/10.24767/00000443

"The art most nigh to tears and memory": The Representation of Music in Oscar Wilde's Earlier Poems

オスカー・ワイルドの初・中期詩における音楽の表象

次世代教育学部教育経営学科
中村　仁美
NAKAMURA, Hitomi
Department of Educational Administration
Faculty of Education for Future Generations

Keywords： Oscar Wilde, fin de siècle poetry, music and literature

Abstract： Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), an Anglo-Irish author of the nineteenth century, is known to have embraced music both as culture and as an idea. In examining his appreciation of music, musical representations in his earlier poetry should not be overlooked. As observed in this paper, Wilde's appreciation of music as the supreme art form was almost synonymous with writing poetry. The paper explores how the idea and figure of music played a role throughout Wilde's early career, and it unveils the process in which his references to Classical images were replaced by contemporary discourse over the course of time.

Introduction

An increasing amount of attention has been paid to the interaction between Victorian literature and music in recent decades. No critical work of consequence, however, has been written about Oscar Wilde, who is not popularly perceived as an artist with strong connections to music. It is a biographical fact that Wilde was neither a musician nor a music aficionado such as his contemporaries, Arthur Symons and George Bernard Shaw. Nevertheless, Wilde's belief that music is the perfect art form recurs in his writings,[1] and this view undeniably informed the aestheticism of the author who followed the *l'art pour l'art* movement.

This paper deals with how Wilde's appreciation of music occurred and was presented in his earlier poems, which previous studies have mostly missed. It is not irrelevant that the author started and ended his literary career with poetry, which is a sister art to music. Wilde's career as a poet did not fulfil his early promise as an ambitious youth at Oxford, where he received the Newdigate Prize for his *Ravenna* (1878). With the exception of the successful narrative poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), written after his release from prison in 1897, Wilde's poetry remained largely unappreciated until a century after his death. It is, however, highly significant that he reverted to poetry after a long silence as a poet, when he wrote *The Ballad* during the most tragic moments of his life.

A brief introduction to Wilde's earlier career as a poet may be useful at this point. His first phase is marked by the publications of *Ravenna* and *Poems* (1881). Wilde, whose mother Speranza was an Irish nationalist poet, made an auspicious start as an Oxford poet. Although *Poems* sold well at that time, Wilde's earliest poems have not always received good reviews. It is a cliché among critics that Wilde's poetry suffered the suspicion of insincerity and unoriginality. Many critics have argued that his models ranged from canonical writers such as Sir Philip Sidney, John Donne and Lord Byron, to his contemporaries Matthew Arnold and William Morris. While Wilde did not draw upon their texts directly, there appeared a critic's voice which considered Wilde's poems to be "committed — in form, if not in substance — to retrospect rather than innovation"

(Buckley 23). Arthur Ransome, in his 1912 critical study of Wilde, similarly commented that "Wilde, so far from inventing a new poetry, happened to summarize in himself the poetry of his time" (46), though the details must be left for another time.

The publication of *The Sphinx* (1894) can be seen as the second phase, when Wilde as a poet was greatly influenced by the French Decadence Movement. Wilde started the title poem when he was still at Oxford and finished it in Paris in 1883. Intriguingly, it was later published in book form at a time when Wilde was pursuing a career as a well-known journalist and an author of popular fiction. Kaijima discerns in the poem the influence of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé and his "The Afternoon of a Faun (*L'après-midi d'un faune*)" (9-10). Mallarmé, and Claude Achille Debussy who composed a symphonic poem inspired by the piece, are both known to have been acquaintances of Wilde.

Before embarking upon a close reading of these texts, the first chapter aims at uncovering Wilde's notion of a poet. As a youth, Wilde particularly appreciated the role of poet as a word-musician and a supreme artist. As I intend to show in the second chapter, *Poems* is full of musical contrivance for this reason. The chapter then investigates the transition of his characteristic references to music, by an in-depth reading of the poems collected in *Poems* and others written by the late 1880s. Wilde's representation of the Greek past was replaced by an indulgence towards popular contemporary discourses, as evidenced in the chapters that follow.

1. To Be a Poet

First of all, it is worthwhile mentioning that the Victorian era saw a flourishing of theories regarding the origin of music and poetry. Charles Darwin, whose *The Descent of Men* sensationally appeared in public in 1871, claimed that the very origin of music can be traced back to birdsong for courtship. Later, William Pole, a man of many achievements, published *The Theory of Music* in 1879. His view was that music — whatever its definition is — developed from adult speech:

> The earliest forms of music probably arose out of the natural inflections of the voice in speaking. It would be very easy to sustain the sound of the voice on one particular note, and to follow this by another sustained note at a higher or lower pitch. This, however rude, would constitute music. (86)

Herbert Spencer reached a similar conclusion, arguing that "when speech became emotional the sounds produced spanned a greater tonal range and thus came closer to music" (Storr 10-11). It was Spencer who started an examination of the psychological effect which music could engender.

