Oscar Wilde's Intentions in "Poems in Prose"

Takashi Kaijima

Abstract

This paper offers an explanation about Oscar Wilde's "Poems in Prose" and its features in style. The "Poems in Prose" were published in the *Fortnightly Review* of July 1894. They are defined as a new hybrid of prose and poetry, which contains the stylistic features found in poetry as well as prose. The critics of Wilde have ignored these hybrid works as the subject of their criticism on purpose, understanding the difficulty of studying them because of their uniqueness in form. This research will contribute toward realizing the features in "Poems in Prose" through analyses of high frequency words. Besides, the comparisons between the stylistic features of his works and those of the Bible will help disclose Wilde's deliberate intentions of creating a new type of art and comprehend the role of the Bible in Wilde's philosophy of art, for he recreated the Biblical work on behalf of the total ban on performing the Biblical play, *Salomé*.

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1. Introduction

This paper is a challenging approach to Oscar Wilde's "Poems in Prose" (hereinafter referred to as PP), which was published in the *Fortnightly Review* of July 1894. PP[1] may be defined as a new hybrid of prose and poetry, which contains the stylistic features found in both poetry and prose. The idea of combining prose with poetry is not his original one, but is conceivably derived from French impressionists such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé in *fin de siécle*.[2] Indeed, his contemporaries also showed some interest in the Bible and Jesus. In those days several writings about Jesus or Bible caught the attention of the public and came out. Among them, A. Edersheim's *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883) appeared on the bestseller list. It should not be forgotten that Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* was published in 1866. As Stephen Arata mentions, "Wilde's admiration for Renan's work was lifelong, deep, and as far as the word can be made to apply to Wilde, sincere."[3]

Wilde himself also declared that Renan was one of three major influences in his lifetime. His real ambition was not only to be famous but also to be an outstanding poet like Dante or a great prophet writing a kind of the Bible, if you allow me to use his expression, "a great literature." PP was written soon after the presentation of his *Salomé* was forbidden. It was natural that he should have tried to challenge the Bible by means of writing poems. He had, after all, acknowledged the importance of the Bible since his Oxford age.

This paper, however, treats the relationship between PP and the Bible from the viewpoint of the words. In fact, he regarded PP as one of the main literary devices in art, especially in poetry and prose. Therefore, both the texts, that is, PP and the Bible, are examined by analyzing high frequency words in both works.[4]

Before we launch the investigation into the comparison, we turn to Wilde's letter to E.W. Godwin, architect and theatrical designer.

> I was in mourning for my uncle, and lo! he speaketh. *Revised Version.*
> Dear Godwino, I am delighted to know you are nowhere, but could not find you anywhere.
> Thanks for your praise of my article.[5]

This letter shows Wilde thought of him as congenial, in spite of the fact that he was almost twenty years older. At the same time this quotation is quite meaningful especially when he wanted to show deep respect and affection for him. When he was imprisoned in Reading Gaol, he asked his friend, Robert Ross to send him the books he needed.[6] The Bible as well as the classics were on his wish list. It can be considered that both versions of the Bible, the Authorised Version and Revised Version, 1885 are quite influential in Wilde's spiritual growth. A lot of quotations from the Bible in his works as well as letters may support this consideration.

To conduct this analysis of his poems, high frequency words are surveyed in the texts, using the application software, AntConc 3.2.0 m, which is a freeware concordance program for Macintosh OS X, in order to recognize the tendencies and characteristics of Wilde's word usage in PP. This will also show his uniqueness concerning word usage and his intentions behind it. Examining high frequency words gives an easy way to find out inmost subjects. As this paper shows, the roles and significance of the Bible are substantially more influential in the whole career of Wilde as a deep thinker than previously expected.

2. About PP

To our regret, PP has been ignored by critics partly because it was categorized as minor and far inferior to all his other writings, and partly because its content was totally regarded as erratic and prosaic. It is also because it seems difficult to know how to criticize them while it is not hard to know whether they are actually

classified into poem or prose.

Indeed, PP has generally been classified as prose, for they are not written in rhyme. In spite of Wilde's intention that they are poems, critics would not acknowledge what he said. Even in a recent study, *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, they are discussed not in the chapter, "Wilde as poet," but in the chapter, "Wilde's fiction(s)."[7] It shows that Wilde's poems were generally regarded as prose by critics. Though it may not be so important to us whether they call it prose or poem in order to pursue research on his work, it was quite important to Wilde himself whether it was considered as a poem or a prose. As for research on their themes, Stephen Arata refers to Byron, Pater, and Renan in his "Oscar Wilde and Jesus Christ." He points out "the twin signs of sorrow and passion" as major different elements. Though it is regrettable to say that there is no mention of Nassarr's studies in his paper, it might be admitted that Nassarr had an indirect influence on Arata in a sense. When he refers to an early Wilde's poem, he says as follows:

