



CHARACTER-DRAWING REPETITIONS IN ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDIES

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Abstract

The article deals with character-drawing repetitions in Elizabethan tragedies. These repetitions add vitality to the personages, reflect their traits of character, emotions. Characters retain their individuality. Realistic repetition, following the forms of ordinary conversation, creates a more vivid reality.

Key words :

Repetition, personality, individualization, character, vitality, portraying, character-drawing.

The employment of repetition in portraying character was the point on which attention has been chiefly focused. The 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.

Repetition 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[5, 87]. 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 [5, 77]. 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. One is not yet reduced to the entirely levelled, unindividual speech of the later dramatists.

The chief interest of Webster's repetitions lies, however, in the opportunity that they offer for reflecting character. 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 stogy, 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 repetition 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*. Vii 34, *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 — *Helies, 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 [8,32]. 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 [8, 32]. When Brachiano makes use of the locution, he does so sharply, abruptly, without any transitional apostrophe — *Come, come, let's see your cabinet, discover Your treasury of love letters*. IV ii 6, *Come, come, I will not hear you*. I ii 305 [8, 50]. For Brachiano is accustomed to command, to follow his own headstrong will, and has no thought for conciliating others.

With Dekker it is, naturally, impossible to form a true picture of the tragic repetitions, since no real tragedy can be assigned to him with any certainty. Still *The Honest Whore* [2,300-334], though not a tragedy, is at least a bourgeois melodrama, and the second of the two plays bearing this name pretty certainly by Dekker alone. Here, as in Heywood's bourgeois tragedy, pathos is an important ingredient, and also repetition is fairly frequent with a total of examples, or one 47 lines. On the other hand Dekker far exceeds Heywood in the use of reechoing, with 48 examples against Heywood's 8, and in his actual employment of repetition, as distinct from mere frequency, he differs no less markedly from him. For, although Dekker strives very clearly after sentimental effects, his repetitions are seldom pressed into the service of pathos — *Bellafront*, the patiently suffering and repentant heroine, has only 5 examples of repetition. Neither are they used at all markedly to express excitement or tension; they are, indeed, heaped more closely in the first two acts, where the figures are respectively 17 and 21, than in the more dramatic later acts with their 9, 12 and 9 repetitions. For it is chiefly as a means of character-drawing that Dekker employs repetition, and his method is more that of comedy, with its broad underlining of external and obvious idiosyncrasies, than of tragedy, with its subtler delineation of moods. And it is for that reason that the opening acts, where the outlines of the statically conceived characters are laid down, are especially rich in repetition. The chief employers of the figure are *Matheo*, the sanguine, devil-may-care scamp of a husband, with his 15 examples, and *Orlando Friscobaldo* with his 13 — the loving and sentimentally inclined old father who conceals a heart of gold under a rough outside—another sanguine type. There follows *Lodovico*, the gay courtier, with 9 examples, chiefly *come, come, fie, fie, no, no* and similar simple, colloquial types, while a considerable number—7—are given, as in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, to larger groups of persons—the guests at *Candido's* wedding, the apprentices etc. No other character exceeds 4 examples.

The types of repetition used by Dekker follow, on the whole the normal lines for the period: the dependent types form roughly a third of the total, and even the excess of exclamatory types over imperative forms — 32 to 15 — can scarcely be considered an individual note. For, though the proportion dependent to independent types is a fairly constant quantity for a given author, and largely depends on general tendencies of style, the proportion of imperative and exclamatory forms is no means so constant and cannot be said to reflect any definite tendency, for imperative forms are no

less ejaculatory than the exclamations, and the distribution of the two types seems to be largely a matter of chance. Of differentiation of the characters by the types or forms of repetition there is scarcely a trace with Dekker. The two chief employers of repetition, Matheo and Orlando, both of them sanguine types, are not distinguished by any characteristic melodies: both use repeated phrases — e. g. Matheo's *No, no, you say well, thou sayest well*. II i 105 and Orlando's *I eat snakes, my lord, I eat snakes*. I ii 58; both employ the same falling melody, the repetition of the closing words of a sentence — Matheo's *Your only fashion for a woman now is to be light, to be light*. III ii 53 and Orlando's *She is the gallipot to which these drones fly, not for love to the pot, but for the sweet sucket within it, her money, her money*. I ii 173 [2,200]. The proportion of the types used by each is roughly the same as for the play as a whole. It is the use of repetition as such that characterizes the effect of temperament and speech habit, not, as, with Shakespeare and Webster, and, to a lesser extent, with most dramatists of the period in as far as they differentiate the repetitions of their tragic characters at all, the emotion or mood behind the repetition. Not even the melodies are adapted to the temperament. None of the four examples quoted above strikes one, thus divorced from its context, as either hurried and nervous, or richly emotional. They are definitely slow and dragging in melody. It is only when taken in conjunction with the still more marked speech habits and traits of character of the pair, with Matheo's rapid, telegraphic sentences in which subject or verb are frequently omitted, or with Orlando's fiery, yet sentimental nature, that proper tone for these speeches can be read into them. Thus the repetition instead of serving to qualify the character, instead of reflecting an individuality in its music actually stands in need itself of a personality to qualify it. That does not, of course, mean that the repetition is wrong from the point of view of realism.

In real life a nervous, rapid speaker will not infrequently make use of rhythms slow and dragging in themselves, and will mould them to his own personality by the speed and intonation with which he utters them. But from the point of view of art this clash between the personal tune and the melody of the words is a waste of energy. It produces a disharmony which, though it may not be consciously apprehended by the reader and still less so by the listener, is the direct opposite of that effect of absolute and inevitable rightness which Shakespeare achieves by the complete harmony between music, mood and character. Dekker's repetitions are not, naturally, all as unsatisfactory as these, but on the whole they make the impression of a mechanically employed trick rather than the direct reflection of a personality. And his characters, though not unindividual, give the impression of having been accurately observed from without rather than being built up from within, which again is only another way of saying that the method that Dekker employs in this melodrama is that of comedy, not of tragedy.

Repetitions in Elizabethan tragedies reflect personality and express emotions. Thus even in the similarity of the trait the characters retains their individuality, they are still clearly differentiated from one another. But this differentiation is not achieved, in the main, by differences in the quality of the repetitions. The speech music does not change with the speakers, nor is it especially well adapted to the irony of the speech. It is, in fact, realistic repetition, following the forms of ordinary conversation, not poetical, creating a more vivid reality. The irony is given by the situation and by the intonation of the actors, not by the repetition itself, which merely serves to underline it. And it is by differences in the situations or the contents of the speech, not by changes in the speed and tone of the speech music, that the characters are differentiated.

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