

A New Criticism Analysis in the Song Lyric *Gunslinger* by Avenged Sevenfold

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Abstract

This research analyzes Avenged Sevenfold's song *Gunslinger* through the framework of New Criticism, focusing on its intrinsic elements rather than external contexts such as authorial background or reader response. The study aims to identify the song's central theme, figurative language, and symbolism that construct its unity of meaning. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through close reading of the lyrics, emphasizing devices such as personification, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, and repetition. The findings reveal that the main theme of the song is emotional struggle rooted in longing and separation. The figurative expressions serve to build tension between pain and hope, while symbols such as "home," "letters," and "stars" reinforce the spiritual and emotional depth of the narrator's internal conflict. The analysis shows that all linguistic elements interact cohesively to create organic unity, where each line reinforces the central theme of devotion and resilience. This study concludes that song lyrics can function as literary texts with complex aesthetic and emotional dimensions. Applying New Criticism demonstrates how intrinsic elements—theme, diction, and figurative structure—contribute to the organic meaning of the work, affirming the approach's relevance for interpreting modern creative expressions and encouraging critical engagement with music as a form of literature.

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, attracting the attention of critics who have developed various approaches to interpret texts. These approaches include Historical Criticism, Biographical Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminist Criticism, and many others. Among them, New Criticism, which emerged in the early twentieth century, remains influential due to its focus on the intrinsic elements of a text. Spingarn (1911) state that every work of art is an organism governed by its own law. Instead of relying on the author's background, historical context, or readers responses, New Criticism emphasizes close reading to uncover how diction, imagery, figurative language, and structure contribute to the overall meaning of a work. Song lyrics, much like poetry, can also be approached from New Criticism perspective. Both are forms of artistic expression that employ language to convey ideas, emotions, and narratives. Lyrics frequently make use of literary devices such as metaphor, symbolism, personification, and repetition, which enable them to function as modern forms of poetry. Moreover, they often explore universal human experiences such as love, longing, struggle, and hope making them a fertile ground for literary analysis.

Emotional struggle can be defined as an intense internal conflict involving conflicting emotions, desires, or values within an individual, such as longing, grief, or guilt. In many contemporary songs, emotional struggle manifests as an inner conflict between longing and loss, hope and despair. These conflicts are often expressed through figurative language such as metaphor, symbolism, and imagery. Such figurative devices allow the listener to feel the tension and pain of separation rather than merely understand it. According to Fávero et al. (2021) emotional experiences are shaped by both conscious and unconscious processes of regulation, and difficulties in managing, accepting, or expressing emotions can generate intense conflicts within relationships. These difficulties highlight how emotional struggle is not only a psychological phenomenon but also a literary theme, particularly in song lyrics that convey universal experiences of love, separation, and resilience. From a literary perspective, such expressions of emotion can be examined using New Criticism, a theory that focuses on the intrinsic elements of a text its language, imagery, symbolism, and structure without relying on external context such as author biography or historical background.

In this study the Researcher focuses on song lyrics Avenged Sevenfold's Gunslinger, a song that expresses the emotional struggle of being separated from a loved one.

"Gunslinger" is an Avenged Sevenfold song from their fourth album, titled *Avenged Sevenfold*, released in 2007 through Warner Bros. and Hopeless Records. Although song lyrics have been studied from various critical perspectives, *Gunslinger* has not yet been analyzed through the lens of New Criticism. This research therefore seeks to fill that gap by identifying the song's central theme, examining its figurative language, and interpreting the symbolism that reinforces the narrative of longing and separation. Applying New Criticism approach, this research demonstrates how the song achieves unity of meaning through its intrinsic elements, positioning *Gunslinger* not only as a piece of music but also as a literary text worthy of critical attention. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a fresh perspective on the analysis of song lyrics in the field of literary studies. It highlights the relevance of New Criticism in examining contemporary works and encourages critical engagement with music as a significant cultural and literary phenomenon.

Music, particularly song lyrics, is one of the most expressive forms of art that conveys human emotions, experiences, and conflicts. Like poetry, lyrics use language not only to tell stories but also to evoke feelings through imagery, diction, and figurative language. One of the recurring emotional experiences found in modern songs is emotional struggle, which refers to an internal conflict involving longing, grief, and hope. This struggle is often conveyed through poetic devices that allow listeners to feel tension, loss, and yearning rather than merely understand them intellectually. *Gunslinger* by Avenged Sevenfold captures this experience vividly, depicting the pain of separation and the persistent hope of reunion.

