

Sound Patterning: The Use of Alliteration in T. S. Eliot's Poetry

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Abstract

A thorough review of literature shows that there is a positive relationship between poetry, as a mode of literature, and phonology. This paper identifies the instances of sound patterning i.e., alliteration in five randomly selected poems written by T. S. Eliot who is undeniably one of the landmarks in the history of English poetry.

This study, as reflected in the title, addresses major and minor questions all of which revolve around the intimacy between the creative process of constructing a poem and sound patterning e.g. alliteration, whether they are extremely casual or highly elaborated.

This considerably long survey helps show that Eliot furnishes his readers with ‘alliteration’ as a stylistic device and as a poet succeeded artistically in showing that alliteration is quantitatively heavy which confirms the first hypothesis of this study and voiceless consonants are repeated initially and this, in turn, validates the second hypothesis. The voiceless consonant /s/ is widely used i.e., (60) times in the poems under investigation.

Introduction

As is well-known the greatness of literature is to be judged by a number of standards e. g literary, aesthetic etc. Literary texts, like non-literary texts are subject to linguistic investigation, in general. How a poem is originated can be of help to arrive at a phonological analysis and appreciation.

Eliot bridges the gap between poetry and phonology when he touches upon the inevitability of ‘alliteration’ which fosters the mutual interdependence between both disciplines. The ingredients of Eliot’s poems lie basically in the profound application of alliteration which highlights his sublime literary or phonological taste of both readers and listeners. Eliot accomplishes his appointed task satisfactorily. Of course, the inevitable problem he has to face is how to perfect the organization of his poetic/phonological experiences. In our view, we equate sound patterning with the human

organism i.e., as long as the human organism practices breathing to survive, poetry likewise needs sound patterning.

Problem of the study

The problem of this study lies in the following questions:

- 1- Which alliteration does Eliot employ in composing his poems?
- 2- How often does he use alliteration in building up his poems?

Hypotheses of the study

It is assumed that:

- 1- Alliteration is widely used in Eliot's poetry.
- 2- The voiceless consonants are highly distributed in employing alliteration.

Aim of the study

The aim of this paper is to provide the readers with both the theoretical and practical background on alliteration as it is deliberately employed by the English poet T.S. Eliot.

Limits of the study

The present study is restricted to investigating the following points:

- 1-The role of alliteration in crafting literary texts, poetry in particular.
- 2-Five poems are randomly chosen from T.S. Eliot's poetry as representatives of English poetry.

Value of the study

The exploration undertaken in the present study is justifiable and worthwhile since it tackles an important area, i. e., alliteration in Eliot's poetry. It is hoped that this study will be of considerable significance to all those who are, wholly or partially, interested in phonology and literature.

SECTION ONE

1.1 Phonetics and Phonology

A review of previous literature shows that ‘phonetics’ and ‘phonology’ are interrelated. Broadly speaking, phonetics is defined as “the science which studies the characteristics of human sound-making, especially those sounds used in speech, and provides methods for their description, classification and transcription.” (Crystal, 2004:289).

It has often been viewed by most linguists and researchers, among which is Poutain (2000:13) that phonology is “the study of the sound system (the phonemes) of a language”. Coxhead (2000:9) indicates that “phonology is more concerned with the underlying theory (i. e., the phonemes which underlie phones and the rules which govern the conversion of phonemes to phones and vice versa.”

In a recent series of investigations in related references, there is considerable evidence that a distinction must be drawn between ‘phonetics’ and ‘phonology’. This is clearly emphasized by Roca and Johnson (2000:1) who say: “the first distinction we must draw is between sound as sound (phonetics) and sound structure (phonology)”. Finch (2000:33-4) believes that “ a sound is both a physical and mental phenomenon”. Roach (2002:58) writes about the overlap between them. He declares that “ usually in phonetics we are only interested in sounds that are used in meaningful speech...this is sometimes known as linguistic phonetics”.

1.2 Sounds versus Letters

In an attempt to illustrate how linguistics works in literature, it is worth quoting Thornborrow and Wareing (1998:19) who state that “in order to be able to analyze the sound patterning in poems, we need a system which let us talk about sounds of language independently of the spelling system.”

It is a self-evident truth that there is no one-to-one correspondence between sounds and letters in English. So far, there has been a large body of work on the written representation of speech i.e., transcription. In this regard, Rogers (2000:16) stresses the fact that “transcription is the use of phonetic/phonemic symbols to write down the way an utterance is pronounced” (see also: Hartmann and stork, 1976:239; Abercrombie, 1980:128; Gimson, 1980:219; Lewis, 1989:37; Jones, 1992:12).