Earlier in the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, himself a music composer as well as a social theorist, had an idea very different from these scientific conclusions. In Rousseau's theory, music preceded or accompanied human speech. The human practice of music and poetry began simultaneously, which was an understanding still influential in Wilde's time. The following passage is from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages (Essai sur l'origine des langues)*, published in 1781:

> Along with the first voices were formed the first articulations or the first sounds, depending on the kind of passion that dictated the one or the other. Anger wrests menacing cries which the tongue and the palate articulate; but the voice of tenderness is gentler, it is the glottis that modifies it, and this voice becomes a sound. Only its accents are more or less frequent, its inflections more or less acute depending on the feeling that is joined to them. Thus cadence and sounds arise along with syllables, passion makes all the vocal organs speak, and adorns the voice with all their brilliance; thus verses, songs, and speech have a common origin. (317-318)

As we all know, music and poetry could never be separated in Greek culture. In ancient Greece, a poet used to be identified as a musician, and vice versa. It was customary for poets such as Homer to recite their tales while playing a lyre or other musical instrument. Wilde, born and raised by scientific yet literary parents, visited the Pierian Spring as a student. The speaker of the poem titled "The Garden of Eros," addressing himself as "the last Endymion" (227), questions the scientific era (229-234).[2]

In fact, Wilde's talent as a poet was nurtured through his vast and passionate reading of Greek literature and language, which he found more musical than Latin. Quoting Part One of "The Critic as Artist" (1890), Wright mentions the writer's liking of the language for its melodic nature:

> From an early age Wilde displayed a preference for Greek language and literature over Latin. This may have been due to the light and melodic nature of Greek, compared to the heavier, more precise, Latin language. Wilde . . . described the idiom of the most famous of all ancient Greek poets as a species of word-music, characterising Homer as "a true singer," who builds "his song out of music." (48)

Hence it was rather natural that Wilde began his literary career with the metric translation of various Greek choruses, as Kohl gives the gist (15).

To be a poet was, for Wilde, to be musical. As he says in a poem titled "Roses and Rue," his heart "will break in music . . . / Poets' hearts break so" (55-56). Under the influence of his mother's view, as Wright adds, Wilde believed that poetry was "essentially a form of word music: instead of attempting to convey a message or trying to represent a 'real' world, verse should offer listeners intense sensual pleasure through its melody" (28).

Certainly, Wilde's artifice as a poet could be seen in his constant attempts to render his poetry musical. In her introduction to Wilde's *Major Works*, Murray succinctly points out that the poet "repeatedly sacrifices accuracy" to make rhymes (627). The following lines in *The Sphinx* exemplify: "And did you mark the Cyprian kiss white Adon on his catafalque? / And did you follow Amenalk, the god of Heliopolis?" (25-26). According to Murray's annotation, Wilde "writes Heliopolis instead of Thebes" to make unusual and trisyllabic rhyme (*Major Works* 627). Wilde perhaps used whatever diction was tactically useful. Working on *The Ballad of Reading Gaol,* he wrote to Robert Ross to ask for an opinion about a part of the manuscript, "Do you think this verse good? I fear it is out of harmony, but wish you were here to talk about it" (*Letters* 635). After finishing it, he wrote to another friend of his that the 225th line in the poem — "We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns" — is a bad rhyme and "perfectly out of tune" (*More Letters* 198-199). These episodes assure us of his deep attachment to rhyming and making sounds in his poems.

In this context, it would be fruitful to remember Wilde's own definition of a poet. As a response to the lecture given by James McNeill Whistler, who maintained that the supreme artist was a painter, Wilde stated:

> But the poet is the supreme artist, for he is the master of colour and of form, and the real musician besides, and is lord over all life and all arts; and so to the poet beyond all others are these mysteries [the secret laws of artistic creation] known; to Edgar Allan Poe and to Baudelaire, not to Benjamin West and Paul Delaroche. ("Mr. Whistler's Ten O'Clock" 66)

Here Wilde declares that a poet stands above all artists with his technical mastery of music, as well as of colour and form. Although the passage was written in 1885, Wilde realised the idea throughout his poetic career, which will be discussed hereafter.