According to the researcher's knowledge, no prior study has specifically analyzed Avenged Sevenfold's *Gunslinger* through the lens of New Criticism. Several studies have demonstrated that song lyrics can be critically examined as literary texts. For example, Ayu et al. (2023) analyzed Taylor Swift's *The Man* through feminist criticism and revealed how gender issues are represented in its lyrics. Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) employed psychoanalytic criticism to interpret metaphors in Billy Joel's *Vienna*, showing how symbolic language reflects psychological struggles. These studies confirm that song lyrics, like poetry, contain intrinsic elements such as theme, figurative language, and symbolism that can be analyzed using literary theory. Building on this foundation, the present study fills the gap by applying New Criticism to *Gunslinger*, focusing on its Theme, Intrinsic Elements and Figurative Language to uncover the organic unity of its narrative of longing and separation. However, research that applies New Criticism to song lyrics remains limited, as most studies on music and literature focus on social, cultural, or psychological

approaches. Even though several studies have explored song lyrics as literary works, few have analyzed how emotional struggle is constructed through intrinsic devices within the framework of New Criticism. This gap highlights the need to re-examine song lyrics as self-contained texts that possess unity and depth of meaning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New Criticism

Within the framework of New Criticism, figurative language is considered a fundamental component of textual meaning rather than a decorative feature. Tyson (2006) explains that close reading requires examining how literary devices such as metaphor, symbolism, personification, and irony interact to create tension and unity. Through these devices, language transforms abstract emotion into concrete expression, allowing readers to experience meaning through form and structure instead of relying on external context.

In song lyrics, figurative language functions similarly to poetry by organizing emotion into aesthetic structure. Devices like metaphor and repetition intensify feelings of longing and conflict, while imagery and symbolism build coherence throughout the text. As Tyson, (2006) notes, a literary work becomes “an experience of life organized through language” (p. 139). Thus, figurative language contributes directly to the organic unity of the text, enabling emotional struggle to emerge naturally from the relationships among its intrinsic elements.

Emotional Struggle

Emotional struggle refers to an internal conflict that arises from opposing emotions such as longing, grief, and hope. According to Fávero et al. (2021) emotional experiences are shaped by both conscious and unconscious processes of regulation, and difficulties in managing or expressing these emotions can lead to tension within relationships. When transposed into literature, this psychological tension becomes an aesthetic structure that can be perceived through diction, imagery, and rhythm. Within the perspective of New Criticism, such tension is a textual phenomenon rather than a psychological one, it is created by the interaction of the text's internal elements.

In poetic or lyrical works, emotional struggle is commonly expressed through contrasts and paradoxes, such as separation and reunion or pain and hope. These opposing forces generate intensity and depth, forming the core of the text's unity. By examining how language organizes these emotional contrasts, readers can uncover how the work transforms personal experience into aesthetic expression. Thus, emotional struggle serves

not only as the theme but as the structural energy that sustains the organic unity of a text, allowing emotion and form to merge into a single, coherent meaning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method within the framework of New Criticism. The primary data source consisted of the complete lyrics of *Gunslinger* by Avenged Sevenfold. Data were collected through the technique of close reading, focusing on intrinsic elements such as theme of the song, setting, character, point of view, figurative language and thematic structure.

The researcher served as the main research instrument, supported by note-taking and categorization. First, relevant lines containing figurative language and symbolic expressions were identified. Second, these lines were coded and classified according to categories of literary devices (e.g., personification, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism, repetition, alliteration). Finally, each device was interpreted in relation to the song's central theme of longing and separation.

This methodological approach ensured that the analysis remained text-centered, in accordance with the principles of New Criticism, which emphasize the organic unity of a literary work and reject reliance on authorial intention, historical background, or reader response.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Theme of *Gunslinger* by Avenged Sevenfold

The main theme of this song is longing and separated from the love one. The lyrics employs a deep yearning to reunite with the love one after being apart for a long time. Loyalty and hope also prevalent as the narrator reflect of enduring hardships while staying connected emotionally. Everyone who feels far away from their loved ones will relate to this song, which captures the universal experience of longing for connection and closeness (*Avenged Sevenfold – Gunslinger Lyrics | Genius Lyrics, n.d.*).

Intrinsic Elements of *Gunslinger*

Setting

There are hints of distant, suggested by the narrator being “gone far too long” and perhaps war-like environment “I won’t question why so many have died” reflecting on lives lost.