> The point to emphasize about moment, though, is precisely their scarcity in Wilde's oeuvre. Generally speaking, his Jesus is an oddly disembodied figure. Counterintuitive though it may seem, the fact is that Wilde seldom avails himself of the vocabularies of decadence, eroticism, or even of physical beauty when he writes of Christ.[8]

Whether his opinions about Wilde's description of Christ is rational or not, we can say that Wilde did special care about it very much. In this paper I would rather focus on the real words of high frequency he used in his works, which will be found to be quite useful when we try to recognize Wilde's stylistic features and his enigmatic intentions behind the words. Among all his works, PP is one of most suitable for this research, for the work is considered as poetry in which the selection of words has quite an important role. Besides, the poems were written in the period when Wilde used great care the selection of words soon after the production of *Salomé* in French.

Wilde used French in the play, for he cherished not only Gallicism, which was popular in those days, but also the sounds French has. Moreover, he found

musicality there. Through my research it can be helpful to find out the enigma of music Wilde often referred to in his several works. What did he mean by using the word music?

Bobby Fong arranged the poems named PP in chronological order when he compiled Wilde's complete works.[9] It has been generally considered quite hard to place them in such an order that they look like a story. We can, in fact, find no close relationship in them at all, because they are irrelevant on the surface. Therefore, I make use of Fong's order, for it is rational and natural.

3. Discussion on High Frequency Words in Both the Bible and the Poems

As I mentioned, it is clear that we can find some allusions to Biblical matters in the poems we are studying. It comes to be important to compare the words of Wilde's poems with those of the Bible. Therefore, we tentatively use the text files of *Evangelium* in Authorized Version as the text of the Bible as a matter of convenience (hereinafter referred as EV), while the text files of "Poems in Prose (PP)," include six poems as a whole. The six poems are "The House of Judgment"(*HJ*), "The Disciple" (*Disciple*), "The Artist" (*Artist*), "The Doer of Good"(*DG*), "The Master"(*Master*) and "The Teacher of Wisdom" (*TW*). *HJ* and *Disciple* were published earlier than the other three poems.[10]

First of all, I look into the high frequency words in both EV and PP respectively in Table 1, and compare the nouns, the verbs, and the adjectives in the list arranged in high frequency order. The comparison shows not merely the

Table 1

	EV-noun	PP-noun
1	Jesus	God
2	God	man
3	father	knowledge
4	things	Hermit
5	day	Man
6	Lord	hand
7	disciples	robber
8	man	purple
9	heaven	thing
10	house	world
11	hand	image
12	kingdom	house
13	people	life
14	word	bronze
15	child	disciple
16	way	hair
17	Pharisee	sorrow
18	Jew	multitude
19	name	poor
20	city	time

features of the two texts, EV and PP, but also Wilde's intentions of creating PP.

Though the nouns of EV and PP are arranged in frequency order in the list, the pronouns are omitted here, as a matter of convenience. In fact, there are more nouns to associate with God in EV than in PP. In fact, it is natural that the words, such as "disciples," "kingdom," "world," and "life" should be found in EV, but it is strange that the word "name" appears there. The words "world" and "disciples" are common in EV and PP, while in PP there are the words, "hermit," "purple," and "robber." The word "hermit" is strangely never used in EV. Besides, "knowledge," "purple," "pearls," "robber," and "pool" can be described as infrequent in EV. The word "knowledge" is used only three times, "purple" 5 times, "pearls" 3 times, and "robber" 2 times in the whole text of EV. As for "purple," it is mainly used as a noun in PP, while it is as an adjective and noun in EV.

As a matter of fact, proper nouns like John and Peter are found in EV. The words concerning the human body such as "hand" and "hair" appear in PP, which clearly shows Wilde's intentions of aestheticism. Besides, it is important to note that there are more monosyllables in EV than in PP. The words of more than two syllables appear less in EV than in PP. It is often said that the monosyllables should be used in such works as fairy tales and books for everyone. Wilde also was inclined to use monosyllables for this purpose.

As a result, we can say that EV has a moral tendency, while PP contains more human elements. Wilde described Jesus as the one who is "most extreme of individualists" in his letter.[11] His intentions, then, automatically appear in this table. Of course, they were not

Table 2

	EV-verb	PP-verb
1	say	Say
2	come	Give
3	go	Answer
4	behold	Come
5	see	Go
6	know	See
7	send	pass
8	cast	make
9	hear	look
10	give	set
11	let	send
12	take	weep
13	call	talk
14	make	answer
15	speak	follow
16	pass	speak
17	believe	know
18	tell	cry
19	bring	recognise

his original, but rather descended from Mathew Arnold, who thought of the Bible as literature.[12] This secular way of viewpoint supports the bold view that Jesus is human not only divine. In addition, it produces the influential power to persuade people to believe the dogma.

