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Ear-Pleasing Devices in The Police's "Every Breath You Take"

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Abstract

This essay is concerned with sound devices in The Police's "Every Breath You Take". The sound devices include the rhythm, metre, and rhyme in the lyric. The study is led by the relation between poetry and music, and it is intended to allow the relation to be used in the teaching of English language and literature. The study applies a textual analysis, and it adopts Cuddon's concept of poetic sounds. The analysis shows a rhythmical metrics in the rhyming lines of the lyric. In brief, the lyric is not musical, but it is also poetic. It is expected that the study will be suitable for general readership in English language and literature, with specific interest in music.

Keywords: song lyric, rhythm, meter, rhyme, prosody

1. Introduction

This essay inserts The Police's "Every Breath You Take" lyric in stylistics of poetry. The song lyric is inserted as a literary text. The lyric is studied with regard to its ear-pleasing devices, namely rhythm, meter, rhyme and stanza form. The song lyric is inserted as a textual resource in stylistics. The lyric is studied with regard to its metrics.

This study aims at incorporating the song lyric with stylistics of poetry. Incorporating a song lyric with a study of literature, Murphey emphasizes, aims at "underlining the parallelism between music and other artistic expression."^[1] The song lyric has devices which are parallel to those of a poem. The lyric is analyzed stylistically because it has devices of style which are similar to those of a poem. Like a poem, the lyric has its rhythm, meter, rhyme, and stanza form. Possessing the ear-pleasing devices, the song lyric shows its style out of its musical arrangement.

Stylistics looks into the ear-pleasing devices as a music and poetic expression. In stylistics the lyric of "Every Breath You Take" is a devised expression which is not only

musical but is also literary. Stylistics, Wellek and Warren affirm, “investigates all devices which aim at some specific expressive end and thus embraces far more than literature or even rhetoric.”^[2] In this regard, stylistics brings the music work into a study of poetry on the one hand and brings a study of poetry out to a realm of music on the other hand. Thus, this stylistic study looks into the ear-pleasing devices of the song lyric as an expression in both music and poetry.

This stylistic study is lifted by the principle which underlines similarity between metrics in music and in poetry. Both musical and poetic meters, Brown emphasizes, are based on the same general principle:

“A short, easily recognized pattern of time and accent is chosen for the basic unit and is then constantly repeated with sufficient variation to prevent monotony, but with sufficient uniformity to be easily perceived.”^[3]

Metrics in the song lyric is studied in the similar pattern to metrics in a given poem is. Accordingly, the pattern of accent which serves the metrics in the song lyric also serves the metrics in the poem.

This stylistic study is performed metrically. The metrics is patterned according to each stress on the song lyric’s syllables. The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables on each line of the song lyric forms the basic unit of the rhythm and meter of the lyric. The pattern of ending sound on each line of the song lyric forms the basic unit of the rhyme of the lyric. The two patterns of ear-pleasing devices designate the euphonic style of the lyric.

2. Methods

In depicting the metrics of the song lyric, this study applies a graphic prosody to the lyric. A graphic prosody, Wellek and Warren explain, “works with graphic signs of longs and shorts, which in English usually are meant to represent the stressed and unstressed syllables.”^[4] The stressed (x) and unstressed (-) syllables form the metrical pattern of the lyric. The commonest metrical patterns in English verse, Cuddon mentions, fall into “iambic (- x); trochaic (x -); anapaestic (- - x); dactylic (x - -); spondaic (x x); paeonic (x - - -)” (509). The metrical pattern constitutes one ear-pleasing device of the lyric: the rhythm and meter of it.