Characters

The song doesn't mentioned explicitly name of the characters but focused on the emotional states. There are 2 characters in this song. The Narrator, a person who deeply in love, physically separated and enduring the pain while holding on hope. The loved one, although doesn't present physically they are the source of narrator's strength and hope. The loved one are idealized as a source of peace and love. "My hearts always with you now" show the Narrator's bond with the loved one.

Point of view

Gunslinger is written by the first-person point of view. The Narrator speak as directly to the loved one, created an intimate and personal tone. The use of "I" and "you" strengthen the emotional impact, making the listener feel the depth of The Narrator's devotion.

Figurative Language in Gunslinger

These lyrics contain hyperbole because they exaggerate the length of the separation to emphasize the intensity of longing. The phrase "far too long" not only describes the duration, but also the heavy emotional feelings caused by the distance. In the context of New Criticism, this choice of diction reinforces the intrinsic meaning of the song by highlighting the themes of longing and separation. This hyperbole becomes part of the organic unity because, from the beginning of the song, this excessive longing forms the basis for the emotional conflict and the promise of return that is repeated in the chorus.

I've been gone for far too long (line 2)

This passage contains repetition and symbolism. This line is repeated several times throughout the song, and the repetition is not accidental it serves to reinforce the determination and promise to return. The word "home" has a symbolic meaning that transcends the meaning of a place of residence; it becomes a symbol of love, peace, and unity after suffering. Within the framework of New Criticism, this repetition creates organic unity because each part of the song returns to the core idea of longing and hope for home. The symbol of home unifies all the emotions of the song into a single, coherent thematic meaning.

But with all that we've been through (line 3)

After all this time I'm coming home to you (line 4)

This line contains personification because pain is described as if it has human characteristics that can be "recognized." Literally, one cannot "recognize" pain, but this expression places pain as a living entity that continues to accompany the speaker. In the

context of emotional struggle, this personification illustrates the speaker's closeness to the suffering that has become part of him, he no longer fights it, but understands and accepts it. From a New Criticism perspective, this style enriches the intrinsic meaning by revealing a paradox: the pain that once tormented him has now become part of his inner strength, reinforcing the themes of longing and endurance that are woven throughout the song.

The pain I've grown to know (line 6)

“I reach towards the sky” contains imagery, specifically a visual image that depicts someone reaching out their hand to the sky. This style of language creates an image of hope, prayer, or spiritual communication. The imagery helps listeners feel the speaker's longing and vulnerability, not just understand the words. In the context of emotional struggle, this imagery signifies an effort to stay connected despite being separated by distance, reinforcing the underlying mood of hope in the song.

I reach towards the sky, I've said my goodbyes (line 9)

The phrase “My heart's always with you now” is a symbolism that represents love and emotional bonds that cannot be separated by distance or time. “Heart” here symbolizes feelings, loyalty, and inner attachment. Within the framework of New Criticism, this symbol enriches the intrinsic meaning of the song by emphasizing the unity between love and suffering two things that are contradictory yet complementary. This symbol of the heart becomes a link between longing and hope, strengthening the organic unity of the song as a reflection of the emotional struggle to stay connected despite physical separation.

My heart's always with you now (line 10)

This phrase contains personification because prayers are described as having the ability to “penetrate” something and achieve their goal. Literally, prayers cannot move physically, but through this personification, the author describes spiritual strength and the belief that hope and love can transcend the boundaries of distance and suffering. In the context of emotional struggle, this style of language shows the speaker's inner struggle to hold on to prayer as a form of fortitude in the midst of loss. From the New Criticism perspective, this personification plays an important role in building organic unity, as it reinforces the balance between suffering and hope that is central to the song's theme. Whenever despair arises, this spiritual belief affirms that love endures, while linking the emotional and religious aspects into a single intrinsic meaning.

My prayers have made it through, yeah (line 12)

The phrase “Letters keep me warm” contains personification because letters are described as if they are capable of providing warmth like living beings. Literally, letters cannot warm someone, but in an emotional context, letters become a symbol of the presence and affection of someone who is far away. This personification shows how memories and communication can be a source of strength for the speaker to endure loneliness. In New Criticism, this style of language reinforces the intrinsic meaning of the song because it presents the relationship between inanimate objects and human emotions as a unity that reflects organic unity.