Table 2 shows the frequency verbs in EV and PP. As a matter of convenience, such verbs as "do" and "have" are omitted from the table. Then, it can be said that the higher frequency verbs are comparatively common to both of them, for there are verbs such as "come" and "go" in the top. The verb "say" is also found there. It is characteristic in PP that verbs to express emotions appeared more in the table. Such words as "weep" and "cry" are regarded as words to express sorrow. The fact also reveals Wilde's intentions without doubt, for he maintained repeatedly that sorrow was the most remarkable element in art. Wilde discusses sorrow in his letter as follows.

> I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great Art. What the artist is always looking for is that mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward: in which Form reveals.[13]

Wilde intended that sorrow should be one of the great sentiments which can unite form and content artistically. In other words, it is sorrow that has the most important role in art. Indeed, he used the verbs to express sorrow in high frequency in the poems, in which he tried a new kind of art form. When he criticized a poem in the letter, he praised it for the three wonderful reasons, that is, "romance, music, and sorrow."

In Table 3 are found the high frequency adjectives in both EV and PP. Such adjectives

Table 3

	EV-adj	PP-adj
1	great	young
2	good	great
3	same	perfect
4	certain	evil
5	dead	dead
6	chief	precious
7	spirit	beautiful
8	blind	naked
9	evil	good
10	holy	bitter
11	high	blind

Table 4

	EV	PP
1	and	and
2	the	the
3	of	of
4	he	he
5	him	be
6	that	to
7	unto	have
8	to	a
9	they	I
10	in	him
11	them	that
12	I	in
13	not	god
14	is	his
15	shall	thou
16	a	man
17	said	say
18	for	for
19	his	do
20	ye	you

as numeral and participial adjectives are omitted from the table on purpose. As for EV, "evil," "holy" and "high" are found in the table. It can be said that these words are related to something stoic and ascetical. On the other hand, we can see "young," "perfect," "precious," "beautiful," and "naked" in PP. These words are used to describe something aesthetic and voluptuous, which reveals Wilde's aesthetic intention most clearly. It is no doubt that he was fond of these epithets when describing his ideal characters in his works, for this work was meant to be something new and creative. It is also meaningful to find out some common words between both EV and PP such as "great," "good" and "blind." This analysis of the common adjectives shows that Wilde did not forget creating an allegory like the Bible.

In Table 4 the top 20 high frequency words in EV and PP are shown with no manipulation such as I did previously in Tables 1 or 2. In the first place, the "and" is common to both of them. The word "and" is repeated 5674 times in EV, and besides, we must observe that the "And" used at the beginning of sentence appears 1848 times there. The "And" has quite a high 32.5 percent occurrence ratio, which is a salient characteristic of the style in the Bible.[14] As for PP, the ratio of "And" to "and" is 31 percent, which is considered as the same high ratio as in EV. In a similar way it is the most remarkable feature of PP. The AntConc also shows the high ratio of the combination of "And" with "when" in both EV and PP. Consequently, we can say that Wilde's unique way of using some words in PP is also found in the Bible. In other words, whether he is conscious of it or not, he intended to create a new form by means of imitating the Bible, which

he had recognized as one of the best forms of literature. In addition, it is a common characteristic to both of them that there is nothing but monosyllable words in the table, for they were intended as the propagation of their beliefs. As for another feature, there is no "thou" in the table of EV, but of Wilde's work, though PP was written in the 19th century when "thou" is used less often than "you." Wilde may prefer the word "thou" as poetic language to the word "you."

In conclusion, we can say that PP is created after the model of the Bible, but Wilde also did not forget adding a new essence to it, which can be called aestheticism. In the tables mentioned above, it is noteworthy to find the words concerning beauty. At the same time, we can see that Wilde recognized Jesus as an individualist. He insisted on individuality rather than morality, for he followed his contemporaries' example. They also began to be aware of the identity of Jesus from a modern viewpoint.

4. Discussion of the High Frequency Words in PP

After the comparison of EV and PP, we discuss the high frequency words in each work of PP respectively. According to the order Fong and Beckson place, Wilde's PP is studied in consideration of the frequently used words. First of all, *HJ* will be discussed, for it was first published in *Spirit Lamp* 3(17 Feb 1893) among other poems. Whether or not the poem was, as Isobel Murray suggests,[15] influenced by his mother's collected fairy tale books, is difficult to know at present, but the date when the work was written suggests something meaningful. In fact, it was just a few months before then that the performance of *Salomé* was banned in July, 1892 on the grounds that Biblical characters should not be represented on the stage. Therefore, we can consider that he might challenge the old censorship by creating another form of art, a kind of poem in which Biblical matters are treated.

It is, therefore, natural that Biblical allusions should be found in the poems, especially in *HJ*, *DG*, *Master*, and *TW*. One of the characteristics in modern Biblical style can be said to be easy and simple to pronounce and repeat on account of the popularization of the Bible. The same features can easily be found in the language of Wilde's poems through this research.