2. Musical Structure in *Poems*

To look at Wilde's musical practice in poetry, this chapter first refers to the structural matter in his earliest poems. After describing the musical contrivance of his *Poems*, it will discuss his actual musical references which underwent some change as years elapsed. The transitional process of his characteristic references to music may be divided into the chapters that follow.

Those who have opened the table of contents in *Poems*, the only compilation of his poems that Wilde was to publish, will have been surprised at how he presented it as a programmatic arrangement. The Oxford edition of his *Complete Poetry* published in 1997 appends Wilde's ordering of contents in *Poems*, published in 1881. As may be seen in one of the headings entitled "The Fourth Movement," it is evident that he was conscious of its symphonic structure, although each poem is in fact grouped in sections of different sizes. Kohl explains this, with the actual titles of the poems included (18).

Besides the ordering, it must be noted that there are a number of poems Wilde was actually inspired by or wrote for music. The list includes "Sonnet: On Hearing the *Dies Irae* Sung in the Sistine Chapel," and "In the Golden Room (*A Harmony*)." The section between two longer poems, "The Burden of Itys" and "Charmides," is entitled as "Wind Flowers" and includes poems of joyous note: "Serenade (*For Music*)," "Endymion (*For Music*)," and "Chanson." Although not collected in *Poems*, there are other titles of the kind such as "From Spring Days to Winter (*For Music*)," "Symphony in Yellow," and "Canzonet."

It appears that Wilde was particularly fond of composing lyric poetry at that time. In a letter sent to Miss Violet Hunt in 1881, Wilde wrote that his favourite poems in *Poems* are "The Burden of Itys" and "The Garden of Eros," saying, "They are most lyrical, and I would sooner have any power or quality of 'song' writing than be the greatest sonnet writer since Petrarch" (*Letters* 79). Repeating "Sing on! sing on!," the speaker of "The Burden of Itys" indeed encourages singing throughout. While not to the same extent as Mallarmé, it is obvious that Wilde's process of creation in poetry often led him to think that it has to serve music in some ways.

Wilde likewise attempted to write poems in various forms which are often associated with rustic or medieval songs. As Ransome remarks, "Ballade and villanelle, rondeau and triolet, the names of these French forms were enough to set the key for a young craftsman's reverie" (35). The poem entitled "Ballade de Marguerite (Normande)" in *Poems* has been regarded as a derivative poem from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "John of Tours (Old French)" (*Complete Poetry* 187). Wilde becomes less pre-Raphaelite in "The Dole of the King's Daughter (Breton)," another ballad written in archaic language. He also wrote "Theocritus: A Villanelle," and "Pan: Double Villanelle" in the French fixed form. As a young cosmopolitan both in reading and in travelling experiences, Wilde adhered to those established forms for both sound's and tradition's sake.

Aside from these attempts in form and structure, Wilde's earlier poetic texts are rife with references to music. His characteristic musical references could be classified into several phases, as is shown in the following discussion. Far from the image of being a playwright of social comedies and an eloquent critic, Wilde first exhibited Classical inspiration in making his poetry. It is, however, worthwhile noting that his treatment of those references underwent changes at a certain point of time.

3. Earlier Attachment to Classical Imageries

In reading Wilde's musical references, it is almost impossible to ignore the Classical preoccupations informing his earliest verse. We know that his attachment to Classics partly drove him to study the course at Trinity College, Dublin. In his earliest poetic texts, there appear monuments and landscapes through which he imagines ancient Greece. The world of the past described in "Amor Intellectualis" occupied the poet's imagination:

> Oft have we trod the vales of Castaly
> And heard sweet notes of sylvan music blown
> From antique reeds to common folk unknown:
> And often launched our bark upon that sea
> Which the nine Muses hold in empery, (1-5)

Wilde's familiarity with ancient Greek culture played a role in his construction of such imagery. In "Humanitad," for instance, we encounter the Pythagorean idea of Music Universalis:

> Strike from their [the stars planetary] several
> tones one octave chord
> Whose cadence being measureless would fly
> Through all the circling spheres, then to its
> Lord
> Return refreshed with its new empery
> And more exultant power . . . . (391-395)

Later in the same poem, similarly, the speaker refers to the time "When soul and body seemed to blend in mystic symphonies" (408). Presumably Wilde had the Pythagorean idea in mind; a human soul is the auditor of the divine music and can awaken the memory in our body. In addition, the climax of "Panthea" develops a beautiful fusion of this Pythagorean idea of music with love. The speaker insists he and his lover be together eternally in the symphony of the universe:

> We shall be notes in that great Symphony
>   Whose cadence circles through the rhythmic spheres,
>   And all the live World's throbbing heart shall be
>   One with our heart, the stealthy creeping years
> Have lost their terrors now, we shall not die,
> The Universe itself shall be our Immortality!
> (175-180)

Likewise, pastoral and Arcadian imageries of music are interspersed frequently in Wilde's earlier poems. Among a number of Greek and Roman mythological references that the poet makes, readers encounter such musical figures as Apollo, Marsyas and Pan. Apollo is the Greek god of music and a kithara player, and both Marsyas and Pan are known for their challenge and defeat in musical contention in various versions of Greek and Roman sources. Apollo and Marsyas are both mentioned in Wilde's "The Burden of Itys" (293-294). In the poem, there also appears the singing of Linus, the son of Apollo and the Muse Calliope (58). Pan, the amorous Greek god who is seldom seen without his pan flute, is given preferential mention. The Pan flute or pan pipe is named for its association of Pan and Syrinx, his beloved nymph who is changed into hollow reeds in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In "Charmides," Wilde's longest work in *Poems*, the speaker passes by Pan (133-138). It is noteworthy that, in Wilde's poems, Pan occupies a higher standing than any other Classical icon playing music. The figure of Orpheus, a legendary musician and poet, is not present in any of his texts. Wilde's later writings reveal that he had more sympathy with Marsyas, who challenged Apollo to a musical competition and was flayed alive for his pains (*Letters* 708, 715).

Likewise, the pastoral musical world is successfully constructed by a variety of birds' singing. In "Magdalen Walks," the poem inspired by Wilde's favourite pathway in Oxford, "The birds are singing for joy of the Spring's glad birth, / Hopping from branch to branch on the rocking trees" (7-8). As a Homeric as well as a late-Romantic symbol that Wilde admired, a nightingale often appears in his poems, acquiring an almost formulaic meaning as the bird of night, of spring, and of mourning. One might recall the painful singing of the self-sacrificing bird in "The Nightingale and the Rose," his fairy tale later published in *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888). Wilde must have heard its singing during his sojourn in Italy and wrote the poem "By the Arno": ". . . in the almond-scented vale / The lonely nightingale is heard" (11-12). In his poem "Charmides," the nightingale is also associated with the idyllic past where Charmides and his lover are to take a rest: "olive-trees make tender the blue sky / On the low hills of Paphos, and the faun / Pipes in the noonday, and the nightingale sings on till dawn" (604-606).

Aside from the nightingale, Wilde's extensive references to birds include heron, pigeon, dove, blackbird, swallow, robin, linnet, brown bird, sparrow, and lark. The presence of the latter five deserves more attention for their characteristic singing. A robin appears in the 89th line of "The Burden of Itys," and a linnet in "Ravenna" (18, 262), "Charmides" (225, 560, 624) and in "Panthea" (135). The linnet also appears in "La Bella Donna Della Mia Mente" with a lark. (5-8)

In "The Burden of Itys," a brown bird sings overhead of the speaker (38-39). There also appears a "jasmine-cradled bird" in the piece, "Who from the leafy stillness of thy throne, / Sang to the wondrous boy" (151-153). Sparrows are singing in "Sonnet: On Hearing the *Dies Irae* Sung in the Sistine Chapel": "A bird at evening flying to its nest / Tells me of One who had no place of rest: / I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing" (6-8). A swallow also twitters in "The Burden of Itys" (43-44) and in several other poems. Thus, Wilde's earliest poems are rife with references to mythological and pastoral figures playing and singing music. All of these effectively come into play to evoke rustic scenes in his poetry.

In spite of its frequent employment of those Classical motifs of music, at some point Wilde's poetry changed its expression, which informed his later poems. In many cases, the poet depicts how those musical icons are construed in this era of modernity. In late-nineteenth century poetry, according to Beckson and Fong, "pastoral was a means of contrasting the glowing Classical past with the sordid industrial present" (59). Although Wilde once wrote, "For well I know they are not dead at all, / The ancient Gods of Grecian poesy" ("The Burden of Itys" 145-146), his lament for their aging or absence in this modern era is discernible in some other poems. Pan has already grown old in "The Garden of Eros" (74), and further, the speaker of "Santa Decca" sketches the world with no God, including the ancient ones, on the day Christ has died:

> The Gods are dead: no longer do we bring
> To grey-eyed Pallas crowns of olive-leaves!
> Demeter's child no more hath tithe of sheaves,
> And in the noon the careless shepherds sing,
> For Pan is dead, and all the wantoning
> By secret glade and devious haunt is o'er:
> Young Hylas seeks the water-springs no more;
> Great Pan is dead, and Mary's Son is King. (1-8)

