

Discerning Sounds and Senses in William Blake’s Poem “The Tyger”

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ABSTRACT: Poetry, a popular genre of literature, retains an artistic arrangement of sounds and senses which create particular feelings, emotions and moods in the readers. The major objective of this article is to familiarize the readers with the sound devices exploited in the poem entitled “The Tyger” composed by William Blake. Presentation, illustration and explanation of lexis and poetic lines that hint at the sound devices are executed as a method for discerning the sound devices that contribute to the senses in the poem. This article is considered to be useful to the college students who are interested in studying English poetry. It is concluded that better understanding of the sound devices leads the readers to the better understanding of sounds contributing to the meanings or senses of the poem.

KEY WORDS: alliteration, assonance, consonance, meter, rhyme

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I. INTRODUCTION

Poetry is different from other genres of literature, because it is more musical or melodic. Sound devices create music in poetry. Music is one of the most distinctive elements of poetry. Music in English poetry can be realized through accent, alliteration, assonance, cacophony, consonance, euphony, onomatopoeia, meter, repetition, rhyme and rhythm. These poetic elements are called sound devices that make poetry a special art form. These sound devices produce a flow of mellifluous sounds that are pleasing to hear, nice to recite and easy to memorize. Sound devices have been consistent assets exploited by poets to convey and reinforce the meanings of poetry.

Music plays a significant role in poetry to heighten both contents of a poem and an expression of the contents in a pleasing way. Music makes poetry expressive. A poem may have diverse beats of music. The variation in music in a poem stops the poem from becoming dull and monotonous. The variation in music suggests the variation in the mood of the poet. It is the role of music that enables the poet to express diverse moods or feelings through a single poem.

William Blake (28 November 1757 – 12 August 1827) was a romantic English poet, painter and printmaker. He is best known for his two poetical volumes: Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794). These two volumes depict the two contrary states of human soul. “Song of Innocence” deals with the freshness, purity, kindness, childhood and innocence of human soul, whereas “Songs of Experience” deals with the sense of experience, gloom, mystery and the power of the evil. “The Tyger” is included in “songs of experience”.

The poem “The Tyger”¹ is a lyrical poem and it has proved to become an instant literary classic amongst all-time classic poems of the modern era. “Tyger” is a symbolic character standing for a perfectly beautiful yet perfectly destructive creature. It could be created only by a divine hand with tremendous strength and power. The poet’s recurrent questions on the creation of the Tyger expose his view that God is the greatest artist capable of having immense skill and strength to create diverse creatures Like Tyger and Lamb. The Tyger, whose eyes are burning bright in the forest of the night, represents a person with a great desire for liberty. Lamb represents an innocent person who enjoys his simplicity and modesty. He lacks the strength of revolt against domination and cruelty of others.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review encompasses connection between poetry and music, role of music in poetry, reasons for using sound patterns in poetry and some sound devices exploited in the poem “The Tyger”.

2.1 Poetry and Music

Poetry is known as expressive music as it retains both expressive and sound qualities. Comley asserts that poetry is “a kind of sound word game that we value because of its expressive qualities”². He further points

out that poetry is a special combination of sound and linguistic qualities of sounds regarded both "as pure sound and as meaningful speech."² For Carlyle, poetry is "a sound thought"³. Poetry and music have always been closely related. Perhaps the most basic element shared by the two is rhythm. Poetry can contain many different kinds of rhythm: regular rhythm and irregular rhythm. Individual lines may be composed in the regular patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables for euphony.

Poems do have their own sound devices, but they can also be accompanied by music when they are read to an audience. Some of the earliest poetry in English was linked with music in this way. The Old English long poem *Beowulf* was performed for an audience and during performance, the poet was accompanied by music played on a harp. If the practice of performing poetry with a sound accompaniment goes back to the early Middle Ages, it has flourished in the twentieth century as well. The Beat poets of the 1950s introduced the idea of listening to poems being read in the informal setting of a coffeehouse or a jazz club, often to the accompaniment of jazz. Most college or public libraries carry a variety of recordings of poetry being performed to music.