Table 5

	Word		
	Word	18	not
1	the	19	that
2	and	20	their
3	of	21	were
4	thou	22	been
5	didst	23	even
6	to	24	have
7	man	25	hell
8	I	26	thine
9	thee	27	before
10	in	28	book
11	god	29	evil
12	said	30	for
13	with	31	into
14	thy	32	made
15	send	33	unto
16	who	34	was
17	life	35	will

In Table 5 the top 35 high frequency words in HJ appear. They are listed if used 4 times or more there. Among them are the nouns regarded as noteworthy, when the characteristics of the poems are inquired in the context. The story is about a man, who had had the perfect knowledge of God, began to give away it to the people around him during the long and difficult journey, and then lost it all. But God praised him for the self-sacrificial deeds, so that he finally managed to get the perfect love of God instead of the perfect knowledge. We should pay attention to the fact that while Wilde's story is didactic and instructive, there are no words such as "love" and "heaven" in the table. On the contrary, all we can find here is the negative word "evil" suggesting the dark side of the world, which shows that Wilde had a cynical view on God's love at that time.

In Table 6 are found the top 43 high frequency words in *Disciple*, which are those used more than 2 times. *Disciple* was first published in *Spirit of Lamp* 4 (6 June 1893), which appeared four months after the publication of *HJ*. In the story readers finally understand that Narcissus, the hero, is not the only person that recognizes his own beauty by listening to the pool's remark. The pool says, "But I loved Narcissus because, as he lay on my banks and looked down at me, in the mirror of his eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored." The paradox remarkably shows that the role of the pool is more important to Wilde than that of Narcissus, which is easy to know only by checking how many times "Narcissus" and "pool" are respectively repeated here. "Narcissus" is repeated only 4 times, but "the pool," 6 times. The

Table 6

	Word								
	Word	9	that	18	at	27	I	36	should
1	the	10	you	19	banks	28	into	37	sweet
2	and	11	but	20	beautiful	29	my	38	tears
3	of	12	his	21	beauty	30	on	39	to
4	pool	13	in	22	changed	31	Oreads	40	was
5	he	14	mirror	23	down	32	own	41	when
6	a	15	they	24	ever	33	said	42	would
7	cup	16	waters	25	for	34	salt	43	your
8	Narcissus	17	answered	26	from	35	saw		

number of repetitions eloquently discloses which character is more significant in the work. The table of frequency poses another problem, that is, the usage of "cup." The existence of "cup" has been completely ignored by critics. It may be quite deviant to call the waters of the pool a cup of water. When "sweet" and "salt" are taken into consideration, it is well understood that Wilde would like to suggest tea by using the series of such words.

In Table 7 the top 38 high frequency words in *Artist* are listed, which are repeated 2 times or more. *Artist* is the third prose poem, which was said to be first published in the *Fortnightly Review* (July 1894), when the other three poems in prose, *DG*, *Master*, and *TW*, simultaneously appeared under the same heading of PP. It is, however, strange that nobody knows where the manuscripts are. The story of *Artist* is about a bronze sculptor who finally succeeds in fashioning "the image of the Pleasure that abideth for a Moment," out of the bronze of "an image of the Sorrow that endureth for Ever." The most remarkable point in the table is the frequency of "sorrow," which is followed by that of "pleasure." In addition, "ever" is also followed by "moment." The word "tomb" is also found there. It is generally accepted that Wilde attaches more importance to sorrow rather than to pleasure in his last letters of *De Profundis*. A little before his imprisonment for two years with hard labor, he also recognized that it is "sorrow" rather than "pleasure" that is generally regarded as one of the most important factors that art should consist of.

Table 7

	Word	8	had	16	ever	24	abideth	32	only
1	the	9	that	17	fashioned	25	an	33	own
2	of	10	a	18	his	26	into	34	pleasure
3	and	11	in	19	set	27	loved	35	save
4	he	12	it	20	sorrow	28	man	36	thing
5	bronze	13	to	21	there	29	moment	37	tomb
6	image	14	world	22	this	30	on	38	was
7	for	15	endureth	23	whole	31	one		

In Table 8 are found the top 40 high frequency words in *DG*, which are used 3 times or more here. *DG* is a story about the people who are saved by the hands of Jesus. However, they unfortunately lead their lives in different ways which are never expected by Him at all. For example, the leper, who miraculously recovers from his illness, begins a dissolute life full of red roses and wine. The blind man, who is cured by Him, follows a beautiful woman with lustful eyes. The woman starts her bohemian life again with a firm belief that her sin should be forgiven forever before God. Finally the young man, who looks like Jesus, keeps weeping over his destiny because he comes back from the dead. It is a paradoxical story, but the verbs such as "go," "pass," "see," and "recognize," are found there. The

Table 8

	Word	9	said	18	me	27	woman	36	out
1	and	10	you	19	passed	28	at	37	should
2	the	11	young	20	recognised	29	do	38	turned
3	of	12	I	21	round	30	else	39	when
4	he	13	to	22	saw	31	face	40	why
5	him	14	were	23	touched	32	had		
6	a	15	but	24	way	33	hall		
7	was	16	city	25	went	34	house		
8	man	17	with	26	whose	35	once		

verbs "go" and "pass" play a crucial role in this story, for going and passing are related to the main topics of this story, that is, change or conversion. At the same time, the next important word among them is "recognize," for the happenings in this story are attributed mainly to misrecognition. We should also be careful of the word "turn." Though they are changed into those who they want to be, they realize that they do not feel happy. It can be found that the function of the verbs seems quite important in *DG*.