And yet, Wilde deliberately laments their absence, as may be found in another uncollected poem entitled "Pan: Double Villanelle." The first villanelle begins as the speaker calls upon Pan: "O Goat-foot God of Arcady! / This modern world is grey and old, / And what remains to us of Thee?" (1-3) As the speaker cries, "many an unsung elegy / Sleeps in the reeds our rivers hold" after Pan is gone (16-17). This is followed by the second villanelle, which finishes in the imperative: "blow some Trumpet loud and free, / And give thine oaten pipe away" (35-36). Pan's jolly presence is depicted as being needed to redeem the modern world.

However, as the death of a nightingale is already anticipated in such a line as ". . . if the nightingale should die" ("By the Arno" 24), Wilde ends up admitting the prominence of modernity in later poems in *Poems*. In "My Voice," the seventh poem in the section titled "The Fourth Movement," he repetitively refers to "this restless, hurried, modern world" (1), and "all this crowded life" (9). Then in "Humanitad," an intricate and meditative poem, Wilde manifests himself as a poet living in such difficult times. It is, however, notable that he takes rather a passive attitude to the surroundings, wherein, awaiting the return of his musical inspiration, he says:

> There was a time when any common bird
> Could make me sing in unison, a time
> When all the strings of boyish life were stirred
> To quick response or more melodious rhyme
> By every forest idyll; — do I change?
> Or rather doth some evil thing through thy fair pleasaunce range? (85-90)

These lines clearly anticipate his farewell to conventional poetry and the changing of the poetic mind, which will further be explored in the next chapter.

4. Sympathy with Contemporary Discourses

While admitting the absence of those musical gods, Wilde stooped to other methodologies to incorporate musical representation in his poesy. The poet started to accommodate himself to popular tastes. Some of his poems, written simultaneously with those reminiscent ones discussed above, were inspired by the contemporary discourses of French Impressionism and synaesthesia. This is indicated by the fact that some titles collected in *Poems* contain the word "impression," such as "Impression du Matin," and "Impression: Le Réveillon." There is also a sequence titled "Impressions," the constituent poems of which are respectively titled "Les Silhouettes" and "La Fuite de la Lune." Both of these texts introduce words related to music to evoke an impressionistic image, in such lines as "The dull dead wind is out of tune" ("Les Silhouettes" 2). In "La Fuite de la Lune," the cry of a corncrake creates an atmosphere of eerie desolation: "A corncrake calling to its mate; / The answer from the misty hill." (7-8)

In the same section, "Impression de Voyage" is another poem which is impressively descriptive. *Poems* also has a section itself entitled "Impressions de Theatre." Though uncollected, another sequence titled "Impressions" ("I. Le Jardin" and "II. Le Mer") appeared in the first issue of *Our Continent* in 1882. Ellmann criticizes the sequence as "devoid of any significance beyond itself" (189). Nevertheless, other works influenced by Impressionist techniques in *Poems* cannot be overlooked, for they are placed near the heading of some sections.

Wilde was, furthermore, conscious of the art of Whistler, as Varty stated in her introduction to Wilde's *Collected Poems*. As one of the leading proponents of the *l'art pour l'art*, Whistler is known for his attempt to harmonize painting and music, naming many of his works "nocturnes," "harmonies," or "arrangements." Beckson and Fong pick up Wilde's "Symphony in Yellow" for its exemplification of the poet's search for a synesthetic effect (65). The term synaesthesia usually denotes aesthetic explorations of the parallels between different arts and senses. Wilde was clearly one of the writers informed by this artistic concern.

It should be mentioned that Wilde established a friendly but rivalrous relationship with Whistler over the first of the 1880s. Whistler's "Ten O'Clock" lecture which Wilde attended in 1885 was, according to Ellmann, mostly "devoted to scoffing at Wilde" (256). As is mentioned in Varty, the opening lines of "Impression du Matin" are an apparent echo from Whistler's "Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge" and "Harmony in Grey — Chelsea in Ice," both painted in the early 1870s (xii). "Impression du Matin" can be taken as Wilde's attempt to practice Whistler's method in poetry, where the first three stanzas go as follows:

> The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
> Changed to a Harmony in grey:
> A barge with ochre-coloured hay
> Dropt from the wharf: and chill and cold
>
> The yellow fog came creeping down
> The bridges, till the houses' walls
> Seemed changed to shadows, and St. Paul's
> Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.
>
> Then suddenly arose the clang
> Of waking life; the streets were stirred
> With country waggons: and a bird
> Flew to the glistening roofs and sang. (1-12)