2.2 Role of Music in Poetry

Music, which is a highly valued property of poetry, differentiates it from other genres of literature. It creates fascinating effects on both the poet at the time creation and on the listener at the time of recitation. It makes the readers easy to recite and remember. Music makes poetry expressive through its elements like rhyme, rhythm, meter, assonance, alliteration, caesura, onomatopoeia and so on. Using a fewer words, poetry can express many and great things by relating pleasing sounds with senses. Music makes poetry emotive capable of creating emotions, feelings and moods in the reader. Music does create aesthetic pleasures in a poem. We enjoy reading such materials which bestow pleasures and mental satisfaction on us. It is the role of music that enables the poet to express diverse moods or feelings through a single poem. Music keeps poetry with a unique identity among other genres of literature, because music is the matter that is mostly exploited, talked about and valued in poetry. Thornborrow and Wareing have identified some reasons for using sound and metrical patterning in poetry:

For aesthetic pleasure- sound and metrical patterning are fundamentally pleasing. Most people enjoy rhythm and repeated sounds, to conform a convention /style / poetic form, to experiment or innovate with a form, to demonstrate technical skill and for technical pleasure and for emphasis or contrast.⁴

2.3 SOUND DEVICES EXPLOITED IN THE POEM "THE TYGER"

The poem "The Tyger" retains alliteration, consonance, assonance, rhyme, meter and repetition.⁷

2.3.1 Alliteration

Alliteration is a sound device which involves the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of the stressed words in the same line or adjacent lines of verse. Wales opines that alliteration is "the repetition of the initial consonant in two or more words"⁵. Alliteration makes the sound emphatic and emotive.

We can notice an ample use of alliteration in this poem. There are repetitions of consonant sound /b/ in the words "burning / bright", /f/ in "frame/fearful", /d/ in "distant/deeps", /b/ in "began/beat", /d/ in "dare/deadly", /s/ in "stars/spears", /s/ in "smile/see" and /m/ in "made/make". All the repeated consonant sounds in the beginning of the words except /m / in the words "made / make" have the harsh quality. They imply the fearlessness of the Tyger, its beautiful and fearful build, the nature of the eyes, heart beating and strength of the maker of the Tyger etc.

2.3.2 Consonance

Consonance is the close repetition of the consonant sound within the words and such a repetition often occurs at the end of the words. Cuddon defines consonance as "the close repetition of identical consonant sounds before and after different vowels"⁶.

We see the repetition of the consonant sounds in the words after different vowel sounds such as /t/ in "what/distant", /t/ in "what/art", /t/ in "twist/heart", /t/ in "heart/beat", /n/ in "when/began", /t/ in "what/feet", /n/ in "when/down" and /z/ in "stars/spears". All the consonants except /n/ in "when / down" contribute to the harshness of the sounds in the poem. The consonantal repetitions reflect the physical strength of the Tyger.

2.3.3 Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowel especially in the stressed syllables in the verse line(s). Abrams asserts that assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds –especially in "stressed syllable in a sequence of nearby words"⁷. It produces a particular effect of euphony. It is usually used within a line of poetry for unity and a rhythmic effect:

Assonance that can be noticed in this poem are /ai/ in the words "Tyger/bright", /ai/ in "thine/eyes" and /ei / in "made/make". The diphthong / ai / associates the sense that the Tyger's eyes are burning bright. The poet wonders whether it was the same Creator who made the Tyger did make the Lamb.

2.3.4 Rhyme

Rhyme refers to the identical sounds generally at the end of verse lines. If the lines have identical sounds at the end, they are called the rhymed lines and the words having the identical sounds are called the rhymed words. Harmon views rhyme as "the identity of terminal sound between accented syllables, usually occupying corresponding positions in two or more lines of verse"⁸.

