

Repetition: Its Aesthetic Value in Edgar Poe's Mystic Poetry

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The article outlines the theoretical and practical framework of repetition, one of widespread figure in prose and poetry. The work contains a full account of different types of repetition proposed by linguists and concludes with the analysis of Edgar Poe's poetry. The interpretation of repetition in poetry entails consequences for its full evaluation as a stylistic figure and underlines its aesthetic value in imaginative work.

1. Introduction

The present article seeks to carry out along the lines of interpretation of the text which gives a wide opportunity to reveal special forms of verbal art, to single out aesthetic values. Interpretation is the construction of textual meaning as such; it explicates those meanings which the text explicitly or implicitly represents. Since we are all different from the author, we cannot reproduce his intended meaning in ourselves. The interpreter might, of course, infer meaning which according to our judgment could not possibly under any circumstances be implied by the author's words. Then it would be reasonable to say that the interpretation is private. The issue is first of all a moral and aesthetic one.

Ever since Plato (Apology 22b-c) talked to the poets and asked them with quite unsatisfactory results to explain "some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings", it has been a commonplace that an author often does not really know what he means. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant (1933: 310) insisted that not even Plato knew what he meant and that he, Kant, could understand some of Plato writings better than Plato did himself. As genuine certainty in interpretation is impossible, the aim of the discipline should be to reach a consensus, on the basis of what is known to achieve *probable* understanding. The issue is not whether certainty is accessible to the interpreter but whether the author's intended meaning is accessible to him. The interpretation of the text cannot be simply comprised with evaluation of author's psychological, spiritual or moral values, it can be achieved through stylistic interpretation as well where the author with the help of stylistic means expresses his overt intention. Our study approaches the problem of **repetition** and its role in the literary work.

2. Repetition as an Aesthetic Figure

The repetition (14c.through French from Latin *repetitio*) of a sound, syllable, word, line, stanza or metrical pattern is a basic unifying device in all poetry and prose. Repetition according to Galperin (1977: 211)

aims at logical emphasis, an emphasis necessary to fix the attention of the reader on the key- word of the utterance. The primary function of repetition is the intensification of the utterance which is the direct outcome of the use of the expressive means employed in ordinary intercourse, but when used in the outer compositional patterns, the immediate emotional charge is greatly suppressed and is replaced by a purely aesthetic aim. In this connection the repetition of the words in the metrical pattern at regular

intervals forms a refrain which serves to set off or divide narrative into segments, as in ballads or in lyric poetry to indicate shifts or development of emotion which underlines the aesthetic and pleasing sound patterns.

It is essential to emphasize that J. Vandres (1937: 147) states that

repetition is also one of the figures having its origin in the emotive language. Repetition when applied to the logical language becomes simply an instrument of grammar. Its origin is to be seen in the excitement accompanying the expression of a feeling being brought to its highest tension.

“Repetition is using the same word, structure or idea more than once for emphasis or for a special effect” noted by Alice Maclin (1996: 293). “Too much repetition, however, can be dull. Using synonyms is sometimes better than using the same word again.” Yet Sosnovskaya (1974: 59) suggests that “repetition is based on a repeated occurrence of one and the same word or word-group.”

From what Sara Thorne (2000: 476) highlights

repetition is a device which emphasizes an idea through reiteration. It is a major rhetorical strategy for producing emphasis, clarity, amplification or emotional effect. As a unifying device, independent of conventional metrics, repetition is found extensively in free verse where parallelism reinforced by the recurrence of actual words and phrases, governs the rhythm which helps to distinguish free verse from prose.

Peters (2004: 471) assumes

the repetition of any word or phrase in a short space of writing draws attention to. A certain amount of repetition is also important as part of the network of cohesion in any kind of writing. Yet repetition is sometimes accidental, or not well motivated. Writers get into a verbal groove when they should be seeking fresh ways of expressing an idea. A thesaurus offers a treasury of alternative words, though many of those grouped together are not synonyms and need to be checked for meaning and stylistic consistency.

In the analysis of the figures of speech Russian linguist Zadornova (1986: 5) adduces a distinction between various types of repetitions. It needs stressing that there is a distinction between sound, syntactic and semantic repetitions. The broad applicability of sound repetition underlines the aesthetic values of both poetry and free verse. It is essential to adduce alliteration as a figure of speech which consists in the repetition of the same (esp. initial) sound in words in close succession (usually in the stressed syllables). *The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew/ The furrow followed free;/ We were the first that ever burst/ Into that silent sea* (S. J. Coleridge).

It is generally accepted that similar type of sound repetition which is based on the coincidence of vowels (or diphthongs) without regard to consonants is assonance. Like ‘... the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore/ Nameless here for evermore’ (E. A. Poe).

The analysis of syntactic repetitions puts forward the following types of repetitions as anadiplosis which is a Greek word meant ‘to double back again’ or ‘to reduplicate’.