Here the poet delicately captures what one could capture by all senses from a banal picture of the London morning. Later in 1886, Wilde wrote: "As the painters are always pilfering from the poets, why should not the poet annex the domain of the painter and use colour for the expression of his moods and music . . . ?" ("The Poets' Corner, I" 82). Specifically, "Impression du Matin" could be taken as an earlier example of his attempt on the contemporarily popular concept. Once again, readers hear a bird, whose singing on "the glistening roofs" alone makes a dull picture more clear and distinctive. Wilde here succeeds in exploring and delineating translational qualities among picture, sound, and poetry.[3]

5. Decadent Representation of Music

Lastly but most importantly, it is clear in his poetry that Wilde left the Greek pastoral after inhaling a breeze of Decadence in the process of writing new verse. The tone of the music heard from his later poems is evidently changed, particularly in poems published during the second phase of his poetic career. Starting with *The Sphinx*, published in 1894, the representation of music in these works becomes somewhat morbid and ominous, which echoed in his later phrases in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

As is encapsulated in the introduction, *The Sphinx* was begun when Wilde was a student at Oxford and was almost completed in Paris in 1883. As the influence of such precedent Decadents as Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Gautier has previously been described (*Complete Poetry* 199), I would rather cite from a precise comment made by Jackson in his *Eighteen Nineties*. Saying the poem has inherited Baudelairean Decadence except for the difference of the language, the critic depicts *The Sphinx* to be "really a poetic design, an arabesque depending for effect upon hidden rhymes and upon strange fancies, expressing sensations which have hitherto been enshrined in art rather than in life" (100). Indeed, the following lines make a sheer contrast with his earlier poetry enriched with Classical references:

> Your eyes are like fantastic moons that shiver
> in some stagnant lake,
> Your tongue is like a scarlet snake that dances
> to fantastic tunes,
>
> Your pulse makes poisonous melodies, and
> your black throat is like the hole
> Left by some torch or burning coal on
> Saracenic tapestries. (153-156)

Here those melodies heard from the description of the Egyptian Sphinx are "poisonous," reminding us of its intrinsically monstrous nature. Jackson notably criticizes "The Harlot's House" in the same manner as he did for *The Sphinx*, in that the poem "interprets a mood that is so sinister and impish and unusual as to express disease rather than health" (100).

Merlin Holland, in a lecture entitled "Oscar Wilde and Music" made in 2007, has also regarded "The Harlot's House," first published in 1885 as "a turning point in Oscar's use of music."[4] In Wilde's earlier poetry, music is used to work as a metaphor to convey his adoration for the Greek past or, more simply, for the one he loved. His change of taste, however, becomes apparent around the time he composed this poem. "The Harlot's House" consists of 36 lines arranged into twelve stanzas of three lines each, which reminds us of the triple-metre pattern of waltz or saraband, both words actually appearing in the text. Although it is written in light tercets, the tempo they make somewhat enhances an ominous atmosphere in the narrative. The speaker's lover in the poem is allured into "the house of Lust" by hearing music from the house (30). It may be useful to have the relevant parts before us:

> Like strange mechanical grotesques,
> Making fantastic arabesques,
> The shadows raced across the blind.
>
> We watched the ghostly dancers spin
> To sound of horn and violin,
> Like black leaves wheeling in the wind.
>
> Like wire-pulled automatons,
> Slim silhouetted skeletons
> Went sidling through the slow quadrille,
>
> Then took each other by the hand,
> And danced a stately saraband;
> Their laughter echoed thin and shrill. (7-18)

Those ghostly figures, in the speaker's words, look as if "The dead are dancing with the dead" (26). The midnight appearance of the Harlot's house is deliberately echoed in the image of the opium-dens which Dorian visits in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891), a novel written a few years after the poem. On Dorian's way to his destination, the ghastly atmosphere on rough-paved streets is described:

> Most of the windows were dark, but now and then fantastic shadows were silhouetted against some lamp-lit blind. He [Dorian] watched them curiously. They moved like monstrous marionettes, and made gestures like living things. (141)

The passage again reminds us of the line "a horrible Marionette / Came out, and smoked its cigarette" in "The Harlot's House" (22-23). In the poem, Wilde effectively integrates an atmosphere of Decadent debauchery with the curiously mesmeric effect of music to evoke the mood. As Buckley claims, this poem, which moved into "the darker shadows of Decadence," turned out to be Wilde's best Decadent verse (26).