The poem 'The Tyger' is comprised of six quatrains entailed in rhymed couplets. The poem flows with a rhythmic synchronization. The rhyme scheme of this poem is aabb ccdd eeff gghh ijij aabb. The rhymed words are "bright /night", "eye/symmetry" "skies / eyes", "aspire /fire", "art / heart", "beat / feet", "chain / brain", "grasp / clasp", "spears / tears", "see / thee", "bright /night" and "eye/symmetry". This poem holds the full end rhyme except the couplet "eye / symmetry" which has near rhyme. In other words, this poem retains the masculine rhyme in which a single syllable is rhymed in the words. The rhyming words exploited in this poem are like cohesive devices that synchronize the linguistic and melodic dimensions. We feel terrific and mesmerized while reading this poem as we do while seeing the real Tyger. Almost all the rhyming words produce creepy sounds that make senses of this poem that the Tyger was not made in a normal way by a normal artist.

2.3.5 Repetition

Repetition is the recurring use of a sound, a word, a phrase, or a line. Harmon (2009) considers repetition as the "reiteration of a word, sound, phrase, or idea"⁷. Repetition can be used to appeal to our emotions, create mood, and to emphasize important ideas. It means repetition is the purposeful re-use of words, phrases, clauses and sometimes sentences for a special effect.

In the poem, the major word "Tyger!" is repeated twice, "what" is repeated thirteen times, "dread" is repeated thrice and "heart" is repeated twice. The repeated words deal with the creation of a "Tyger" which is not only beautiful, but also terrifying and strong. The first stanza is repeated as a chorus. This poem sounds like a creepy chant. There are fifteen questions which are not answered. These unanswered questions are primarily related to the creation of the Tyger. It seems that the poetic persona praises the greatness and artistic aptitude of God by describing the creation of the Tyger. The words "Tyger" and "Lamb" demonstrate the contrarian nature of the harsh human thought and the mild human soul. In fact, we all have reared Tyger and Lamb in our psyche. Sometimes we are guided by Tygerness that makes us strong, violent, aggressive and revolting, and sometimes by Lambness that makes us mild, gentle, submissive and feeble.

2.3.6 Meter

Meter is a fixed pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in the lines of verse. The fixed pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables is named a particular foot. The number and nature of feet determine meter in verse. It means the pattern of recurrence of rhythm (feet) in a line of verse is called meter. According to Abrams, meter is determined by the "pattern of stronger and weaker stresses in the syllables composing the words in the verse-line"⁶.

In English poetry a foot is normally made up of two syllables or three syllables. If a foot is made up of two syllables, it is called a **disyllabic foot**. There are four disyllabic feet in English poetry:

TABLE 1: Disyllabic Feet

S.N.	Nature of Foot (Two Syllables)	Name of Foot (Noun)	Name of Foot (Adjective)	Nature of Melody
1.	Stressed+ Stressed	Spondee	Spondaic	DUM_DUM
2.	Unstressed+ Unstressed	Pyrrhic	Pyrrhic	da_da
3.	Stressed + Unstressed	Trochee	Trochaic	DUM_da
4.	Unstressed + Stressed	Iamb	Iambic	da_DUM

If a foot is made up of three syllables, it is called a **trisyllabic foot**. There are eight trisyllabic feet in English poetry:

TABLE 2: Trisyllabic Feet

S. N.	Nature of Foot (Three Syllables)	Name of Foot (Noun)	Name of Foot (Adjective)	Nature of Melody
1.	Stressed + Stressed + Stressed	Molossus	----	DUM-DUM-DUM
2.	Unstressed +Unstressed + Unstressed	Tribrach	Tribrachic	da-da-da
3.	Stressed + Stressed + Unstressed	Antibacchius	Antibacchaic	DUM-DUM-da

