Iteration as an Idiosyncrasy of Speech in English Drama of the 16th-17th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

The article is dedicated to iteration as an idiosyncrasy of speech of the personages in English drama of the 16th-17th centuries. It reflects personality and expresses emotions. Iteration is used as a means of individualization of characters.

KEYWORDS: *iteration, idiosyncrasy, portraying, emotions, character, individuality, repetition.*

Iteration may serve five purposes : to depict excitement or deep emotion, as a means of emphasis, for realistic, colloquial touches, for rhetorical ornamentation and for the portrayal of character. Idiosyncrasy of speech characterizes a unique way of communication, featuring words and expressions distinctive to an individual, setting them apart from common usage. It encompasses personalized phrases and vocabulary that distinguish one's speech. Repetition is essentially an emotional reflex, and it is as such that it chiefly occurs: even the more rhetorical emphatic use, where it is employed to draw attention to a particular word or phrase, is generally tined emotionally as well.

The employment of iteration in portraying character was the point on which attention has been chiefly focused. Shakespearean character's repetitions seem to be a complete and accurate reflection of his whole personality, the effect seems to be due not to any laborious effort on the author's part, but to his ability to enter into the feelings of his creations and to mould his language to the character as he has conceived it in its general outlines. And it is just because the device is employed unconsciously in the main, that it appears ultimately as a fairly accurate gauge of the vitality of an author's character-drawing in general.

Many nuances of tone can be suggested by means of iteration. There is the rhetorical, ornamental type favoured by Polonius in *Your noble son is mad; mad call I it,* II ii 92 and *I have a daughter, have while she is mine.* I ii 106, a foolish figure one might call it, using his own words, which serves to reinforce the maundering effect of his other repetitions. The ghost makes use of another rhetorical figure- *With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,- O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power to seduce- won to his shameful lust.* I 5 43, which gives his speech a certain stiff grandeur and formality to be noted also in his solemn, treble repetitions with their rhetorical tmesis- *List, list, O, list!* and *O, horrible! O, horrible; most horrible!* in Ophelia's replies as she chats with Hamlet during the play scene there is a hint of flirtatious banter, not strong enough to act unpleasantly, but suggestive of the gallantry of the court: *You are keen, my lord, you are keen and You are naught, you are naught.* III ii 158 and 262. Further, iteration is very frequent when one has lost the thread of one's discourse, or is searching for a word. One such very characteristic example, that once more stresses his senility, falls to Polonius- *And then, sir does he this,- does, what was I about to say?* II, ii 49, and Hamlet, straining his memory for a quotation, or extemporizing a verse takes refuge in repetition: *Begin at this line: let me see, let me see.* II ii 480 or *a very, very- pajock.* III ii 300. Then there is the inconsequential rambling of Ophelia in her madness- *Good night, ladies; good-night, sweet ladies; good-night, good-night.* IV V 72. But none of these effects is repeated with sufficient frequency to constitute a trait of individuality. Not even the meditative, reflective tone of Hamlet's

To die; to sleep; no more; To die, to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream. III I 60 is repeated.

Yet there remains one type of repetition that is decidedly characteristic of Hamlet, that is made use of by no other speaker, while Hamlet employs is no less than six times. The following examples were already noted by Bradley as being intensely characteristic: *Very like, very like. Stay'd it long?* I ii 236, *Words, words, words* (in answer to *What do you read my lord?*) II ii 196, *You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal; except my life, except my life, except my life.* II ii 225*, I humbly thank you, well, well, well* III I 92, and to these may be added as similar in tone: *Why, right, you are I' the right* I v 126 and *Yours, yours* (in answer to Osric's *I commend my duty to your lordship*) V ii 190 [3,41]. It should be mentioned, in order to show that the constitution of this group, difficult though it be to define what connects the examples, is not entirely subjective, that we had grouped them together before reading Bradley's remarks, and had not, consciously at least, any memory of the examples he had chosen, or what he had said about them. But we can only reindorse his words when he says 'Is there anything that Hamlet says or does in the whole play more unmistakably individual than these replies?' [3, 62]. Yet when Bradley pointed to the intense individuality of these repetitions as a proof that repetition as a whole was characteristic of Hamlet, he was surely making a great error in logic. The remarks are individual, not because they contain repetitions of a peculiar type. It is useless therefore to appeal to their individual flavor as a proof that Hamlet's speech is characterized by repetitions as such. They cannot, in fact, be used as a proof of anything until the essence of their individuality is determined.

