WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

THE POETIC POWERS OF REPETITION

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IN this lecture I do not seek to prove anything; principally I seek to show and pay tribute to the artistry of many men.

> Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.

> These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
>
> In solemn troops, and sweet societies
> That sing, and singing in their glory move,
>
> I am dying, Egypt, dying; . . .

Here are the seeds of the crop I hope to harvest in this hour. Let me sow another small handful:

> The notion of some infinitely gentle
> Infinitely suffering thing.
>
> Not to-day, O Lord,
> O, not to-day, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown!
>
> The woods decay, the woods decay and fall.
>
> How art thou lost, how on sudden lost,
>
> Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.

'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen': 'Comfort ye, comfort ye.' Why is it that the repetition moves one so, giving the phrase its pulse? True, the context in each case is firm, the moment of awareness that each takes is important in the passage in which it occurs and this, in itself, is telling: for it *is* at such moments, it seems, that repetition can be, has been, and perhaps must be used.

I could make a longer list: I need only say 'Nothing' or 'Never' or 'No' three times each, or five, and give these words to Lear in his fury or his anguish; or reiterate 'But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!' and think of Othello; or harp on 'honourable' and make the ghost of Brutus wince, or with a triple 'dark' bring Samson's condition to mind.

I am not sure of being able to answer all the questions I raise with myself as I notice how often this simple device is employed, but something pricks me to go a little further in the search, not so much for the quantity, or indeed for the formal intricacies of repetition—these have been studied before—but rather in admiration of the quality that inheres in the *variety*, *delicacy*, and *force* of some of its applications in English alone. While it would be presumptuous of me to expect fully to explain a cause so deep seated, it could count as ingratitude to refuse to respond to the effect.

I began to watch out for repeats some years ago, not at first looking for them but catching at the incidental recurrences of an aesthetic sensation. From this I found myself led on to consider the radical principle, the nature of repetition, its prevalence and function, and its implications. Since that time it has amused me deliberately to collect and then to arrange and classify; by now it behoves me (at all costs) to discriminate as I present the findings for your consideration.

What I offer here is a selection designed, in the first place, to illustrate some of the poetic uses to which this elementary but essential, innocent but dangerous, familiar but, I think, neglected device has been put.

A question in my mind governs the display. What is it that makes repetition at one time so deadly, so dreaded as the very sign of banality and formula of boredom, and at another life-giving, as in the famous instances I have already reminded you of? Repetition is a scandal, a stone of stumbling; what chips and polishes it into a cornerstone?

The tiresomeness of repetition I will not waste time over; we all know of it in ourselves and others. It is the felicitous uses that are my concern, and beyond that, this question of the *controls* which the instrument requires.

Repetition is also a figure of rhetoric and in this connection Puttenham remarked: 'a figure is ever used to a purpose either of beauty or of efficacy'. What then are the purposes, the use, and the attraction?

But first, repetition of what? And what constitutes repetition?

It is not hard to define for practical purposes. I mean by repetition the recognizable similarity, not necessarily the identity, of some element or feature within such a span of attention as may hold two or more items together in our regard, allowing, that is, for the varying distances at which we choose to view the work in question. As for what these items are: they may be events, as in the dreadful repeat of the sensational sequence that underlies De Quincey's 'Dream Fugue': or the two pilgrimages of Christian and Christiana juxtaposed to show up the significant differences which play across the broad likeness. It is repetition that occasions the apprehension of the inevitable as one recognizes the parallel between O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Electra* and the *Oresteia*. It may be thematic duplication as in *Lear*; or the reminder in *Paradise Regained* of 'that crude apple that diverted Eve'; or the two hesitancies before heroic offering in the Hell and Heaven of *Paradise Lost*.

To repeat is not always to stir dread, it is also a spring of laughter, as in the comical repeat of situations, cumulative in *Love's Labour's Lost*, complex in *The Comedy of Errors*, and economically neat in *Much Ado*. In a crude way repetition is an infallible formula for farce. Pascal, it has been pointed out, noticed an odd, involuntary response to twins or doubles:

> Deux visages semblables, dont aucun ne fait rire, en particulier, font rire ensemble par leur ressemblance. (*Pensées*, Art. xxv. lx.)