In Table 9 we find the top 32 high frequency words in *Master*. They are used 2 times or more. *Master* was published in the *Fortnightly Review* (July 1894). The hero in this poem is doing almost the same things as Jesus did except that He was crucified. Owing to crucifixion, he is desperately envious of Christ, but this is in vain. The remarkable feature of Table 9 is that there are a few nouns indicating parts of the human body. While he envies Christ's holy miracles and crucifixion, Wilde lays stress on "body" and "hair" in the description of the character. It is his appearance that he cares about when depicting the young man. This obviously reveals Wilde's intentions that the young man follows Christ's deeds only on the surface level. In addition, we should be careful of treating those words like "hair" and "naked", which are emblematic of sensuality and voluptuousness.

Table 9

	Word	17	that
1	the	18	weeping
2	and	19	who
3	I	20	young
4	have	21	as
5	a	22	body
6	he	23	but
7	of	24	done
8	was	25	hair
9	his	26	into
10	man	27	is
11	for	28	my
12	had	29	naked
13	from	30	on
14	great	31	to
15	in	32	valley
16	not		

Table 10 shows the top 39 high frequency words in *TW*, which are used 11 times or more. *TW* was published in the *Fortnightly Review* (July 1894). This is a story about a man who has the perfect knowledge of God. He leaves home and sets out to give his knowledge to the people around him. The more knowledge of God

Table 10

	Word		
	Word	20	as
1	and	21	was
2	the	22	is
3	of	23	thou
4	he	24	had
5	to	25	young
6	him	26	who
7	god	27	not
8	his	28	away
9	that	29	my
10	a	30	give
11	in	31	have
12	I	32	at
13	knowledge	33	this
14	hermit	34	but
15	for	35	city
16	said	36	robber
17	you	37	about
18	will	38	with
19	me	39	it

he gives to others, the more he loses. Therefore, he gradually refrains from giving it to others. Finally, against his will he reveals the last knowledge of God to the Hermit, who is anxious to have it. As a result, he completely loses it, but he gets the perfect Love of God instead. This anecdote reminds us of his fairy tales, for example, "the Selfish Giant" in *Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Self-sacrifice is one of serious main themes common to almost all the works Wilde dealt with. It is not until people give away the things most important to themselves that they can understand what meanings of the things they lost are. If Wilde regards love as quite an important theme, why does he use the word "love" so few times in this poem? It is paradoxically interesting that there is no word of "love" in the list of Table 10. Though the "love of God" is the main theme of this piece, he does not use it so often. However, it was because of making the word "love" more impressive that he used the word only once at the very end of the story. As a result, we can say that this table reveals his hidden intentions of making a story into a drama. In addition, it is a common feature among almost all his works that a lot of monosyllable words are found in PP. In other words, high frequency of monosyllables plays an important role in them.

5. Length of Sentence

Hereafter we see and discuss the average length of a sentence in PP according to the date when they were written. It is quite useful to identify the features of the chronological changes in average sentence length in each poem. Moreover, we also see that of his fairy tales written in 1888 and 1891, which shows the features better. Adding to these texts his fairy tales will make the tendency more distinct. Figure 1 stands for the average sentence length in each of Wilde's tales and poems in prose, which is arranged in chronological order.

Hereinafter, *HP* represents "The Happy Prince," *Night*, "The Nightingale and the Rose," *Self*, "The Selfish Giant," *Dev*, "The Devoted Friend," *Roc*, "The Remarkable Rocket," *Young*, "The Young King," *Birth*, "The Birthday of the Infanta," *Fish*, "The Fisherman and his Soul," and *Star*, "The Star-Child." *The Happy Prince and other Tales*, including *HP*, *Night*, *Self*, *Dev* and *Roc*, was published in 1888 and *A House of Pomegranates*, which consists of *Young*, *Birth*, *Fish*, and *Star*, was published in 1891, which means that PP and the two fairy tales were written at almost the same period.

As shown in Figure 1, the average sentence lengths obviously become longer. If both the fairy tales and the allegorical PP are written for children, it will be reasonable to use simpler and shorter sentences in the works. To our surprise, the average sentence length in PP becomes a little longer than that in the previous fairy tales written a few years before. But why does Wilde use longer sentences in PP? First of all, PP is not written for children, for Wilde intends to challenge the strict code that denied the performance of *Salomé* the previous year. Besides, he originally likes longer sentences because of the very effect that is essential to him.