4.	Unstressed +Unstressed +Stressed	Anapest	Anapestic	da-da-DUM
5.	Stressed +Unstressed + Unstressed	Dactyl	Dactylic	DUM-da-da
6.	Unstressed + Stressed + Stressed	Bacchius	Bacchaic	da- DUM-DUM
7.	Stressed +Unstressed + Stressed	Amphimacer/Cretic	Cretic	DUM-da-DUM
8.	Unstressed +Stressed + Unstressed	Amphibrach	Amphibrachic	da-DUM-da

The poem "The Tyger" is, in general, written in trochaic trimeter with an extra stressed syllable or word at the end of each line. Such a poetic line is called a catalectic line. The poetic line embraces disyllabic foot called trochee. It is a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable in a line of verse. The trochaic meter that creates music through a stressed syllable followed by a light syllable in each foot of poetic lines is common in children's rhymes. This meter is exploited for growing ideas in the readers:

— ◡ — ◡ — ◡ —
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright,
— ◡ — ◡ — ◡ —

In the forests of the night:

In the above line "in" and "of" are given the poetical stress to make the line regular and rhythmical. The last lines of the first, fifth and sixth stanzas are octasyllabic, whereas the remaining lines are heptasyllabic. Like the regular rhythm in the poem, the body of the Tyger is symmetrical, therefore beautiful. The regularity of rhythm makes the sense of the symmetry of the Tyger.

2.3.6 Distribution of Consonant Sounds in Terms of Quality

Poetry exploits both quality and quantity of speech sounds. Quality refers to the nature of a particular sound and quantity to the frequency of the repetition of the sound in a poem. Consonants can be described in terms of their harshness and softness. Every language has its own level of harshness and softness of its consonants. The following is the division of harsh and soft consonants in case of English.

Table 3: Distribution of Consonant Sounds in Terms of Quality ⁹

S.N.	Types	Strong (Harsh) Sounds	Soft (Mild) Sounds
1.	Bilabial	/ b / , / p /	/ m / , / w /
2.	Labio-dental	/ f / , / v /
3.	Dental (inter-dental)	/ θ / , / ð /
4.	Palato-alveolar	/ tʃ / , / dʒ / , / ʃ / , / ʒ /
5.	Alveolar	/ t / , / d / , / s / , / z /	/ n / , / l /
6.	Velar	/ k / , / g /	/ ŋ /
7.	Glottal	/ h /
8.	Post-alveolar	/ r /
9.	Palatal	/ j /

(Source: Roach, 2008)

Most of the words exploited in this poem commence with harsh consonant sounds. Tyger, burning, bright, forests, hand, could, frame, thy, fearful, symmetry, what, distant, deeps, skies, burnt, fire, thine, dare, seize, shoulder, twist, sinews, heart, began, beat, when, dread, feet, hammer, chain, furnace, brain, grasp, deadly, clasp, terrors, stars, threw, down, their, spears, heaven, tears, did, smile, see and who retain a harsh consonant sound in their initial position. Only a very few words begin with a soft consonant sound. The words night, wing, made, Lamb and make commence with a soft consonant sound.

= The harshness of the sounds indicates the harshness and brutality of the Tyger. It further may suggest the revolting instinct of the Tyger. The softness of the sounds implies the innocence, modesty and gentility of the Lamb. The poet might have meant to show us the submissive nature of the Lamb.

III. CONCLUSION

Poetry, known as expressive music, reflects its unique genre or identity among other genres of literature because of exploitation of music that is the most distinctive property of poetry. Music is the arrangement of sounds in pleasing sequence or combination. It depends on the quality and quantity of speech sounds. Poetry turns to be a good one if it retains the harmony of sounds and sense. It plays a significant role in poetry because it makes poetry expressive, emotive, pleasing, memorable, suggestive and unique in the world literature. This poem exploits the words which appeal to the readers because of their meanings and their sounds. It has a texture of sound which is as important as the meaning behind the poem. It has been written in a neat regular structure with efficient proportions for a rhythmic synchronization. It can be concluded that discerning sound devices in the poem leads the readers to the understanding of the poem which embraces both sounds and senses.

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Appendix

Text: The Tyger --William Blake

Tyger !Tyger! burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

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