Anadiplosis is the repetition of the last word of one clause or sentence at the beginning of the next. *For I have loved long, I crave reward/ Reward me not unkindly: think on Kindness,/ Kindness becommeth those of high regard/ Regard with clemency a poor man's blindness* (W. Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice* 3.4.3.). Similar type of repetition is gradation which is another unit of poetic speech based on the recurrence of a certain syntactic pattern. In each recurrent sequence the lexical unit is either emotionally stronger or logically more important. *My conscience hath a thousand several tongues/ And every tongue brings in a several tale/ And every tale condemns me for a villain* (Richard 111 5.3.194).

Repetition is classified according to compositional patterns as well. If the repeated word (or phrase) comes at the beginning of two or more consecutive sentences, clauses or phrases, we have anaphora. *Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!* (Shakespeare: *Richard* 111,2.1.561). Whereas epiphora in opposition to anaphora is the repetition of the final consecutive sentences, clauses or phrases. *I'll have my bond./ Speak not against my bond!./ I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond.* (W. Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice* 3.3.4). A profound analysis of anaphora and epiphora makes apparent that there exists another related type of repetition termed simploce which uses the properties of both anaphora and epiphora at the same time. In Greek *sim* 'together' and *plekein* 'to weave'. *O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever/ O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever/ O give thanks to the Lord of Lords: for his mercy endureth for ever* (Psalm 136: 1-3).

Effective and emphatic type of repetition is epizeuxis. The term is derived from Greek *epi* 'upon' and 'zeugnunai' 'to yoke'. Epizeuxis is the emphatic repetition of a word with no other words between. *Reputation, reputation, reputation! I have lost my reputation* (W. Shakespeare: *Othello* 2.3.264).

Isocolon is the repetition of phrases or clauses of equal length and corresponding grammatical structure. The term derived from Greek word *isos* 'equal' and *kolon* 'member'. *I spoke Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men and German to my horse* (Charles V) or *Veni, vidi, vici* (*I came, I saw, I conquered*).

Proceeding the analysis of semantic repetition Sosnovskaya (1974: 58) puts forward the theory as "sometimes there is the use of several synonyms together to amplify or explain a given subject or term. Such kind of repetition that adds force is termed as synonymia where synonymous words and phrases are used by adding a slightly different nuance of meaning that intensifies the impact of the utterance. *The poetry of earth is never dead .../ The poetry of earth is ceasing never...* (Keats: *The Grasshopper and the Cricket*). Yet there are two terms frequently used to show the negative attitude of the critic to all kinds of synonymical repetitions. These are pleonasm which is the needless repetition of words and tautology -the repetition of the same idea in different words, but (often) in a way that is wearisome or unnecessary. *If you have a friend, keep friend, for an old friend is to be preferred before a new friend, this I say to you as your friend* (*The Garden of Eloquence* 49, proverb). Galperin (1977: 214) states that

any repetition may be found faulty if it is not motivated by the aesthetic purport of the writer. On the other hand, any seemingly unnecessary repetition of words or ideas expressed in different words may be justified by the aim of the communication. Both pleonasm and tautology may be acceptable in oratory inasmuch as they help the audience to grasp the meaning of the utterance. In this case, however, the repetition of ideas is not considered a fault although it may have no aesthetic function.

Auxesis (Greek ‘increase, amplification’) is the arrangement of words **or** clauses in a sequence of increasing force in ascending order of importance. In this sense, auxesis is comparable to climax and has sometimes been called *incrementum*. *I may, I must, I can, I will, I do/ Leave following that which it is gain miss* (Sydney F.: *Astrophil and Stella* 47. 1591).

3. The Use of Repetition in Edgar Poe’s Poetry

The evident and most prominent aim of Edgar Poe is originality, either of idea, or combination of ideas. He appears to think it a crime to write unless he has something novel to write about, or some novel way of writing about an old thing. He rejects every word not having a tendency to develop the effect. Most writers get their subjects first, and write to develop it. The first inquiry of Poe is for a novel effect-then for a subject; that is, a new arrangement of circumstance, or a new application of tone, by which the effect shall be developed.

Sometimes a poet, especially Poe may choose to repeat lines, but change them slightly each time leading bit by bit to the meaning which termed as incremental repetition common in folk ballads and poetry. Incremental repetition in its more schematic usages simply provides a progressive intensification or elaboration of an initial statement and has the fullest dramatic and psychological justification. (Peters 2004: 471). A remarkable instance of incremental repetition is in the exquisite poem of Edgar Poe *Annabel Lee*:

It was many and many a year ago
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me”.

I was a child and she was a child
In this kingdom by the sea:
But we loved with a love that more than love
I and my Annabel Lee
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me”.

In this extract ‘love’ is the mysterious, vital attraction which draws things together. The incremental repetitions *In a kingdom by the sea/ By the name of Annabel Lee/ In this kingdom by the sea/ I and my Annabel Lee* apart from creating rhythmical patterns seek to underline the innocent love between children in the kingdom by the sea. Unsurprisingly Poe is the master of creating repetitions which on closer inspection gain an appreciation of the reader.