1.3 Consonants

It would be relatively easy to view consonant if each standpoint was associated with a similar definition. The widespread belief is that “a consonant is: 1- (in phonetics), a segment whose articulation involves a significant obstruction to air flow in the vocal tract.2- (in phonology), a segment which occupies a syllabic margin.” (Trask, 1996:87)

Below is a schematic illustration of the classification of English consonants:

Table (1) Classification of English Consonants

	BILABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	ALVEO-PALATAL	VELAR	GLOTTAL
STOP: VOICELSS VOICED	p b			t d		k g	
AFFRICATE: VOICELESS VOICED					tʃ dʒ		
FRICATIVE: VOICELESS VOICED		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ		h
LATERAL:VOICED				l			
NASAL: VOICED	m			n		ŋ	
SEMIVOWELS: VOICED(GLIDES)	w			r	j		

(Taken from Varshney, 1991:153)

Much of the pioneering works in English consonants (see, for example: Ward, 1972: 5 ; Gimson, 1985:23) depended on ‘voicing’ as a criterion in the categorization of consonants. Crystal (2004:413), among others, refers to the distinction between voiceless and voiced. In this connection, he (ibid.) says “Voiceless-voiced are fundamental terms referring to the auditory result of the vibration of the vocal cords i. e., voiced sound...; those produced with no such vibration are voiceless.”

Knutsson (2006: 1-2) takes the same view and relates voiceless-voiced to fortis- lenis (see also: Fromkin and Rodman, 1988:35; Roach, 2000:29; Kreidler, 2003:2).

SECTION TWO

2.1 Phonology and Poetry: Overview

To start with, there is a harmony between sense and sound (Savory, 1975:5). It is significant to state that since poetry is primarily based on an auditory criterion, phonological devices can be easily distinguished by those who listen to a poet who recites his poem.

A poem is actually regarded as a text. In this respect, Halliday (1971:122) views the term 'text' as "the linguistic form of the social interaction". In point of fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that a text i.e., a poem is regarded as a piece of music. On text categorization, House (1981:23) lists the following types: content-oriented, form-oriented, cognitive and subsidiary texts. The so-called literary text lies under the form-oriented class. Bell (1991:204), on the other hand, proposes: literary, institutional and scientific texts. It is important to state that Knight (1981:218) points out that a literary text supplies the reader with "a sudden burst of intellectual energy accompanied by a feeling of pleasure". A literary work is actually considered to be a complex organization with a host of meanings and relationships.

2.2 Stylistics

Presumably, a question may be asked: what is stylistics? To give an answer to this query. Thornborrow and Wareing (1993:3) state that "stylistic is concerned with the idea of 'style', with the analysis of literary texts, and with the use of linguistics. 'Style' is usually understood within this area of study as the selection of certain linguistic forms or features over other possible ones."

Both (ibid.) take the same position with Hatim and Mason (1999: 10) who observe that "style may be seen as the result of motivated choices made by text producers..." Elgin (1979:156) specifies the aspects of stylistics as prosody, prosodic, poetics, metrics, rhetoric, and literary analysis.

2.3 Poetic Language

Tracing arguments on poetic language, it is useful to state the fact that poetry is pertinently related to language. In this regard, Saporta (1960:882) points out that poetry is not only language but also an art. Leech (1969:5), in his turn, draws a distinction between poetic language and ordinary language. The language of poetry is necessarily accessible both to linguistic analysis and literary criticism. It is characterized by a host of figures of speech. It is semantically deviant in contrast with literal language which is basically rule-governed.

2.4 Sound Patterning

To illustrate the different forms of sound patterning, it is worth quoting the following two lines of Marlow's poem 'The Passionate Shepherd' :

Line No.

18 Come live with me and be my love

19 And we will all the pleasures prove

Rhyme is incorporated in: me /mi/ - be /bi/; alliteration in :me /mi/ - my /mai/; assonance in: come /kʌm/ - love /lʌv/; consonance: will /wil/ -all; /ɔ:l/; reverse rhyme in: with - /wið/ - /will /wil/; and pararhyme in: live /liv/ - love /lʌv/ (Thornborrow and Wareing, 1998:31).

2.5 Forgrounding

The term 'foregrounding' was first introduced by the structuralists of Prague School of linguistics who used it to describe 'deviation'. Halliday (1971:39) refers to foregrounding as 'prominence'. His discussion outlines the point that there are "patterns of prominence in a poem or prose text, regularities in the sound...such prominence contributes to the writer's total meaning".