**Figure 1 Average Sentence Length in Fairy Tales and PP**
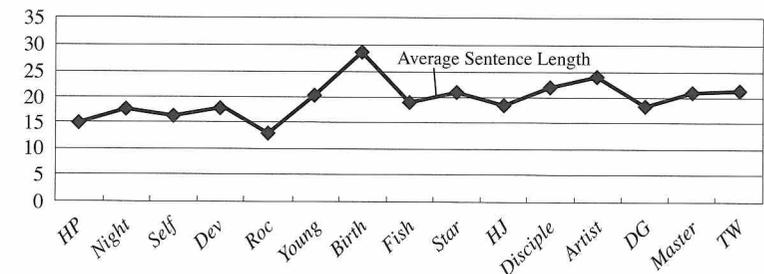
6. Discussion on the Average Number of Syllables Per Word

Next we pay attention to the average number of syllables in words in his sentences. In Figure 2 the average number of syllables per word in the works is shown. Compared with Figure 1, there is a slight difference in Figure 2. It shows that shorter words are generally supposed to be consistent with shorter sentences. Shorter and simpler words are quite normally expected to be appropriate for moral writings, such as allegorical and Biblical stories, because of spreading to people, including adults. Though the results in this figure are quite inconsistent with the previous figure, it is reasonable in a sense.

As seen in the figures, the average sentence length becomes longer, but, on the contrary, the number of syllables per word becomes smaller. This inconsistency clearly shows Wilde's complicated ideas on poetry as well as his ambiguous literary theory, concerning the relation between form and art.

Then, what kind of form is his ideal in art? Long sentences can be construed as in-depth explanations, through which people can learn even difficult expressions and meanings. Using shorter words, Wilde paradoxically endeavored to describe what is beyond description. He uses short words, by which he gives a vivid impression to the readers. His unique stylistic tendency is a device for entertaining not only children but also adults, which confirms our belief that PP is written not merely for children. Wilde does not directly comment on this matter, but we can

Figure 2 Number of Syllables per Word in Fairy Tales and PP
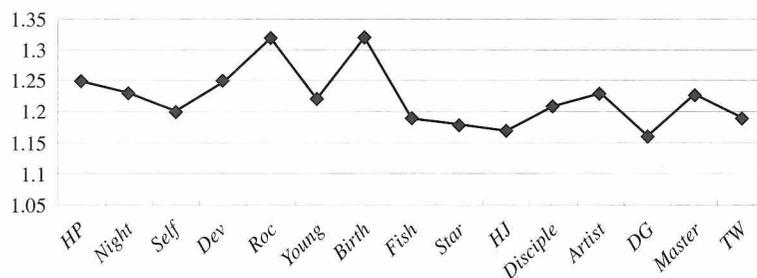
guess his ideas on it from the following letter, written soon after PP was published:

> He [the reviewer] starts by asking an extremely silly question, and that is, whether or not I have written this book [*A House of Pomegranates*] for the purpose of giving pleasure to the British child. Having expressed grave doubts on this subject, a subject on which I cannot conceive any fairly-educated person having any doubts at all, he proceeds, apparently quite seriously, to make the extremely limited vocabulary at the disposal of the British child the standard by which the prose of an artist is to be judged! Now in building this *A House of Pomegranates* I had about as much intention of pleasing the British child as I had of pleasing the British public…. No artist recognises any standard of beauty but that which is suggested by his own temperament. The artist seeks to realise in a certain material his immaterial idea of beauty, and thus to transform an idea into an ideal. That is the way an artist makes in making things. That is why an artist makes things. The artist has no other object in making things.[16]

This letter shows how much his tales had been misconstrued as immoral since they were published, and how much he was misunderstood. It was sent to the publisher in whose magazine an article reviewed his book, *A House of Pomegranates*. As mentioned in the letter, all Wilde cares about is the standard of beauty, which should be suggested only by artists' own temperament. Indeed, he does not consent to make the basic vocabulary the cannon by which the quality of prose is measured. Though this letter shows his general ideas on writings, especially in the book, it is obvious that his readers should not be limited only to the fairy tales. He does not intend to pay attention to the simple words he uses, but to create beauty in the works, while he changes his style in fiction and poems. The fact is that the average sentence length of PP becomes a little longer than that of the fairy tales written a few years before, but on the other hand the average number of syllables per word becomes smaller. These are the features in the style of Wilde's PP, where the Biblical affairs are often depicted in a most simple fashion.

What does he mean by the features? We can also consider them from a little different viewpoint. Is it possible to regard them as an ultimate form of beauty in

Wilde's ideas, whether or not he is conscious of them? Did he believe that beauty consisted of slightly longer sentences and one-syllable words? This interpretation is quite dangerous and rough, since it seems quite an extreme and radical argument. However, if we are forced to define Wilde's theory of word usage as descriptively as possible, we will be able to find it in the hybrid poems full of impressive and one-syllable words.