The repetition of *fact* may gather awe, as in the calling of Samuel, in Elijah's questioning, the review of Jesse's sons, in the affirmation of faith that 'In Thy light shall we see light', and above all in the oracular 'I am that I am'. Allied to this is such a repetition as 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh', or, more individually, the curlew cry in Yeats's 'Paudeen':

> . . . and in the luminous wind
> A curlew answered; . . .

and we are persuaded that it *happened* so. Marvell's famous play upon greenness, as of thought and shade, also partakes of fact.

I will only remind you of the effect of a repeating *form*: read twenty stanzas of any clear pattern and you feel it catching hold, sweeping you into its dance. To verbal repeats of statement, question, petition, phrase, and cadence I shall be attending more closely in a moment.

But before I confine myself to the narrower field let me take

this elastic term to its full stretch. The mere fact of repetition is, as it were, the pebble thrown, and the rings that ripple out from its splash show its relation to rhyme, synonym, parallelism, antiphonal structure. Shadows, reflections, echoes are natural repeats. It is a mode of symmetry, of matching, and so of harmony itself. These distinguished, if distant, connections and philosophical implications I will not pursue, but they should not be forgotten. It may well be that it is the fact that the connection is there that holds some of the secret of the power of this apparently elementary practice. Repetition may be simple and seem at times even poverty-stricken, but it has rich relations. 'What is your parentage?' 'Above my fortunes, yet my state is well: I am a gentleman.'

With a device so simple then, yet belonging to so fundamental a principle, it should not be surprising to find that there is a *lot of it*. Sterne has a word, or more properly a sound, for what I felt when I had become seriously interested in my collection.

> Humph!—said my uncle Toby; tho' not accented as a note of acquiescence,—but as an interjection of that particular species of surprise, when a man in looking into a drawer, finds more of a thing than he expected.—Humph! replied my uncle Toby.

My choice of a subject would have caused no surprise to Renaissance rhetoricians. Repetition is a well-accredited figure of style in the handbooks. To the lists in Puttenham, from whom I quoted just now, one might add those of Wilson and Peacham among the many standard guides for the would-be writers of their several generations. With the recent revival of critical interest in their instruction twentieth-century scholars have been at pains to follow their minutely differentiated nomenclature into sixteenth-century practice and amuse themselves by detecting instances of isocolon, parison, antimetabole, *et alia*. To these, for good measure, add Puttenham's seven sorts:

> anaphora, or the figure of report; antistrophe, or the counterturn; symploche, . . . of reply; anadiplosis, or the redouble; epanalepsis, or echo sound or slow return; epizeuxis, the underlay, or cuckoo-spel; ploche, or the doubler.

Thanks to the ground clearance made by the industry of scholars such as Sister Miriam Joseph and recently Dr. Brian Vickers, we may move more expeditiously from the game of precise naming, which is appropriate to rhetoric, to a consideration in our own terms of the aesthetic properties of

repetition with a hint now and then of the psychological reason for its effectiveness. What interests the modern reader is not so much that a writer *may* (is encouraged) to use repetition, as that he finds he can hardly do without it: it seems that in the satisfaction of his subtler purposes he *must* use it. The repeat does something special to reach the hearer more effortlessly than by any other route; it has a way of getting under the skin.

There is a simple test: pare away the repeat and measure the loss as, for example, in one of my seed phrases:

I am dying Egypt
or, Egypt I am dying

the message is there, but less plangency. I could add other instances: e.g.

My love is like a red rose
or, a very red rose
or, a bright red rose—

Dryden's Prospero calculates briskly and perhaps more accurately:

Fifteen years since, Miranda,
Thy Father was the Duke of Milan and
A Prince of power.

Shakespeare's Prospero had begun ruminatively:

Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since, . . .

and I confess I am the more moved to listen feelingly to his relation.

