Exclamatory Repetitions in Shakespeare's Tragedy "Hamlet"

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Interjections and vocative forms- forms, that is, independent of longer syntactic complexes- lend themselves especially well to this figure and the emotion expressed in this way can be most varied- sorrow, regret, anger, disgust, surprise, horror. Any attempt to classify the examples according to their emotional content would lead to mere confusion. Mostly the shade of emotion in supplied by the context, and, of course, by the word repeated, not by any inherent characteristics of the repetition itself , and consequently the definition of the emotion often rests on subjective impressions. It will be better therefore to keep for the present to more formal, grammatical principles, though certain categories may be separated from the rest on objective grounds other than purely grammatical.

In the first place we may consider some examples in which people are calling to one another from a distance, shouting either a name, a cry for help or some indifferent exclamation. Such repetition is very natural, indeed unavoidable as long as no answer to the call is received, and it may therefore be free from any emotional tinge. The cases in point, however, do all postulate a certain excitement or anxiety on the part of the caller. Hamlet's friends, fearing some mischief from the ghost, search for the prince in the blackness of the night calling: *My lord! My lord! Lord Hamlet!.. Hillo, ho, ho, my lord!* in the distance, till they hear the answering call of *Hillo, ho, ho, boy!* I v 113 ff. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, searching for the prince after the murder of Polonius, looking, that is, for a dangerous madman who must be placed under control, are similarly heard shouting his name in the distance before they make their appearance (IV ii 2). The terrified cries for help of the queen and Polonius (III iv 22) speak for themselves. Least called for by the circumstances- and therefore potentially most important as an index of character- are Hamlet's cries o f *Mother, mother, mother!* III IV 6, again heard off the stage, as he makes his way to the queen's apartments. Here there is no anxious searching, no pressure of fear to call forth the repetition. Yet it would be idle to suppose that it was Hamlet's habit, a personal idiosyncrasy of his, to announce himself in this way. His cries are introduced merely to solve a difficulty of stage-craft. The audience had to be shown Polonius stepping into his hiding-place before Hamlet's arrival, and, in order to avoid the long wait that a realistic representation would demand, it was much simpler to have Hamlet give his opponents warning in this somewhat theatrical manner. No touch of portraiture is involved here.

Similar in principle to these cries of single persons of groups of persons are the gentleman reports them: *Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!* IV v 108, or as we hear them ourselves in answer to Laertes' orders: *We will, we will*, ib.114. again it is a question of shouting to a person or persons who cannot hear. Also the courtiers' horrified cries of *Treason, treason!* as Hamlet at last achieves his revenge (V, ii 337) may be reckoned to this group. Here, of course, there can be no comparison with Hamlet's habits of speech, but these examples shoe us, at least, the use that Shakespeare makes of repetition both to display and to awake excitement. For repetition is not merely an expression of emotion, it is so completely associated with excitement that such repeated cries can be used by a skilful dramatist to arouse feelings of tension. Here in Hamlet this latter function is not especially apartment, there is no such marked heaping of repetition in scenes of bustle and excitement as may be observed in *Othello* and *King Lear*, though a few isolated cases to occur.

Of more direct bearing on the question of character- drawing is the use of exclamatory repetition, not in shouting and calling, but in normal conversation or soliloquy in order to increase the effect of a single exclamation. Here we may recognize three distinct cases: the repetition of a vocative form- the king's

O Gertrude, Gertrude! When sorrows come...IV V 77 and the queen's expostulatory *Hamlet, Hamlet!* V I 285, as the men fight over Ophelia's coffin; the repetition of an interjection- Horatio's *Tush, tush! 'twill not appear*. I i 30, the king's *Alas, alas*! IV iii 28; or the ghost's *Adieu, adieu! Hamlet remember me.* I v 91; and thirdly, the repetition of a noun, adjective, or an adverb, used as an exclamation to form an elliptic sentence, more pregnant and more charged emotionally than the formal, logical expression would be; the ghost's *O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible*! I v 80, Osric's *A hit , a very palpable hit!* And Laertes' *A touch, a touch, I do confess!* during the fencing match (V ii 295-300), the answer of Marcellus and Bernardo *Longer, longer!* I ii 238, as they describe the ghost's appearance, the queen's repetition of *A rat, a rat!* IV i 10 as she recounts the murder of Polonius (Hamlet himself had only cried *A rat!)* and her dying words *No, no, the drink, the drink, -O my dear Hamlet! The drink, I am poisoned,* V ii 323.

All three of these types are used by Hamlet in an ascending scale of frequency. Hamlet in an ascending scale of frequency. The vocative form is rare with him. Mostly the repetition of a name, if not indicative or remonstrance, sounds weak, appealing, pathetic. Shakespeare makes frequent use of the device in King Lear to achieve pathos, but for Hamlet, the very essence of whose trouble is that he must bear it alone, such appeals are obviously out of place. Such repetition occurs only in the phrase *O God, O God!* I ii 132, addressed not as in the other cases to an actual person, but to the diety, and assuming, especially in the context in which it is placed a deeper, more heartrending tone. In the interjectional repetitions Hamlet's *Fie on't! o fie!* I ii 75 with its additional exclamation O achieves a greater emotional force than those of the other characters, but does not differ from them otherwise. His *Buzz, buzz!* II ii 421, addressed to Polonius, is comic rather than emotional, while *For, O! for, O! the hobby horse is forgot,* III ii 145 is a proverb and *Well, well, we know*, I v 175 supposed to be a quotation. Again the only difference is that Hamlet's repetitions rise, on occasion, to a higher pitch of emotion, and this excited note is still more obvious in the exclamatory use of a noun, the most frequent and most individual type of this group. here it is characteristic that, whereas the other persons are chiefly driven to this type of exclamation in the quick give and take of the duel, in the desire to interrupt quickly, or, in the case of the queen, by the urgency of death itself, Hamlet is impelled chiefly by the turmoil in his comments to Horatio on his father's funeral. *Thrift, thrift, Horatio!* ii 180, and again, as the idea of the funeral awakes in him the memory of his father: *My father, methinks I see my father*. I ii 184. Here, especially in the irony of the first example, it is the hysterical lack of balance, so essential a part of Hamlet's make up, that produces the repetition, as also in the exclamations of *O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!* I v 116 and *Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorse less, treacherous, lecherous, kindness villain!* III ii 616 that interrupt two of his soliloquies. The remaining examples of this figure, his aside of *Wormwood, wormwood!* III ii 193 and the exclamation of *Dead, for a ducat, dead!* 3 iii 23, as he throws himself on Polonius, may be explained, as with the other characters, by the hurry of the moment and the necessity for compression. But in the previous examples we have clearly a case in which Hamlet seems to differ from the remaining figures. Yet wherein does this difference lie? Not in the use of repetition itself. Formally no line can be drawn between the queen's *The drink, the drink!* and Hamlet's *Thrift! Thrift!* The difference lies in Hamlet's greater emotional excitability that induces the use of his part, which offers more frequent opportunities for such outbursts of emotion.

The exclamatory repetition is with Shakespeare not a means for individualization, but the portrayal of emotion and excitement. If such emotion becomes associated especially with one particular character, then, of course, the use of repetition that it entails may have the effect of an individual trait; but this is only a secondary result, not a deliberate attempt to individualize the speech.

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