Rhyme is the other device. Rhyme can be annotated, Cuddon explains, “by using the sequence of consonants (*bcd fghj . . .*) for the stressed rhymes, and of vowels (*aeiou*) for the unstressed.”^[5] Rhyme constitutes meaning in the lyric. With regard to the meaning, rhyme may be concerned with diction and interpretation. Wellek and Warren mention that:

“We may ask what is the semantic function of the syllables which rhyme, whether rhyme is in the suffix (character, register), in the

root (drink, think), or in both (passion, fashion). We may ask from what semantic sphere rhyme-words are selected: whether, for example, they belong to one or several linguistic categories (parts of speech, different cases) or group of objects. We may want to know what is the semantic relation between the words linked by rhyme, whether they belong to the same semantic context as do many of the common doubles (heart; part; tears, fears) or whether they surprise precisely by association and juxtaposition of completely divergent semantic spheres”(160).^[4]

This stylistic study depicts the rhythm, meter, and rhyme in “Every Breath You Take”. Depicting the metrics of the lyric, this study denotes similarity in the language of poetry and music. Applied to the language of poetry, Turner underlines, “this stylistic analysis will become a theory of metrics.”^[6] Likewise, applied to the language of music, this analysis will become a theory of metrics as well. Thus, the song lyric possesses its rhythm, meter, and rhyme in the same manner as a poem does.

3. Results

Stylistic studies on song lyrics have been well acknowledged in recent years. As a case of point of it, a stylistic study on the song lyrics of Bob Dylan, which was conducted by Gezari, is cited here. Gezari discusses how the most familiar expressions in Bob Dylan's songs, comprising idioms, cliches, and the demotic language he delights in, contribute to the validity of his lyrics. She suggests that “one hears Dylan's voice most clearly when he is using habitual expressions or relying on one's knowledge of them and not just of them but of the tone behind them.”^[7]

This stylistic study of The Police's “Every Breath You Take” brings its discussion into another realm of expression. It discusses how the ear-pleasing devices in the song lyric could amplify the parallelism of the song lyric as a music arrangement to a study of poetry. It suggests that the study of poetry can benefit from the lyric for its ear-pleasing devices. It also suggests that the study of the lyric can become literary when the devices serve the purpose of a stylistic study of poetry.

4. Discussion

In its discussion this stylistic study, firstly, scans each line of the lyric in order to constitute the pattern of rhythm and meter of the lyric. Scansion of the

lyric may appear as follows: ^[9]

- - x | - x ← anapaest | iamb

Every breath you take

a
(-) - - x | - x

And every move you make

a
- - x | - x | - - x | - x

Every bond you break, every step you take

a
- - x | - x

I'll be watching you

first verse
quatrain

b
- - x - x
Every single day

c
(-) - - x | - x
And every word you say

c
- - x | - x | - - x | - x
Every game you play, every night you stay

c
- - x | - x
I'll be watching you

second verse
quatrain

b
- (-) x | - x
Oh, can't you see

d
- - x - x
You belong to me?

d
- - x | - x
How my poor heart aches

- - (-) x - x
With every step you take

a |

- - x - x
Every move you make

a |

- - x - x
Every vow you break

a |

- - x - x - - x - x
Every smile you fake, every claim you stake

a |

- - x - x
I'll be watching you

b

- - x - - x - x - x
Since you've gone I've been lost without a trace

e |

- x - x - x - - x - x
I dream at night, I can only see your face

e |

- x - x - - x - x - x
I look around, but it's you I can't replace

e |

- x - x - - x - x - x
I feel so cold, and I long for your embrace

e |

- x x - x - x - x (-)

trochee trochee I keep crying baby, baby please,
f

third verse
octave

fourth verse
quintet

iamb | trochee | trochee |

- (-) x - x
Oh, can't you see

d

- - x | - x
You belong to me?