In the Rheims version of Revelation 12: 9 we read:

And that great dragon was cast forth, the old serpent, which is called the Devil and Satan, which seduceth the whole world: and he was cast into the earth, and his Angels were throwen downe with him.

This is fine, but in 1611 the version is a touch finer:

And the great dragon was *cast out*, that old serpent, called the devill and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: hee was *cast out* into the earth, and his angels were *cast out* with him [italics mine].

Surely it was genius taking its chance that chose to modulate into Italian when Eliot invoked

Figlia del tuo figlio,
Queen of Heaven.

Here the repeat lies ready, as in English it does not. Walter de la Mare once remarked: 'Any charwoman could say "Water, water, everywhere", but she wouldn't.'

I turn now to examine the forms repetition takes and the uses it serves whether the occurrence strikes us as premeditated or involuntary. By this distinction I mean whether the writer invites the reader to share his awareness of what he is doing, or is intent upon creating the illusion of spontaneity. It is the difference between, say, a triolet or a ballad refrain and Lear's fourfold 'howl'. The root reason for repetition may be the same, but there is a marked bifurcation up the stem. I shall call the branchings, for a start, the *artificial* and the *natural*.

Let me attend first to what I am calling the *natural* uses. For a writer to repeat can be to turn his human necessity to aesthetic gain. Repetition in ordinary intercourse argues limitation. We are so stupid, we need to have a thing said twice. We have so few words, we have to use the same ones over and over again. There are repetitions in real life that make us painfully aware of our poverty; we are frustrated, humiliated, bored. This is a depressing thought, but this is not the only way either of interpreting or dealing with the phenomenon. Repetition can also betoken relish. Something is *so* good, we *want* it twice. It is hard to say 'Alleluia' once only: a child demands that we 'do it again', over and over again it may be. Music repeats, structurally, of course, but the effect to the ear is of sheer delight in the recurrence of the passage. 'That's the wise thrush, he sings his song twice over.' Indeed, it is birdsong that presents the instinct most purely, and after the fact comes the representation of that song in lyric mimesis.

> *Teevo cheevo cheevio chee*:
> O where, what can thát be?
> *Weedio-weedio*: there again!
> So tiny a trickle of sóng-strain; . . .

It is Hopkins's *Woodlark* and as the creature drops down the song ends,

> To the nest's nook I balance and buoy
> With a sweet joy of a sweet joy,
> Sweet, of a sweet, of a sweet joy
> Of a sweet—a sweet—sweet—joy.

Natural repetition is also to be found in an oblique form. The artist, and particularly, though not exclusively, the dramatist may

use it to sublimate in his poetry the natural poverty of which I spoke just now. It is there, of course, in Lear's negatives, but I catch it also in Cordelia's affirmation

> And so I am, I am.

One might detect it in Leontes' hysteria:

> Too hot, too hot! . . .
> But not for joy; not joy. . .
>
> Go play, boy, play; thy mother plays, and I
> Play too, . . .

and again,

> is this nothing?
> Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing;
> The covering sky is nothing; Bohemia nothing;
> My wife is nothing; nor nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing.

When Hamlet repeats it comes to count as personal idiom:

> You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal; except my life, except my life, except my life.

Repetition is exploited for comic effect with Gobbo and the Nurse, by Pandarus and his 'sweet queen' (ten times in forty-two lines with another burst of three later), and in the tipsy tautology of Antony's description of the crocodile.

> It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.
>
> Lepidus. What colour is it of? Antony. Of it own colour too.
> Lepidus. 'Tis a strange serpent. Antony. 'Tis so; and the tears of it are wet.

Eliot seizes on the banality of 'Hurry up please it's time' or 'the *Boston Evening Transcript*', and Prufrock's 'I grow old, I grow old' surely echoes Falstaff's incipient senility (adding the rolling up of the trouser bottoms). There can be either extreme pathos or a kind of ironic zest in the imitation of our weakness according to whether the intention is tragic or satiric. Time and again Eliot practises his own fine economy in this respect, putting the words on a lemon-squeezer.