Neither Jackson nor Holland mention "Canzonet" (first published in 1888) and "In the Forest" (1889), the poems still retaining a densely Decadent air. In "Canzonet," published in *Art and Letters*, Wilde again imagines the world without idyllic Gods. Offering to play music in the absence of the Gods, the speaker entices "woodland girls" (7) to come with him:

> What dost thou fear?
> Young Hyacinth is slain,
> Pan is not here,
> And will not come again.
> No hornèd Faun
> Treads down the yellow leas,
> No God at dawn
> Steals through the olive trees. (17-24)

Music here is associated with amorous temptation, and the lines evoke an image of dark woodland where sexual conduct can be performed in secrecy. Although the poem at first glance looks light and gay, mention of the murder of Hyacinth and the absence of Pan who "will not come again" (20) makes us feel anxious.

In "In the Forest," a poem published in the Christmas issue of *Lady's Pictorial*, even the presence of Faun is depicted as beguiling and alluring. The speaker, finding Faun deep in the forest, is lost as to which he or she is to follow, the shadow or the music:

> O Hunter, snare me his [Faun's] shadow!
>   O Nightingale, catch me his strain!
> Else moonstruck with music and madness
>   I track him in vain. (9-12)

The last two lines are related to the argument made in the previous chapter. This characteristic use of music as enticing and deranging, which Wilde discovered in the late 1880s, is clearly a trait of *fin de siècle* literature.

As mapped out so far, Wilde's musical representations up to T*he Sphinx* are inconsistent in the sense that they are largely changed over the course of time. His dissemination of Decadent techniques and elements becomes discernible mostly in the works preceding *Dorian Gray*, which may reveal the significance of reading his poetry in order to analyse other works in the same way. It is feasible to regard this transitional nature of Wilde's musical references as a by-product of his pre-modernist stance. Wilde's earlier poems are a compound of Classical appreciation and his exploration of new aesthetic ideals in poetry.

Wilde was in the United States on his lecture tour in the year after the publication of *Poems*. In a lecture given in New York, he talked to his audience as below, where we see the presentation of his view that the development of any art, including poetry, is merely a matter of "new technical improvements":

> And so it is in poetry also: all this love of curious French metres like the Ballade, the Villanelle, the Rondel; all this increased value laid on elaborate alliterations, and on curious words and refrains . . . is merely the attempt to perfect flute and viol and trumpet through which the spirit of the age and the lips of the poet may blow the music of their many messages. ("The English Renaissance of Art" 253)

Wilde acknowledged the difficulty of being completely modern and innovative in any aesthetic attempts. In poetry, above all, he must have found it all the more difficult on account of his earlier attachment to Classics. Later in 1888, Wilde published a review on some modern poets in *The Woman's World*, where he addressed the matter again:

> We are always apt to think that the voices which sang at the dawn of poetry were simpler, fresher, and more natural than ours, and that the world which the early poets looked at, and through which they walked, had a kind of poetical quality of its own, and could pass, almost without changing into song . . . . 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 . . . . It takes a great artist to be thoroughly modern. ("A Note on Some Modern Poets" 110)[5]

At this point in time, Wilde was writing much less poetry except for a few previously mentioned titles.

Conclusion

This paper examines how the figure of music matters in earlier poems of Oscar Wilde. The subject cannot be dismissed when it comes to discussing the relationship between the writer and music, for the fact remains that both his first and last published works were poetry. As a poet, Wilde did not refer to the contemporary music scene as extensively as he did in his social comedies, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and other creative writings. Nevertheless, poetry held great significance to Wilde for its capacity to be musical in many ways.

As the first section of the chapter has clarified, being a poet was almost synonymous with being musical for Wilde. As if making a claim against contemporary scientific discussions about the origins of music and poetry, Wilde first embarked on his career as an avid worshipper of Greek pastoral, and as a successor of late Romantic poets. The claim that in his earlier poems he even sacrificed referential accuracy to make rhyme is addressed. As is explored through his critical writing, Wilde credited the poet with the role of "the real musician" ("Mr. Whistler's Ten O'Clock" 66).

Accordingly, it is possible to discern diverse attempts to be musical made by Wilde in his earlier poetic career, which was marked by the self-publication of *Poems* in 1881. His aspiration to be musical is indicated through the structure of *Poems* and through a number of the titles included in the work. As the second section of the chapter discusses, however, the appearance of Wilde's musical references in those poems changed over the course of time. In his earliest phase as a poet, one encounters a number of references to the Greek gods (most frequently Pan) in association with their music. Rustic icons such as birdsong are also discernible, which suggests the poet's homage to Classical and Romantic poets that he admired.