As it has been mentioned above repetition is a widespread figure realized especially in poetry and verse. In this connection the quotation of Edgar Poe is not at random as *Poetry is the rhythmical creation of Beauty*. In Poe's mystical poetry which is full of dread and sorrow a perfect illustration of repetition is omnipresent. The poems *The Raven*, *Annabel Lee*, where a subtle reflection of various repetitions is evident, are considered pivotal in the author's 'constructive phase' which unveil the overt intention of poet's dread and sorrow (i.e. the death of his wife). In *The Raven* Poe introduced poetic, fragile composition and a wealth of black tones that produce complex atmosphere, where a man in agony listened to a sudden door tapping and rushed to open it anticipating that it was the soul of his beloved Lenore. Poe systematically manipulated with sound repetitions and interrelated them in an extraordinary way:

But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping
 And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door
 That I scare was sure I heard you – here I opened wide the door
 Darkness there and nothing more.

The recency of phonemes *n-p*, *t-p*, *r-p* in words napping, rapping, tapping correlate in close succession (alliteration) and create in reader's mind the analogy with the 'tapping of the door' that keeps in suspense. One cannot fail to observe that by means of alliteration Poe reinforces the importance tapping as pivotal which is overtly accompanied with the entrance of the main symbol of the poem, the raven. Almost in every stanza we notice the rhythmical manipulation of sounds and words:

“Prophet!” said I thing of evil! – Prophet still, if bird or devil!-
 Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
 Desolate, yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-
 On this home by horror haunted, – tell me truly, I implore-
 Is there-is there balm in Gilead? – tell me-tell me, I implore!
 Quoth the Raven “Nevermore”.

The extract catches our attention with the continuous repetition of phonemes *p* and *t* in prophet – tempter – tempest – tossed. In further lines, however, the predominance of phonemes *t* and *p* disappears giving its place to the alliteration of the sound *h* in home, – horror – haunted. The author, later puts emphasis on the repetition of the final line (epiphora) tell me truly, I implore/ tell me-tell me, I implore where the hero pleads the fowl for his soul consolation by repeating the words 'tell' and 'implore' as if he wants the fowl to have the feeling of compassion towards him.

The further case which may be instanced is the writer's use of synonymic set of words (synonymia) to characterize the fowl as an omen of evil. The author is actually trying to convey a certain amount of meaning equivalence either for the sake of 'vocal amplitude and beauty' or to improve the style of the utterance to make the underlying idea clearer:

Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking

What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking “Nevermore”.

The choice of synonyms is not aimless as the author effectively builds up the character of devilish fowl with negative synonymia.

Poe never sees anything in terms of life, matter or force but instead in terms of death, horror and mystery. Every stanza is calculated with great accuracy where unique examples of repetition are brought to reader in perfect details.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Trilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating:
‘Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door –
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;
This it is and nothing more.

The melodious play of sound repetitions (alliteration, assonance) as *s: silken, sad, uncertain, rustling, l; trilled, filled, felt, t; still, beating, heart, repeating* and epiphora (final repetition of lines) like visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door convey a sense of melancholy and elevate the soul with disruptive throes.

Poe is rather a scientist than an artist. He is reducing his own self as a scientist reduces a salt a crucible. It is an almost chemical analysis of the soul and consciousness. Whereas in true art there is always the double rhythm of creating and destroying. The plot revolves around love and death; sacred and spiritual where Poe’s desirous consciousness was possessed with a passion to discover what was beyond the life. He was an adventurer into vaults and cellars and horrible underground passages of the human soul. He sounded the horror and the warning of his own doom. Doomed he was. He died wanting more love, and love killed him. Poe tells us of his disease trying to make it fair and attractive, even succeeding:

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming
And the lamplight o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor,
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted-nevermore.

The last stanza is concluded with the utmost disappointment of the hero. The emphatic epizeuxis (repetition of a clause with no other words between) “*still is sitting, still is sitting*” emphasizes the duration of action and indignation of the hero towards raven which never ceased sitting on the bust of Pallas. We observe that the words ‘my soul from out that shadow’ is a metaphorical expression which with the answer ‘nevermore’ disposes the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The last stanza of the poem ends up

with tense energy of melancholy. The imagination is lost in the shadow that lies upon the floor while the inanimate objects, the bird and the bust remain in triumphant rigidity.

4. Conclusion

In Poe's (1999: 743) perception the ultimate object of all poetry is truth. Every poem should inculcate a moral, and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. The shadow of the death looms over all the poem. Poe has the gift of rousing terror, not of the blood, but of the spiritual forces that penetrate the imperfect armour of the flesh. From bitter experience he learnt to describe in vivid language the workings of those weird powers which terrify the very souls of men. The omnipresence of repetitions is not at random. They do not merely contribute to the rhythmical chant of the poem or aimed at logical emphasis. The underlying principle of repetitions in Poe's poetry is to convey and denote the utmost depth of sorrow and terror, to stress the aesthetic values of repetitions which are impeccably balanced and produce complex nearly flawless gems. They utter a kind of fragile relationship between the poet and reader leading to a nightmarish world that simply cannot fail to grip and compel.

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