That this reproduction of the natural tendency to repeat is a very dangerous game is shown by an exchange between Wordsworth and Coleridge. The occasion is Wordsworth's note

on 'The Thorn' answered as it is at the end of chapter xvii of *Biographia Literaria*.

For all its appearance of simplicity, 'The Thorn' is a complicated composition in what it attempts. Wordsworth admitted that he ought to have provided an introductory poem. As it stands the published ballad has a dual purpose: first, to depict a character such as that of a retired sea-captain of a small trading vessel; second, to convey such a man's true feeling as he tells a story of desolate sadness without departing from the characterizing style. Wordsworth says he hoped to compensate for the slowness of the teller's manner by using a 'lyrical and rapid metre'. It is in this connection that he begs leave to say something in general about repetition in poetry. I cite the whole passage because it is psychologically so shrewd.

> There is a numerous class of readers who imagine that the same words cannot be repeated without tautology: this is a great error: virtual tautology is much oftener produced by using different words when the meaning is exactly the same. Words, a Poet's words more particularly, ought to be weighed in the balance of feeling, and not measured by the space which they occupy upon paper. For the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings. Now every man must know that an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language. During such efforts there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character. There are also various other reasons why repetition and apparent tautology are frequently beauties of the highest kind. Among the chief of these reasons is the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion. And further, from a spirit of fondness, exultation, and gratitude, the mind luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings. The truth of these remarks might be shown by innumerable passages from the Bible, and from the impassioned poetry of every nation. "Awake, awake, Deborah!" &c. Judges, chap. v, verses 12th, 27th, and part of 28th. See also the whole of that tumultuous and wonderful Poem.

It is not to this astute criticism that Coleridge takes exception but to a weakness in the poem itself.

> It is indeed very possible [he says rather acidly] to adopt in a poem the unmeaning repetitions, habitual phrases, and other blank counters, which an unfurnished or confused understanding interposes at short

intervals, in order to keep hold of his subject, which is still slipping from him, and to give him time for recollection; . . .

But what assistance to the poet, or ornament to the poem, these can supply, I am at a loss to conjecture. Nothing assuredly can differ either in origin or in mode more widely from the *apparent* tautologies of intense and turbulent feeling, in which the passion is greater and of longer endurance than to be exhausted or satisfied by a single representation of the image or incident exciting it. Such repetitions I admit to be a beauty of the highest kind; as illustrated by Mr. Wordsworth himself from the song of Deborah. '*At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead.*'

The truth is, of course, that 'The Thorn' contains two kinds of repetition, the banal and the lyrical, and they are hard to bind. It is the unkindness of Coleridge—and he was not meaning to be kind—that in revealing the weakness of the one he hardly allows enough for the strength of the other—for that wail, of 'Oh misery! oh misery! Oh woe is me! oh misery!' that comes like a bleak wind round the corner of the verses. As critics, however, they converge in admiration of Deborah: so well they might. Coleridge singles out the brilliant verse but her whole orgiastic song is ringing with repeats:

until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.

. . . . . .

The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon.

. . . . . .

Then were the horsehoofs broken by means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

. . . . . .

Curse ye . . . curse ye.

. . . . . .

because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Other examples of natural, almost incidental repetition might be cited from these two Romantic poets. It comes like an instinctive caress in 'Tintern'.

Five years have past; *five* summers, with the length
Of *five* long winters!

. . . . . .

Once *again*
Do I behold . . . when I *again* repose
Here . . . Once *again* I see
These *hedge-rows*, hardly *hedge-rows*, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild:

. . . . . .

How *oft*, in *spirit*, have I turned to thee, . . .
How *often* has my *spirit* turned to thee! [Italics mine]

Johnny Foy seems to get away with what tripped up the retired sea-captain:

> Oh! happy, happy, happy John . . .
> . . . . . .
> And Betty's in a sad *quandary* . . .
> She's in a sad *quandary.*
> . . . . . .
> The owls have hooted all night long,
> And with the owls began my song,
> And with the owls must end.