However, Wilde gradually came to express the absence or death of those gods in the era of modernity, which we conclude was a sign of his farewell to conventional poetry. His musical reference, thereafter, changed its tone from the time that the poet encountered French Impressionism, the discourse of synaesthesia, and the Decadence movement. "The Harlot's House" and *The Sphinx* can be taken as the most illuminating examples in this vein. Those influences were strong enough to be retained in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which deserves a separate piece of analysis some other time.

Notes

[1] As quoted in the title of this paper, for instance, Wilde is known to have stated that "music is the art most nigh to tears and memory" (*Epigrams* 88). For other citations, see Nakamura, 247–248.

[2] Oscar Wilde, *Complete Poetry*. Ed. Isobel Murray. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. All subsequent citations from Wilde's poems are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

[3] It is pointed out that another influence could be taken from Théophile Gautier's 1852 collection, *Émaux et Camées*. See Murray's introduction to *Complete Poetry*, 198.

[4] See Tiffany Perala, "Oscar Wilde and Music."

[5] Wilde favoured this passage and reused it in "The Critic as Artist." See 1020.

Works Cited

Beckson, Karl and Bobby Fong. "Wilde as Poet." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 57–68.

Buckley, Jerome H. "Echo and Artifice: The Poetry of Oscar Wilde." V*ictorian Poetry* 28. 3/4 (1990): 1–31.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. 1987. London: Penguin, 1988.

Jackson, Holbrook. *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*. 1913. London: Faber and Faber, 2010.

Kaijima, Takashi. "Oscar Wilde no Shi (The Poetry of Oscar Wilde)." *Oscar Wilde no Sekai (The World of Oscar Wilde)*. Tokyo: Kaibunsha, 2013. 1–20.

Kohl, Nobert. *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel*. 1989. Trans. David Henley Wilson. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011.

Murray, Isobel. Introduction. *Oscar Wilde: Complete Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. ix-xvi.

---. Introduction. Oscar *Wilde: The Major Works*. 1989. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. vii-xix.

Nakamura, Hitomi. " 'Some Mad Scarlet Thing by Dvorák': Notes on Oscar Wilde's Engagement with Music." *Ritsumeikan Bungaku* A Special Issue in Honour of Prof. Michiyo Maruyama (2014): 243–258.

Perala, Tiffany. " 'Oscar Wilde and Music': A Lecture by Merlin Holland at the William Andrew Clark Memorial Library, 14th October 2007." *The Oscholars*. Web. 18 Nov. 2014. <http://www.oscholarship.com/To/Archive/Forty-two/And_I/AND%20I.2.htm.>

Pole, William. *The Philosophy of Music*. 6th Ed. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1924.

Ransome, Arthur. *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*. New York: Haskell House, 1912.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Essays on the Origin of Languages. Essays on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music.* Vol. 7 of *Collected Writings of Rousseau.* Trans. and Ed. John T. Scott. New Hampshire: UP of New England, 1998. 289-332.

Storr, Anthony. *Music and the Mind.* New York: Ballantine, 1992.

Varty, Anne, ed. *The Collected Poems of Oscar Wilde.* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2000.

Wilde, Oscar. *Complete Poetry.* Ed. Isobel Murray. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

---. "The Critic as Artist." *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde.* New York: Harper Collins, 1989. 1009-1059.

---. "The English Renaissance of Art." *Miscellanies by Oscar Wilde.* Vol. 10 of *The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde.* Ed. Robert Ross. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969. 241-277.

---. *Epigrams of Oscar Wilde.* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2007.

---. *The Letters of Oscar Wilde.* Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962.

---. *More Letters of Oscar Wilde.* Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis. London: J. Murray, 1985.

---. "Mr. Whistler's Ten O'Clock." *Miscellanies by Oscar Wilde.* Vol. 10 of *The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde.* Ed. Robert Ross. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969. 63-67.

---. "A Note on Some Modern Poets." *The Woman's World.* Ed. Oscar Wilde. Tokyo: Athena, 2007. 108-112.

---. *The Picture of Dorian Gray. The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde.* New York: Harper Collins, 1989. 17-167.

---. "The Poets' Corner, I." 1886. *Reviews by Oscar Wilde. The Pennsylvania State University's Electronic Classics Site.* Web. 5 Nov. 2013. 82-84.

Wright, Thomas. *Built of Books: How Reading Defined the Life of Oscar Wilde.* New York: Holt, 2008.