



Research on Comparison Between Poetry and Lyrics

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Abstract. The researcher of this paper has found that poetry and lyrics are similar and can be compared in several ways. However, there are not many studies about this. Learning the differences and similarities in poetry and lyrics can help writers enhance their creative abilities and step up their understanding in musical ways like tempo and in writing ways like words. Based on the previous literature review, the researcher has generally summed them up and drawn some conclusions. In the introduction, some relationships between poetry and lyrics were illustrated and some existing problems were raised. It also generalized the study ways and aspects of this paper, giving an overall view of the whole passage. This paper analyzed imagery perspective at first and found that there are no obvious distinctions; in the way of content, the researcher first listed some elements in poem writing and then explained both differences and common grounds in the aspect of thought expressing, narrating content and interactions with readers or the audience, raising several examples of lyrics in stage performing. The paper discussed their dissimilitude in forms. Next, the researcher studied the language processing of the two issues, analyzing poetry and lyrics from words using translation and a rhetorical skill: repetition.

Keywords: poetry · lyrics · writing analyzing

1 Introduction

There is much research about poems and lyrics, respectively, while not much about the differences and similarities between them; a combined analysis is lacking. Some lyrics can be analyzed as a poem, though it seems like researchers are not so willing to treat them seriously. Everything can also be found in the poems from their social meaning, structure, and images. However, people cannot just read lyrics but appreciate them with music, just as some poets like T.S. Eliot wanted people to listen to their poem recordings because they had better understand a poem by both words and the tune. It is known that ancient people sang poems, so they could remember and pass on the content to the next generation with melody. As a result, the relationships between poetry and lyrics are close, deep, and time-honored.

Modern poetry is rarely studied. Even for the lyrics, they are more likely to be studied in the field of music rather than poetry. Wars or other social events may stimulate the

boost of poems, but people attach more importance to their political effects instead of the poems themselves. When it was the 60–70s, a lot of excellent musicians came up, and people would not call them poets but lyricists. Moreover, the common thing is that these songs have the same characteristics as the canonized poems: they use surrealist images and irony, form a coherent unity despite their ambiguity, they communicate indirectly/by implication only [1].

It is debatable whether the lyrics are equal to the poems because without the melody and other embellishments, the words themselves can be silly. At the same time, it is also said that the boundaries should not be so strict. Poetry and song lyrics are bridged and blurred in practice. Some songwriters had written poems when they were young. For example, the famous singer Lou Reed would combine poems with rock music. Moreover, skills of writing poems can be useful in lyrics writing as well, and some songwriters write poems when they want to create a song. Taking rock music as an example, the rock lyrics themselves can be considered poems. What they are like in poems is that words have liberated themselves from the duty of meaning something precise and concrete. Due to that, words stimulate the imagination of the audience, which indicates rock music has been described as a literary tradition that goes back to romanticism and symbolism, nonsense poetry, and literary modernism [2].

Moreover, nowadays, many people are poets and lyric writers as well. Studying the differences and similarities between poems and lyrics is necessary to enhance the quality of the output in the two fields. As far as people know, the emphasis on the overlap of poetry and lyrics fields is about educational research and computer techniques. Most of the papers collected data and then established mathematical models to analyze and calculate to find out if it is suitable to teach poetry by putting them in a melody, or they tried to work out the best application for poems and lyrics in cyberspace, and more. They are more likely to combine them with computer techniques or test the teaching method's acceptance. Rare papers are concerned with poems and lyrics themselves. This passage is going to study something tightly related between the two things. By selecting some concrete examples, this study will explore whether there are differences or similarities between poems and lyrics in various aspects. Lines and words will be laid out; inherent feelings will be analyzed well. The aim of this passage is mainly about generalized the approximate opinions of several researchers. Images, content, and rhetoric of poems and lyrics will be mainly discussed.

2 Images

2.1 Images in Poetry

The concept of poetry can be various. Except for the well-formed words, it attaches great importance to the sound as well. Meters and rhymes are also emphasized, and it can be seen as imaginative literature in general [3]. Poetry is a language harmony that is read with rhyming and tempo. Imagery can be considered as a picture so direct that the readers can experience and feel the content of the poem [4].

“Although the definition of poetry is slightly blurred, the definition of lyrics is very clear. Unlike the poem, the lyrics have to be intertwined with the music, even complementing it. According to Starrett, songwriters are the new poets with all the privileges

that come with the title. The study of lyrics becomes more reasonable when we realize that lyrics have taken the place of poetry in the last few decades [5].”

When it comes to the period 1909–1917, to protest the number of emotional expressions in poems and the attitude to making a fuss about imaginary illness, some poets like Ezra Pound wanted poetry to concentrate entirely upon “the thing itself” [6], to encourage people to use imageries in their poem, namely, some picture in mind, which can depict feelings directly and vividly.

2.2 Images in Lyrics

To make a song have a similar atmosphere as a poem, some writers would like to choose images frequently used images in poetry—for example, the imagery of the “moon” in Chinese classical poems. “Moon” is the symbol of nostalgia and reunion; in ancient times, the Book of Songs used the moon to express the feeling of missing between young lovers; in Li Bai’s *In the Silence of Night*, “moon” created an atmosphere of sadness and loneliness, to better express Li’s nostalgia [7]. Therefore, the feelings of this kind of imagery are common, so the songwriters extract and adapt these images to their own works.

2.3 Similarities in Imagery

Lyrics do not have the historical development as poems do, and nor do they have some critics to discuss their forms and contents, such as the rising of Imagism. It seems that lyrics have more freedom than poems because there are no certain demands for them. Therefore, in the aspect of images, except for the history and standard of imagery, no clear difference between poetry and lyrics. Both of them use images to build a corresponding atmosphere that adapts the feelings of the works.