I need hardly quote from 'The Ancient Mariner' to recall the pressure put upon 'ice', 'painted', 'water', 'weary', 'rotting' and above all, '*alone*', or cite those eery questions and answers that make 'Christabel' so draughty.

The Authorized Version is full of natural repetitions.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. (Joel 3: 14)

Jeremiah cries:

> O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. (22: 29)

Ezekiel threatens:

> I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: (21: 27)

Isaiah moans:

> My leanness, my leanness, (Isaiah 24: 16)

The mocking of the children's jibe to Elijah is realistic by exact repeat:

> Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. (2 Kings 2: 23)

Job pleads:

> Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. (19:21)

I catch a whiff of the same thing as Dryden salutes Mr. Oldham:

> Once more, hail and farewel; farewel thou young,
> But ah too short, *Marcellus* of our Tongue; . . .

And Yeats is equally evocative with his

> *O my dear, O my dear.*

as the refrain for 'The Three Bushes'. But the most remarkable exploitation is surely by Hopkins as he seems to be thinking aloud, feeling after expression with a kind of back-stepping movement which has an extraordinary effect of spontaneity:

> the hurtle of hell
> Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?

or

> The heart rears wings bold and bolder
> And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet.

The habit becomes part of Hopkins's style, almost his manner.

At the other extreme there stands what I would call the *artificial* in that the use seems to draw attention to deliberate patterning and to invite admiration for this very thing. I will move right across to this extreme before looking at the central body of material. With artificial repeats I class the suffrages of Litany, Gloria, Kyrie, Rosary, the reiterated praises of Psalm 118 or the twofold ceremonial question and answer of Psalm 24—'Lift up your heads, O ye gates'—the formulae in Daniel and Ezekiel, the count of the saved of the ten tribes in Revelation, stock epithets and phrases in epic. Each item is simple but the required recurrence induces an *awareness* of the arrangement. It is to be found in a secondary form in Herbert's 'The Sacrifice' following its liturgical models—

> Was ever grief like mine?

Ballads with single or incremental refrains present a very special case and I suspect that neither of their functions—whether to divert, or to concentrate attention—can fairly be estimated without reference to conditions of the accompanying music and dance and to all that goes with the corporate game which their appropriate recitation must involve. The same must be said of carols, jingles, drinking-songs, and nursery-rhymes where the incantatory, even hypnotic, effect is most unimpeded. Their proneness to parody as soon as the magnetic force is weakened tells its own tale: it is a short step from the lulling to the dulling, to 'butter and eggs and a pound of cheese'. The test is whether we are disposed to skip.

To turn from ballads proper to look at the uses of a burden elsewhere, as, for instance, in the greater number of Wyatt's lyrics, or as refrains are discreetly and sparingly employed by

Spenser, Herbert, and Yeats is to realize that what matters is the nice adjustment to the course of the pleading or the story to which they are fitted. The refrains are not mere decorative knots but handles which turn and hold.

Wyatt uses a refrain in at least forty songs, placing it neatly to form a tiny frame in some (in Muir's edition numbers 1, 2, 17, 18, 19, 35, and 148) to link and emphasize in others, breathing it like a recurrent sigh in 'Alas the while!' (38), modifying it to point an irony:

> to rew upon my pain . . .
> Rejoyse not at my pain
> (57) (as also in 66, 67, and 72)

fitting it verse by verse by shifting the prepositions; gaining an effect by sheer presure in the tolling of 'In Eternum' (71) or 'Blame not my lutte' (132).

Herbert's 'Quip' depends upon clinging to the repetition of 'But thou shalt answer, Lord, for me' and 'The Pearl' builds up its 'Yet I love thee'.