7. Words and Music in PP

Up to now, Wilde's PP has been discussed by means of the research on word frequency and word length. Now let us discuss the relation between form and art. Besides, in the discussion we can refer to a concept of music which Wilde makes good use of in his explanation of the critical theory, for Wilde repeatedly regards the term music as a key concept in art. Nevertheless, his ideas on music seem too abstract and vague to understand. Besides, his paradoxical ways of using words prevent his discussions from being properly treated as the object of study. We naturally can resolve the enigma, that is, the meaning of music when we consider what functions Wilde assigned to his words. Before that, it is quite significant for us to confirm Wilde's ideas on music in "Critic as Artist:"

> And what is true about music is true about all the arts. Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods. Beauty is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing. When it shows us itself, it shows us the whole fiery-coloured world.[17]

The relation between beauty and music is shown here so clearly. However, these short, rather too simplified expressions seem to serve only to deepen the mystery of beauty and music. This is a paradoxical expression, but "it expresses nothing." However, it is a kind of expression Wilde often uses in such a situation. In fact, he stubbornly refuses to express the intellectual messages when writing poems. We can conclude that beauty and music do not convey any clear and intellectual message in Wilde's criticisms of art.

It is well known that Wilde had made good use of music since the publication of his early poems in which there are several poems whose titles are associated with music. Nevertheless, for example, in "Symphony in Yellow" not a sound of beautiful music at all, but the landscape of the Thames is depicted in a French Post-impressionistic fashion. We should pay attention here to the close conjunction of the three terms, French, impressionism, and music. When he lived with his family in Dublin before his father's sexual scandal, they were said to have employed a French maid. Accordingly, it can be easily imagined that Wilde had gradually acquired good knowledge of the French language, which might contribute a great deal to the creation of the play, *Salomé* in French. No doubt this early experience was helpful for him to lead to his associations with French impressionists in those days.

It is, however, far beyond our expectation that there is no conspicuous influence from French Impressionism in PP, for we can find in Tables1-10, as mentioned before, few words that depict colors or flowers. But it is not coincident with all possible relations between the poems and Impressionism. All we can do here is to affirm Wilde's negative attitude toward it when he created the poems. In fact, we cannot find any words regarding sound and music in the same tables either. Of course, we may find some words that indirectly suggest music when reading the texts as a whole, but it is a sobering fact that there are no such words in the tables.

In conclusion, we failed to find the influence from music and Impressionism in the poems in the tables before. Of course, this does not always support the idea that there is no relation between them at all. Therefore, we have to modify an existing idea a little. It is natural that the poems should be considered not from the viewpoints of Aestheticism or Impressionism, but from other viewpoints such as oral tradition. The short words found in the tables are greatly beneficial to common people's memory.

8. Oral Tradition

Is it possible to think that using one-syllable words is consistent with Impressionism in Wilde's theory on art? This is quite a hard question to answer. But in a sense it is the question that Wilde posed to us when he endeavored to create the most ideal poems at that time. All we can do here is to read his poems carefully and

objectively. In this respect it can be said that McCormack succeeds in finding an important role of Wilde's oral proficiency in her essay. She discusses the form "oral" as follows:

> As Wilde intended, his prose poems have the status of parables. They aim to overturn; they proceed as precise, almost mechanical, inversions of audience's expectations. Their form is oral, with a cadencing of perfect music. Often they exist in several versions, adjusted according to different audiences and different contexts; a full collection is still to be made. Their value, however, is evident. These are the kernels from which the larger fictions grow: such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is little more than a literary elaboration of such a slight, but pregnant, tale.
>
> 'The Doer of Good' has effectively destroyed a man by saving his life – but not teaching him how to live, Salome explores how desire, both erotic and religious, is perverted within a rotting colonial regime. Its plot, characters and language are derived (in the English translation) from the Authorised Version; it was banned by the Lord Chancellor from the British stage on the grounds of blasphemy.[18]

When reading the quotations, we consider her insight into Wilde's intentions. But we have to be careful about her interpretation of the poems in prose from ours. She does not exclude his other poems except PP from the poems. PP is quite special poems to Wilde, as mentioned before. However, her phrase "oral, with a cadencing of perfect music" includes some important features found in Wilde's PP. Indeed the verb "cadence" is quite rarely used now, but there is no doubt that McCormack finds "the rhythm of perfect music" in the lines of PP. Her discussion also confirms our ideas on Wilde's tactics in writing poems, for Wilde's talkativeness in conversation must be also seriously considered in the traditional context of Irish folklore. Besides, we must not overlook the fact that Wilde was originally influenced by the ancient Greek tradition of dialogues, which are considered as the resources of his amusing conversations when he was in Dublin as well as in Oxford.