2.4 Differences in Imagery

In general, poems attach importance to building artistic conception, while lyrics pay attention to the use of images. Most poems have their own implications, which need people to reflect and care about beauty as a unity. In comparison, lyrics use images to express feelings directly. Poetry is reading words, as a reader, people can have various understandings, and there is no time limit, while lyrics are combined with tunes and melodies, which distract people’s attention to the words and make people move in a short time [8].

3 Content

3.1 Elements for Expressing

Emotional expression is one of the main functions of poetry. From the aspect of content, poetry can be divided into lyric poetry, narrative poetry and philosophical poetry, and more. Poets may express their feelings directly, depict something vividly, or appeal to

some far-reaching thoughts. Each poem has its unique context. Different times, spaces, cultures, and customs in different cultural environments of different times and regions can also have some impact on the thinking mode of poets and the content, structure, and logic of poems. The poet expresses their feelings through its objective counterpart, namely image, which can be enhanced by rhythm as well. The emotional content and rhythmic form make poetry a unity of social value and artistic value.

3.2 Differences from Three Aspects of Content

First, in general, lyrics are more likely to have a preference for expressing positive thoughts. The images in the lyrics should be analyzed with their cultural context. However, the attitudes of poems always remain multiple and mingled and sometimes can be ironic [9].

Second, lyrics build the intertextuality among history, biography, culture and pop music, and more. Meanwhile, the content of lyrics can be inserted with the writer's own experience and feelings, and sometimes they also make lyrics mingled with literary and film works, making them equipped with literariness [10].

Third, lyrics without melody are actual poems in a broad sense instead of real lyrics. This is the main point that decides the differences between lyrics and modern poems in contents and forms. A song would be performed in public, so the lyrics must be popularized to meet the demand of the masses. Most of them are moving and use simple words rather than choosing scads of delicate words. Compared with lyrics, poems cannot reach the same effect that songs have because they only have words to build a mental world [11].

There are several examples. Swedish melodic doom metal band Draconian adapted Wordsworth's poem "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal", and that indicates poems can be transferred into lyrics without any movement of the words. Meanwhile, when combined with emotions and melodies, something would change. The outlook of the poem and the lyrics can be different: they do share the same words, but they express so differently; while the poem is created with some emotions and atmosphere, and with musical instruments and stage performance, this kind of atmosphere of a poem can be amazingly presented.

Iron Maiden bassist Steve Harris also adapted Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and this adoption indicates that the progression of the story of the poem can be presented by instrumental arrangement. Even if the words are changed, it still tells the complete story in a multidimensional way, with another kind of form.

There is another example of Yeats' "A Dream of Death". Circle of Ouroboros is an experimental black metal band hailing from Finland, and it adapted the poem. This indicates that through the instrumental arrangement, the atmosphere and emotion of the poem can be changed. The audience can feel different when hearing the song and the poem reading. Some images in the original poem may be endowed with other meanings, under the condition that there is no word changing [12].

3.3 Connections and Differences in Forms

First, the definition of lyrics can be wide enough to cover some famous writers' works, so they do not need to be so strict with the forms of lyrics only if they have their own

content to show. However, some lyricists are not satisfied with writing random words. Instead, they are eager to write lyrics as poems, weighing every single word carefully. Poetry is an art of language, and it can be read as well as voiced and listened to. Singing is a way of voicing, and it can help poems to be created, spread, and remembered. As a result, some songwriters use their poems as lyrics, composing music for them [13].

Second, if one listens to recordings of poets such as Robert Browning, Alfred, Tennyson or W.B. Yeats, the musical, oratorical and incantatory nature of their recitation is clearly apparent in their delivery. Like singers today, this allowed the words' meanings to live in the listeners' minds in their remembered state and further meanings to emerge through this interaction.

Third, lyrics are usually combined with other musical things, and then together, they make some impact. To coordinate with melodies, the length of the lyrics must be considered, but poems can be very short or very long. Moreover, lyrics can build a more intimate relationship with the audience rather than sole musical instruments playing. The lyrics are more concrete [14].

4 Language

4.1 Differences in Word Choosing

The adjectives used in lyrics are more rhyming than that in poems, although sometimes they are the same in the semantic aspect. It is inferred that lyrics must consider compatibility with melodies, musical instruments, tempos, vocals, and the quality of recordings, but poems do not have such problems. Sometimes people use more obscure words or infrequently used words in poems while using common words in songs. That is because some poems are written for literature lovers, not for the public [15]. Sometimes lyrics use simple words to build communication with the audience, and because poetry can elicit strong emotional responses, and this is analogous to people's responses to music, lyrics can do the same [16].

Then, lyrics emphasize the expression of subjective emotions, so there are two roles of sender and receiver. They always have the intention to tell, to narrate, and need a response from the audience, so they use the first person and the second person obviously. However, poetry is not as direct as lyrics [9].

4.2 Differences in Translation

Another aspect is translation. Lyrics translation belongs to literary translation, so it must obey the rules of literary translation. The closest form to lyrics is poetry; some songs are just poetry with melody, and others have the same sense of beauty as poems. In this field, lyrics translation can refer to poetry translation, but the musicality should not be ignored [17].

4.3 Common Points

Furthermore, repetition is an important form of art used both in poems and lyrics, so as ambiguity, which can arouse people's radioactive thoughts of the text even if it may also lead to misunderstanding [18].

5 Conclusion

To sum it up, this paper has compared poetry and lyrics from three perspectives in general, and it is obvious that they have many common grounds in most parts, but there are still subtle differences that make them recognizable and distinctive from each other. When people talk about these two things, many of them regard them as the same. However, it is worth and necessary to analyze the slight differences because it will deepen people's understanding of these two historic art forms, thus they can do better in one field with skills used in the other field.

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