Perhaps the most exquisite refrainer is Yeats, as in 'The Three Hermits', or better still as here:

> Bolt and bar the shutter,
> For the foul winds blow:
> Our minds are at their best this night,
> And I seem to know
> That everything outside us is
> *Mad as the mist and snow.*
>
> Horace there by Homer stands,
> Plato stands below,
> And here is Tully's open page.
> How many years ago
> Were you and I unlettered lads
> *Mad as the mist and snow*?
>
> You ask what makes me sigh, old friend,
> What makes me shudder so?
> I shudder and I sigh to think
> That even Cicero
> And many-minded Homer were
> *Mad as the mist and snow.*

Framing repetition is used by Cowper in the *Olney Hymns* and in a more distinguished way by Herbert in 'The Bag'. 'Away despair!'—and then that strange, daring fable closed up

with 'Harke, Despair away'. It is rather more elaborate in Dylan Thomas's elegy:

> Do not go gentle into that good night,
> . . . . . .
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Tennyson encloses the crucial, visionary moment of *In Memoriam* (xcv) by repeating the descriptive detail:

> The white kine glimmer'd, and the trees
> Laid their dark arms about the field.

Herbert betters the mechanical sestina as he picks up the five rhyme words of 'Aaron' five times. Wreaths and crowns depend upon intricate patterns of repetition. Donne and again Herbert excel as in 'Sinnes round' and 'Clasping of hands' and Spenser before them used it charmingly:

> An hundred naked maidens lilly white,
> All raunged in a ring, and dauncing in delight.
>
> All they without were raunged in a ring,
> And daunced round; . . . (*Faerie Queene*, VI. X. 11–12.)

John Byrom has a beautifully shaped little hymn:

> My spirit longs for thee
> Within my troubled breast,
> Unworthy though I be
> Of so divine a Guest.
>
> Of so divine a Guest
> Unworthy though I be,
> Yet has my heart no rest
> Unless it come from thee.
>
> Unless it come from thee,
> In vain I look around;
> In all that I can see
> No rest is to be found.
>
> No rest is to be found
> But in thy blessèd love:
> O let my wish be crowned,
> And send it from above!

But Herbert's artistry is supreme:

A Wreath

A Wreathed garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
I give to thee, who knoweth all my wayes,
My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
Wherein I die, not live: for life is straight,
Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee,
To thee, who art more farre above deceit,
Then deceit seems above simplicitie.
Give me simplicitie, that I may live,
So live and like, that I may know thy wayes,
Know them and practise them: then shall I give
For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise.

Structural conceits such as the shapely pair of wings still fascinate some creative, ingenious minds even today.

Sequences are effective, and more noticeable still, gradations.

O do not bruise me! . . .
O do not scourge me! . . .
O do not grinde me! . . .
O do not kill me! . . .
My God relieve me!
(Herbert's 'Sighes and Grones'.)

And in the three verses of 'The Call':

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

There are two more verses each with its exact repetitive amplification.

The most elaborate uses simulate echoes and reflections: Duke Senior plays back Orlando's questions 'with palpable exactitude':

True is it that we have seen better days,
And have with holy bell been knoll'd to church,
And sat at good men's feasts, and wip'd our eyes
Of drops that sacred pity hath engender'd; . . .

In *Comus* the Lady asks,

Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?

and answers herself at once:

I did not err, there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night.

Eve's watery image is more subtly done:

> I started back,
> It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
> Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love; . . . (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 462–5)

As for echo poems they were at one time only too frequent and as transient as the sound itself until the day when the conceit was touched into a lasting life by the genius of a man with something serious to say and artistry to match:

> So be beginning, be beginning to despair.
> O there's none; no no no there's none:
> Be beginning to despair, to despair,
> Despair, despair, despair, despair.
> Spare!
> . . . . . .
> O why are we so
> haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed,
> so cogged, so cumbered,
> When the thing we freely fórfeit is kept with fonder a care,
> Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept
> Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it) finer, fonder
> A care kept. . . .

These artificial uses are intellectually the most engaging though some may savour of 'tours de force'. It is *between* these extremes that we may best note the frequency, variety of the device. Henceforward I prefer to drop this stiff little term, 'device', and regard repetition rather as an 'ornament of poetry', understanding ornament by Johnson's definition as admitting of use though excluding necessity. One *could* clear a path along formal lines, distinguishing precise from partial, immediate from diffuse, simple from compound or complex, but I would rather examine it through another lens. Formal distinctions such as these have a display use but they are superficial and can become fidgetty. In sharp contrast I prefer to view the mass along the lines of its twin functions: to *persuade* and to *shape*.

