

Politics, Music, Poetry in Afro-American Literature

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Abstract

Music allows politically charged African-American poetry to be both accessible and engaging to their audiences. Without music, these authors would have, I fear, drastically different impacts on the world today. By calling on a collective past and promoting a collective message through music, Hughes, Cortez, and Lamar are able to leave a lasting impact on the black community in the United States and the larger global community as well.

Keywords: music, black community, global community, politics

Introduction

Some scholars trust that the two disciplines must be studied individually, whereas others wish to believe the associations between the two. My paper begins with a question: if songs be able to be considered poetry, what other forms of music might also be measured poetry? Rap implements numerous poetic techniques such as rhyme, meter, anaphora, and many more. Some raps verses, for example Eminem's "Lose yourself," are still written in iambic pentameter, and reflect many examples of presentation poetry delivery. Why, then, is Bob Dylan's music considered literary when rap is so often not? Just what is music's relationship to poetry? How is music folded into the poetic tradition? Who uses music in their poetry? What work does music exactly do? And of course, how do these traditions intersect?

Olden times prove that poetry and music have long disappeared hand in hand. Finally, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were intended to be sung, or at the very smallest amount recited. On what position did this musical practice in poetry commence to give way to poems relying only on the words? At what time did music in poetry twist into an addition or an easy annotation when studying poetry? Instead of just reading the Odyssey, why do all academics not completely hold close the information that it was meant to be recited and sung? I argue that we must fully embrace the musical belief in poetry and use it as another tool for knowledge in our scholarly magazine. I am not saying we must pay no attention to the written

words of pleasing poetry or try to sing poetry that just was not intended to be musical. But I do suggest that we are missing out if we choose to pay no heed to music in poetry which was first written or collected with music and/or orality in mind music or orality in mind.

Earlier than we go any further, we should first look at certain key definitions that will inform the rest of this paper. First of all, I will describe how I am using the word development. I am defining development as a progress and not essentially a development. This is an explanation thought to tolerant the argument of this paper. I am not in dispute that Kendrick Lamar is a “better” poet than Jayne Cortez or Langston Hughes, for instance, and I am not arguing the opposite either. In fact, I make no worth finding on any of the poets I am studying.

Plate argues that the majority of the general public thinks rap is violent, vulgar, and rude. Though, by looking closely at Lamar’s work, I will argue that his rap immensely follows the customs of poetry, after all, he writes in lines, metaphors, rhymes, and further. Nowhere in the description of poetry is there a specification which states that words cannot have a musical supplement or an oral element. Music, too, must be clear. Thomas Clifton defines with his mind, his feelings, his senses, his will, and his metabolism" (Clifton 10). I would like to emphasize “any sound” taken from Clifton’s definition. Surely poetry falls into the group of “any sound.”

Over the course of America’s history, field hollers and slave songs have blurred the line between poetry and song. The same tradition holds true today with African-American poetry. The poems of Langston Hughes sway with the tom-tom of the Blues. The music poem hybrid verses of Jayne Cortez swing with mood of Jazz. The bars of Kendrick Lamar provokes thought with the complexity of poetry. Each figure is a hybrid of the two, a manifestation of a rich, complex, and enduring African-American tradition. They represent their communities and their heritage, making works for their own people while simultaneously spreading their political messages to the masses.

Finally, rhythm, rhyme, and meter are all based on sound. Whereas I am not arguing that all poetry is music and all music is poetry, here, I am stress the conventional similarities between the two forms that permit us to unite poetry and music in the ways I will be doing right through this study. A last essential consideration is that I will be analyzing music in written form all over this study. I will evaluate Lamar’s rap as written poetry although his rap is meant to be heard. A fundamental statement I am making during this study is that poetry exists on a field. On one end of the field is customary, prepared, poetry. On the other end is Lamar’s rap. The whole thing falls somewhere within that field. In this reading, I consider the sounds and audio effects that Lamar and also Jayne Cortez apply every time necessary, however I focus mostly on their words. However, I propose that the person who reads of this

paper take note to the Cortez and Lamar poems I talk about to get a more complete idea as to what I am writing about.

Thinking about the conclusion of this paper, I am continuously nagged with the thought that music is not respected as much as traditional poetry is in the traditional literary canon. While I understand that this sentiment is changing and music is gaining more and more respect daily, I am still disturbed by the slow-moving nature of literature. Just because something is a poem does not mean it cannot also be a great song or vice versa. We are too singular in our categories.

The definition of poetry is this, "A composition, often in Lines, that draws on some or all of the following common features: rhythm, meter, figuration" (Princeton *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*). The definition is distinctly open. Poetry is meant to be experimentation, pushing boundaries and testing new waters. Music, despite its long tradition in the poetic canon, has fallen out of favor in modern times. However, it is up to us as scholars to value this history and remember it.

Looking at these poets through an interdisciplinary lens is important and necessary to understand how they and their work functions. One can never understand the true magnitude and importance of these artists works without focusing on both poetry and music. Written word and music are intertwined into the very DNA of Hughes, Cortez, and Lamar. We, as an academic community, owe it to these artists to study all facets of their work, not just bits and pieces.

We as academics also owe it to artists to be open minded about their work. Where would the English literature community be if we chose to ignore Hughes's, Cortez's, and, perhaps mostly so, Lamar's work simply because it was intertwined with music? And where would the American music community be if it chose to ignore these artists as well? Instead, we should build bridges and work together to learn for the sake of improving. Together, with an open and inclusive mind, is where great academic progress is made.

The lessons I learned through reading across disciplines are not unique to the study of these three poets. Throughout the academic world, interdisciplinary study is breaking into the unknown and challenging many scholarly norms. My hope is that this project has inspired others to think about the importance of interdisciplinary work and the fruits it can bear. The world is full of overlapping categories and classifications.

Finding these overlaps and studying them with open minds is the key to progressing the academic world.

References

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