d |

- - x - x

How my poor heart aches

a |
 - - (-) x - x

With every step you take

a |
 - - x - x

Every move you make

a |
 - - x - x

Every vow you break

a | | |
 - - x - x - - x - x

fifth verse

Every smile you fake, every claim you stake

a |
 - - x - x

free verse

I'll be watching you

b | | |
 - - x - x - - x - x

Every move you make, every step you take

a |
 - - x - x

I'll be watching you

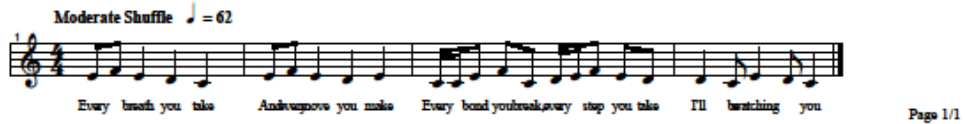
b |
 - - x - x

I'll be watching you

b

The lyric nearly possesses a recursive foot pattern: each line is majorly composed of an anapaest which is followed by an iamb. The recursive pattern generates regularity in the rhythm and meter of the lyric. The lyric are read at a proper tempo and time. There is also irrecurisive foot pattern in the lyric: dissimilar foot number and type. Instead of one, there are two pairs of feet on one line. For an instance is line three in the first stanza. The foot pattern is not only composed of a pair of anapaest and iamb but also of a pair of iamb and trochee. The irrecurisive pattern still generates regularity in the rhythm and meter of the lyric for the recursive-patterned lines are read at an accentuated tempo in time. That means that in one line an eight-note pattern should be read equally to two sixteenth-note patterns. A musical notation below, which annotates the first verse

of the lyric, may illustrate the equation:



In the notation above, line three, which is set in bar three, is read at an equal time to the other lines of the verse in bar one, two, and four. So, each line of the lyric is metrically parallel to each bar of the notation.

Next, this study groups syllables which rhyme into their semantic function, sphere, and relation in order to constitute the rhyme scheme of the lyric. The following table may depict the grouping:

Verse	Rhyming Words		Semantic Function	Semantic Sphere	Semantic Relation
1	Perfect Rhyme	take, make	suffix root	Verb pronoun	transitive verb object pronoun
	Half Rhyme				
	Unrhyme	take, you			
2	Perfect Rhyme	day, say, stay	suffix root	Noun verb	abstract noun intransitive verb
	Half Rhyme				
	Unrhyme	stay, you			
3	Perfect Rhyme	take, make	suffix root	Verb	transitive verb
	Half Rhyme	aches, take	suffix	Verb	intransitive verb transitive verb
		break, stake	suffix	Verb	transitive verb
		see, me	suffix	verb pronoun	transitive verb object pronoun
	Unrhyme				
4	Perfect Rhyme	trace, face, embrace	suffix	Verb noun	transitive verb concrete noun
	Half Rhyme				
	Unrhyme	embrace, please			
5	Perfect Rhyme				
	Half Rhyme	see, me	suffix	Verb pronoun	transitive verb object pronoun

		aches, take	suffix	Verb	intransitive verb transitive verb
		break, stake	suffix	Verb	transitive verb
	Unrhyme	take, you			

In each verse, there is one dominant semantic sphere: the verb. Like in the quatrain, quintet, or octave, the rhyming words fall dominantly into the verbs in the free verse. Related semantically to the verbs, the nouns and pronouns take their positions most frequently as the objects of the verbs.

The verb dominance suggests that the lyric is about action rather than emotion, considering the term ‘lyric’ itself naturally suggests. “Every Breath You Take” expresses some kind of emotion. In fact, the sentence “I’ll be watching you” suggests that that emotion is haunting. The rhyming verbs serve as the power words to amplify the haunting emotion of the lyricist. So powerful is the amplification that the lyricist will keep an eye on ‘you’ in, even, every breath ‘you’ take.

5. Conclusions

“Every Breath You Take” is not only musical but also poetic. The metrics of the lyric constitutes its own music because of the ear-pleasing devices the lyric possesses. The rhythm, meter, and rhyme of the lyric blend pleasantly with the music accompaniment, creating a powerful impression of the lyricist’s haunting emotion.

Acknowledgements

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