2.6 The Poetic Functions of Sound

Thornborrow and Wareing (1998:43-5) enumerate the poetic functions of sound as follows:

- 1- For aesthetic pleasure.
- 2- To conform a convention.
- 3- To experiment or innovate with a form.
- 4- To demonstrate technical skills, and for intellectual pleasure.
- 5- For emphasis or contrast.
- 6- onomatopoeia.

SECTION THREE

3.1 T.S Eliot: Life and Works

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis on September 26, 1888, and died in London on January 4, 1965. Although Eliot deferred to Yeats as “ the greatest of his time, he was himself the most famous...He was a man of keen intellect, capable of developing a philosophical position...He was better equipped than any other poet to bring verse fully into the twentieth century”.

The theme which prevails all his work is, in its various forms, love. His work are presented in: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Whispers of Immortality, Sweeny Among the Nightingales, Gerontion, The Waste Land etc. (Ellmand and O’Clair, 1988:482-505).

3.1.1 T.S Eliot’s Phonology

As a modern English poet and like his predecessors, Eliot achieves the musical effect of his poems by the employment of alliteration, which is useful, only in so far as it is intentionally used by poets in general.

3.1.2 Phonological Parallelisms

Phonological parallelisms are incorporated in alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, rhythm and meter. When phonological devices such as alliteration are used in poetry, they elevate the text from the ordinary to the poetic level. Leech (1969:5) indicates that there is no dividing line between the ordinary level and the poetic level.

Repetition is an active stylistic device. Chapman (1973:80) purports that it is employed under the control and force of a certain mental condition or flow of emotion. Rabah (1997:130) among others, believes that “repetition is considered to be deviation from the norm, and consequently offers prominence...”.

3.2 Alliteration

There is a mechanical explanation for alliteration. Lefevere (1992:49-50) says “one of the most effective characteristics of literary style is poetic diction which lies in alliteration”. He (ibid.) adds that alliteration is “the repetition of the initial consonant sounds”.

3.3 Data Analysis

At first sight, alliteration is easily observable, a notion, which readily leads to the reason behind the occurrence of alliteration. It is used to show vividness and emphasis. Moreover, it adds an aesthetic touch to poetry (ibid.1992:58).

The following analysis (1*) will show instances of alliteration in five (2*) randomly selected Eliot’s poems taken from “Anthology of Modern Poetry” (1988:482-505)

- 1- In the analysis, repeated words are not considered.
- 2- It is impossible to analyse the whole poem (No.5) i. e., only three selected parts are analytically examined because “The Waste Land” is a long poem.

Poem No. 1

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Line No.

- 2- When the evening is spread out against the sky
20- Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
and seeing that it was a soft October night
24- For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
64- But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!
72- Of lonely man in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows ?
75- And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
101- After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled street
111- No! I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be:
113- To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
128- When the wind blowes the water white and black.
130- By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown.
131- Till human voices wake us and we drown.

Poem No. 2

“Whispers of Immortality”

Line No.

- 1- Webster was much possessed by death
2- And saw the skull beneath the skin;
4- Leaned backward with lipless grin.
5- Daffodil bulls instead of balls
6- Stared from the sockets of the eyes!
8- Tightening is lusts and luxuries.
9- Donne, I suppose, was such another
10- Who found no substitute for sense,
27- Distil so rank a feline smill

Poem No. 3

“Sweeney Among the Nightingales”

Line No.

- 1- A penneck Sweeney spread his Knees
3- Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
5- The circles of the stormy moon
12- Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees
18- Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;
23- Rachel nee Rabinovitch
39- And let their liquid siftings fall

Poem No. 4 “Gerontion”

Line No.

- 1- Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
2- Being read to be by a boy, waiting for rain.
6- Bitten by files, fought
8- And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
9- Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
10- Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.
16- Signs are taken for wonder. " We would see sign!
17- The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
20- In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
21- To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
24- who walked all night in the next room;
25- By Nakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
30- Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
34- History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
38- And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
39- That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
42- Into wweak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with

44- **N**either fear **n**or courage saves us. Unnatural vices
 47- **T**hese **t**ears are shaken from **t**he wrath-bearing tree.
 59- I have lost my **s**ight, **s**mell, hearing, taste and touch:
 60- How should I **u**se them for **y**our **c**loser **c**ontract?
 62- **P**rotract **t**he **p**rofit of **t**heir chilled delirium,
 65- In a **w**ilderness of mirrors **w**hat **w**ill the spider do,
 66- Suspend its operations, **w**ill the **w**eevils
 67- **D**elay? **D**e Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Camel whirled
 68- **B**eyond the circuit of the shuddering **B**ear
 69- In fractured atoms.
 Gull against the **w**ind, in the **w**indy straits

Poem No. 5
The Waste Land
1- The Burial of the Dead

Line No.