And what is it that constitutes their personal flavor? In the first place three of them contain not a mere doubling of a word or phrase, but actually a trebling, a simple trebling without variation, practically the only such examples in the play: for both the ghost and Horatio, in addressing the ghost, interrupt their chains of repetition by tmesis. *List, list, O list! or Stay; speak, speak! I charge thee speak!* There remain as the only other example of simple treble repetition, the confused cries of the courtiers *Lights, lights, lights!* III ii 268, which can hardly be compared with Hamlet's reiterations. This is not, however, so very important in itself. Lear, for instance, several times rises to as many as six repetitions of a word, and Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* also has long runs of repetition, without either of them striking such an individual tone. And, which is more important, Hamlet can strike it with a simple repetition, *Very like, very like,* or even *Yours, yours.* A second point, as Bradley saw, is that these are all replies; even when not answers to a definite question they are replies to a remark, and made, therefore, on a falling tone [3,75]. In some cases even the iteration comes actually at the close of the sentence. For a strong emotional effect the rising tone and opening position are more usual, if not absolutely essential; these replies sound on the whole weary, and discouraged. They all mark a certain amount of annoyance, or contempt for the other speaker, and are made, one would say, in a tone of languid negligence. *Very like, very like* and *Right, you are in the right* mark a passing annoyance at a not very intelligent or superfluous remark *words, words, words* and *well, well, well* are answers to conventional questions, *yours, yours* a lazily condescending reply to the courtier's exaggerated politeness, while the trailing melody of the thrice repeated *except my life* suggests that the speaker's thoughts are already elsewhere. Weariness, contempt, a faint exasperation even, barely masked by the liquid tone, are the characteristics of these examples, and it is in these qualities that the personal, individual note resides. Again it is less the form of the repetition (though here the form, the slow dragging melody, has its part to play) than the idea, the mood behind the repetition, that is characteristic and that lends the figure its individual note. In form the six examples vary considerably: in some a languid melody is inherent in the words themselves, in others the languor would have to be supplied by the actor: the connecting link between them is mainly in the circumstances in which they are spoken. These phrases serve as illustration of idiosyncrasy of speech of personages.

For Chapman iteration is not only a reflection of an emotion, is not purely dependent on the external

stimulus, but is to a certain extent a reflection of personality; the reaction to the external stimulus is varied in accordance with the character of the speaker. It is not used as a habit of speech, it depends always on the emotion, but the emotion itself is tinged by the character of the speaker. Thus the stoical hero, Clermont, is never betrayed into the strong emotion that produces repetition. Indeed repetition does not seem with Chapman to be a masculine characteristic at all: he uses it to mark the cowardly frenzy of Montsurry as the revengers break in on him: — *Negligent traitors! Murther, murther, murther!... Show, show your purpose... Murther, murther!* I 186, and again at the end: *Treason, murther, murther!... No, no; come and kill* me. V 210. With this ignoble exception repetition is only twice put into the mouth of a male character, Baligny's *'Tis base, 'tis base!* II 189, and Chalon's *Stand, cowards, stand.* IV i 198. Otherwise it is reserved for the women, as in Charlotte's *When, when, will this revenge come?* I 180 (quoted by Baligny), Tamora's *Enter here, Enter, O enter .I* 184, *Fly, fly, and here Fix thy steel footsteps: Here, O here, where...* I 184. *Hide, hide thy snaky head; to cloisters fly,* and the Countess's Do it, for *heaven's love do it.* IV 201. The individualization is, of course, rudimentary only, there is no real differentiation in the melodies of the various speakers, no variety of moods, but the use of repetition does at least divide the characters into two categories, the emotional and the dispassionate, and their speech is differentiated accordingly.

The chief interest of Webster's repetitions lies, however, as with Shakespeare's, in the opportunity that they offer for reflecting character, idiosyncrasy of the characters' speech. A certain amount of character-drawing is contained in the mere distribution of the repetitions among the various speakers. In *The White Devil* the greatest number, 15, fall to Flamineo, the rather stagy, malcontent villain of the piece, and to Brachiano, the man of passion and impulse, who equals him. Vittoria herself, in spite of the importance of her part, is too cool and calculating a nature, too much mistress of herself to have many repetitions — only 5, scarcely more than are given to her mother Cornelia in the single scene of lamentation over her murdered son.

These lamentations of Cornelia's form a single clearly marked group: they consist of repetitions, not of single words, but of longer, more complex phrases in which the usual sharp, exclamatory force of iteration is wanting, and which suggest, therefore, a dull, hopeless grief, not wild passion. Even the imperative forms are complex: *Rear* up's *head, rear* up's *head, his bleeding inward will kill him. Vii34, Let me go, let me go.* V ii 53. Still more resigned and pathetic is the treble Oh, you *abuse me, you abuse me, you abuse* me! V ii 32, and, though in her anxiety to save her remaining son, the murderer of his brother, from the consequences of his act, she strikes a sharper note — He *lies, he lies: he did not kill him.* V ii 49, it is still much duller than the simple exclamation *Lies, lies!* would have been. Excellent further is Camillo's single repetition: *Shall I, shall I?* I ii 183, as he eagerly falls into the trap set him and himself provides the opportunity for his wife to play him false. The weak dependence of the question with which he accepts Flamineo's suggestion, the foolish eagerness, the excitement brought out by the repetition, form a picture of the man complete in four words, in which the music of the words and their contents supplement one another. Cardinal Monticelso's repetitions are appropriately slow and deliberate, and, in the main, conventional. His one interjection is *Well, well.* III i 140: he rebukes others with *Go to, go.* III i 230, and his encouragement is *Come, come, my lord.* III iii 1, where the apostrophe gives the whole a more suave, obliging tone. When Brachiano makes use of the locution, he does so sharply, abruptly, without any transitional apostrophe — *Come, come, let'see your cabinet, discover Your treasury of love letters. IV ii 6, Come, come, I will not hear you. I ii 305.* For Brachiano is accustomed to command, to follow his own headstrong will, and has no thought for conciliating others.

The dominant moods of a character are underlined by means of iteration. Character- drawing is much

more subtle than is suggested by a mere trick of repetition. It is also, one might feel inclined to say, more unconscious. It is the result of entering into the moods of the character and bringing the various tricks of speech, such as repetition, into harmony with these moods. It is not a mechanical trick, but the result of complete insight into the individuality of his characters, of identification with them.

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