Letters keep me warm (line 15)

The line “Helped me through the storm” is a metaphor, where “storm” symbolizes the difficulties, suffering, or emotional conflict experienced by the narrator during the separation. This metaphor describes the struggle of facing difficult times and shows that letters, as a form of memory or love, are a source of comfort in the storms of life. Thematically, this metaphor emphasizes the emotional struggle between loss and hope. In the framework of New Criticism, the metaphor enriches the meaning by showing how each element of the lyrics works together to create a balance between suffering and inner strength that binds the whole song together.

Helped me through the storm (line 16)

This line contains hyperbole because the phrase “waited so long” is used to exaggerate the length of the wait in order to emphasize the intensity of the speaker's longing. The exact length of time is not stated directly, but this expression describes an extraordinary longing and emotional suffering caused by separation. In the context of emotional struggle, this hyperbole shows the conflict between patience and the desire to be together immediately, creating an inner tension that is at the core of the speaker's feelings. From a New Criticism perspective, this hyperbole reinforces organic unity because it works in harmony with the repetition and symbolism in other lyrics all of which emphasize emotional struggle and the promise of return. In other words, this style of language affirms how extreme feelings of love and longing unite the overall meaning of the song.

I've waited so long just to come hold you (line 26)

The line “The stars in the night, they lend me their light” contains personification, because the stars are described as if they have the ability to “lend their light.” Literally, stars have no intentions or actions, but in the context of the lyrics, stars become symbols of hope and spiritual guidance. This personification illustrates that the narrator finds strength from nature and the sky, as if the universe is guiding him back to his loved one.

From a New Criticism perspective, this personification supports organic unity because it shows the emotional connection between humans and nature as a single meaning that reinforces the theme of hope amid suffering.

The stars in the night, they lend me their light (line 31)

The phrase “To bring me closer to heaven with you” contains symbolism, where “heaven” represents peace, eternal happiness, and true love. Heaven here is not only a spiritual place, but a symbol of emotional togetherness and the perfection of love. This symbolism emphasizes that the speaker's emotional struggle is not only to return physically, but also to achieve spiritual closeness with his loved one. In New Criticism, this symbolism reinforces the thematic meaning of the song because it unites the elements of suffering, hope, and love into a single, cohesive whole emphasizing the organic unity between body, soul, and feelings.

To bring me closer to heaven with you (bring me closer) (line 32)

There are 5 kinds of figurative language that used in Gunslinger. Figurative language such as Personification, Hyperbole, Symbolism, Imagery, Repetition used by Avenged Sevenfold for their work.

Table 1

No.	Type	Frequency
1.	Personification	4
2.	Hyperbole	2
3.	Symbolism	4
4.	Imagery	1
5.	Repetition	1
6.	metaphor	1
	Total	13

The figurative language throughout Gunslinger functions cohesively to build an organic unity that reveals the song’s emotional core its struggle between longing and hope. Each figurative device, whether in the form of hyperbole, personification, symbolism, or repetition, contributes to shaping the listener’s emotional experience. Hyperbole conveys the depth of longing and the unbearable distance; personification transforms abstract emotions like pain, prayer, and memory into living forces that accompany the narrator through his solitude. Symbolism, especially through recurring images such as home, letters, and stars, embodies love, hope, and spiritual guidance. Meanwhile, repetition binds the entire composition together, reminding the listener that despite time, loss, and suffering, the desire to return and reunite remains unbroken. Viewed through the lens of New Criticism, these elements collectively demonstrate the song’s organic unity each part

interdependent and essential in expressing the central emotional struggle. Thus, *Gunslinger* is not merely a narrative of separation but a poetic reflection of endurance and devotion, where language, sound, and feeling merge into a unified expression of human resilience.

CONCLUSION(S)

The analysis of *Gunslinger* by Avenged Sevenfold shows that the song articulates an emotional struggle rooted in longing and separation. Through figurative devices such as personification, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, and repetition, the lyrics portray the narrator's conflicting emotions: the pain of distance, the grief of loss, and the hope of reunion. The chorus, in particular, crystallizes this struggle by repeatedly affirming the promise of "coming home," making emotional conflict both the subject and the structural core of the text. Applying New Criticism, the study demonstrates that these intrinsic elements achieve organic unity: every verse, pre-chorus, and refrain reinforces the central theme of longing, emotional endurance, and eventual return. This highlights that emotional struggle in song lyrics can be examined as a literary theme, and that New Criticism remains a powerful approach for uncovering how repetition, figurative language, and structure work together to produce meaning.

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