Repetitions of phrase or sentence, Chorus phrases, and other elements, which can be named the essence of music are easily found in PP without using computer analysis. The repetitions are used quite vividly and remarkably. In a sense we find such a "cadencing of perfect music" in most of Wilde's works.

9. Tentative Conclusion

In this paper we have first discussed high frequency words in Oscar Wilde's PP and the chronological changes in the features. The tables of high frequency words in each poem have contributed to a deeper understanding of Wilde's strategy of writing poems, even if he were not conscious of it at all. They have also revealed some of his hidden intentions there. They disclose a logical inconsistency between the superficial theme and the woven intentions, which contributes to a better understanding of his strategy of making prose poems.

There are also a few interesting and unexpected features of the words in his works, which can be discovered only by means of word analysis. Table 1 reveals Wilde's immanent interpretation of Jesus as an individualist. Table 2 eloquently tells his inclination to sorrow. Table 3 clearly says that aesthetic and voluptuous words are repeated in PP. Table 4 gives a good account of the affinity between EV and PP. Besides, Table 5 supports the new idea that HJ is not a simple moral story but has aspect of irony. Table 6 shows that the real hero in *Disciple* is not Narcissus, but the "pool." Table 7 expresses his preference to use the words which mean sorrow. Table 8 supports the important role of verbs in *DG*. Moreover, Table 9 discloses Wilde's intention that he endeavors to add something voluptuous to the image of Jesus. Table 10 reveals that Wilde did not use the word "love" in *Master*. Indeed, these tables somehow contribute to our better understanding of his new poems full of his creative motives. Our research into high frequency words reveals Wilde's ambiguous intentions, whether or not he was conscious of them. Indeed, Wilde was trying to write a new kind of the Bible. Naturally enough he did not forget adding something unique to it, which means his real intention of creating the new kind of poems. The characteristics found in the tables are quite helpful to realize what kind of poems he tried to create in deeper meanings.

Then, we have researched a few interesting and unexpected facts about words and sentences that are discovered by this research on sentence length. In Figure 1

we have found a modest but noticeable increase in sentence length, and a slight but marked decrease in the number of syllables in a word. The average word length of PP becomes shorter in comparison with that of the fairy tales written a little earlier, but on the other hand the average sentence length becomes longer. These characteristics are found especially in his PP, in which there is no doubt that he endeavors to realize his dream of making a perfect form of art, that is, music.

In a tentative conclusion, we must admit that this is only a beginning for a new sort of research by means of computer analysis. This research has indicated a considerable demand for similar kinds of studies, which will assuredly contribute to a better understanding of his mysterious terms, such as music. We know that music consists of sound and rhythm, so word syllable and sentence length are only a part of it. Therefore, at the same time music as a whole should also have been studied. However, we should also launch this kind of research to dissolve Wilde's ambiguous theory of music and paradox. Though Wilde continued to write several novels and famous plays after the publication of PP, it is not proved whether or not his choice of the words had changed radically. Therefore, we have to continue to research the words he used patiently in order to change our airy impressions into real understandings, in other words, to "give airy nothing a local habitation." When Ian Small discusses a variety of Wilde biographies, he insists that the "myth of Wilde" might be replaced by more scholarly studies.[19] To borrow his expression, the myth of music should also "be replaced" by more statistical approaches.

Notes

1   The "Poems in Prose" in my paper consist of six Wilde's poems: "The House of Judgment," "The Disciple," "The Artist," "The Doer of Good," "The Master," and "The Teacher of Wisdom."

2   When Wilde was in Paris, Mallarmé was said to welcome him. His oral proficiency in French was considered to promote his involvement with Impressionism. Wilde was profoundly influenced by the contemporary French poets.

3   Stephen Arata, "Oscar Wilde and Jesus Christ" in *Wilde Writings*: Contextual Conditions ed. Joseph Bristow (Canada: The Regents of the University of California, 2003), p. 261.

4   The original electronic text for this version of the Bible was provided by the Oxford Text Archive. I am grateful to them for it.

5   Letters, p. 176.

6   Letters, p. 523.

7   Peter Raby(ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

8   Stephen Arata, "Oscar Wilde and Jesus Christ" in *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, p. 261.

9   First of all, I appreciate for his academic contributions to the studies of Oscar Wilde's poetry.

10   Fong specifies the dates of their publications in his annotation.

11   *Letters*, p. 479.

12   Katherine Brown Downey, *Perverse Midrash* (The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York), p. 34.

13   Letters, p. 473.

14   Dr. Masahiro Hori, a disciple of Dr. Hiroyuki Ito, showed me the stylistic features of the Bible.

15   Isobel Murray, *Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 635.

16   Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: 1962) pp. 301-2.

17   Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1990) p. 1030.

18   Jerusha McCormack, "Wilde's fiction(s)" in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 101.

19   Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde Recent Research: A Supplement to 'Oscar Wilde Revalued'* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2000), p. 5.

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