5- **W**inter kept us **w**arm, covering
 6- Earth in **f**orgetful snow, **f**eeding
 7- A **l**ittle **l**ife with dried tubers.
 8- **S**ummer **s**urprised us, coming over the **s**tarnbergersee
 13- And **w**hen **w**e **w**ere children, staying at the arch-duke's
 16- Marie, hold on tight. And down **w**e **w**ent.
 17- In the mountains, there you **f**eel **f**ree.
 20- Out of his **s**tony rubbish? **S**on of man,
 22- A heap of **b**roken images, where the sun **b**eats,
 24- And the dry **s**tone on **s**ound of water. only
 25- **T**here is shadow under **t**his **r**ed **r**ock,
 40- Living **n**or dead, and I knew **n**othing,
 41- **L**ooking into the heart of **l**ight, the silence
 46- **W**ith a **w**icked pack of cards. Here said she

- 49- Here is the man with three staves, and here the wheel
 53- Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
 54- Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
 67- To where saint Mary woolnoth kept the hours
 68- With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
 69- There I saw one I knew, and stopped him. crying: stetsan!
 70- You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
 71- That corpse you planted last year in your garden.

2-Landscapes

I- New Hampshire

Line No.

- 2- Between the blossom-and the fruit-time:
 5- Black wing, brown wing, hover over;
 7- To-day grieves, to-morrow grieves;
 8- Cover me over, light-in-leaves;
 11- Spring, sing,

V- Cape Ann

Line No.

- 1- O quick quick, quick hear the song-sparrow,
 2- Swamp-sparrow, fox-sparrow, vesper-sparrow
 3- At dawn and dusk. Follow the dance
 6- With shrill whistle the rote of the quail, the bob-white
 7- Dodging by bay-bush. Follow the feet
 8- Of the walker, the water-thrust. Follow the flight

Results

Scrutinizing the poems under investigation, it is found that there are many occasions where alliteration is obviously evidenced. The results of this study can be briefly outlined in the following points:

1- Poem No. (1) contains instances of alliteration which appear mostly by the use of [s] i.e., (18) times. On the other hand, the following sounds are repeated as follows: /l/ (4) times; /n/ twice; /w/ (6) and /r/ twice, respectively.

2- In poem No. (2), again /s/ occurs heavily (11) times. At the other extreme, /l/ again exists (4) times; /w/, /b/, and /f/ each appears twice.

3- Poem No.3, once more, has the recurrence of /s/ i.e., (8) times.

4- Poem No.4 contains (11) instances of alliterating /s/. The dominant consonant in this poem is /w/, i.e., (17) times. /m/, /r/, /f/, /b/, /p/, /d/, /n/, /k/ and /j/ occur frequently as follows: (2), (2), (2), (8), (4), (4), (4), and (2), respectively.

5- Poem No. 5, as stated earlier, is a very long poem containing many parts. In the randomly selected parts, the following instances of alliteration are found:

a- In "The Burial of the Dead ", /s/ is employed (12) times while /w/ is initially repeated (15) times. Others appear as follows: /f/, /l/, /b/, /r/, /n/ and /j/ occur differently i.e., (6), (4) and each of the rest is found twice.

b- In 'Landscape', part I " New Hampshire", T. S. Eliot uses alliteration i.e., the /s/ appears just in (2) instances. The prevailing consonant is /b/ that is employed (4)times. A similar number of alliteration of /s/ is used with /d/ and /b/. The data shows that there are (2) instances of alliterating /f/. Finally, the investigation reveals the fact that /w/ is initially repeated (5) times in this part.

Conclusions

Issues on alliteration are examined in this study and summarized in the following points:

1- From the theoretical point of view, since poetry is primarily based on auditory criterion, phonological devices such as alliteration can be easily distinguished by listeners to a poet.

2- From the practical point of view, the analysis has revealed the following:

a- From the large set of words, one can find instances of alliteration in the following consonants: /s/, /l/, /n/, /w/, /r/, /b/, /f/, /m/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /ð/, /t/, /j/ and /p/.

b- The data suggests that the voiced consonants are less employed in T. S. Eliot's poem i. e., /l/, /n/, /w/, /r/, /b/, /m/, /d/, /g/, /ð/ and /j/. However, the voiceless consonants such as /s/, /f/, /k/, /t/, and /p/ are highly used as illustrative examples of alliteration in operation.

c- As far as phonological differences of occurrences are concerned, a close analysis of the poems reveals that /s/ has the largest number of the occurrences. On the contrary, /r/, /w/, /b/, /f/, /m/ and /j/ make the least number of occurrences i. e., (60) and (2), respectively.

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