We have it on the authority of the Bellman that 'What I tell you three times is true', and while logically this is *not* true, psychologically it often is. Satan knew this when he set out to undermine Eve's resolution: we submit to it daily in advertisement. To 'The Snark's' calculations we might add, 'if I say a thing twice I have made a design'. This may be very simple but it is

fundamental: it is the principle of the blot-pattern and the doodle but no artist neglects it. This I take to indicate all that repeating can do for structure, no matter what the size of the unit. I am not competent to do more than refer to what this means to the musician. Much that I have already dealt with as patterning comes under this head and the simpler balances inherent in every instance by the mere fact of duplication need no further illustration, unless it is by murmuring:

> Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.
>
> My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.
>
> Rejoice in the Lord, alway: and again I say, Rejoice!

Instead I shall attend, chiefly to the means by which repetition *persuades*. Its mode is, of course, by emphasis, as it strengthens the essential point or line whether of sense, scene, or fancy. This may be open and immediate or covert and gradual; that is, by the hammer-tap or the screw; and the emphasis can be logical, descriptive, or emotional.

For the *logical*:

> Not so (quoth he) [it is Colin Clout speaking, in disgust],
> love most aboundeth there.
> For all the walls and windows there are writ,
> All full of love, and love, and love my deare,
> And all their talke and studie is of it.

Iago's 'Put money in thy purse' comes with 'damnable iteration', and Othello's retort is worse:

> Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
> And turn again: and she can weep, sir, weep;
> And she's obedient, as you say, obedient,
> Very obedient. (IV. i.)

Insolently Satan presses his adversary to

> learn
> In what degree or meaning thou art called
> The Son of God, which bears no single sense;
> The Son of God I also am, or was,
> And if I was, I am; relation stands;
> All men are Sons of God; . . . (*Paradise Regained*, iv, 515–20)

Tennyson appals by the second placing of the line:

> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn,

in 'The Vision of Sin'.

The whole point of Yeats's 'What then?' depends upon the fourth occurrence of the question:

> His chosen comrades thought at school
> He must grow a famous man;
> He thought the same and lived by rule,
> All his twenties crammed with toil;
> '*What then?*' *sang Plato's ghost.* '*What then?*'
>
> Everything he wrote was read,
> After certain years he won
> Sufficient money for his need,
> Friends that have been friends indeed;
> '*What then?*' *sang Plato's ghost.* '*What then?*'
>
> All his happier dreams came true—
> A small old house, wife, daughter, son,
> Grounds where plum and cabbage grew,
> Poets and Wits about him drew;
> '*What then?*' *sang Plato's ghost.* '*What then?*'
>
> 'The work is done,' grown old he thought,
> 'According to my boyish plan;
> Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
> Something to perfection brought';
> *But louder sang that ghost,* '*What then?*'

Obviously the simplest way is to carry the sense by repeating the key word:

> Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord God, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: sith thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. (Ezekiel 35: 6)

Romeo's 'banished', Eve's 'mee, mee only', Smart's theme words: 'Sweet', 'strong', 'beauteous', 'precious', 'glorious', and 'adoration' (in a patterned arrangement); Tennyson's 'break', 'ring out', 'delay', and 'calm' all illustrate this.

These last veer towards the descriptive uses of which pure examples would be the swans in 'Prothalamion' which

> Did never whiter shew,
> Nor *Jove* himselfe when he a Swan would be
> For love of *Leda*, whiter did appeare:
> Yet *Leda* was they say as white as he,
> Yet not so white as these, nor nothing neare;
> So purely white they were, . . .

Or Eliot's 'Virginia':

> Red river, red river,
> Slow flow heat is silence
> No will is still as a river
> Still. Will heat move
> Only through the mocking-bird
> Heard once? Still hills
> Wait. Gates wait. Purple trees,
> White trees, wait, wait,
> Delay, decay. Living, living,
> Never moving. Ever moving
> Iron thoughts came with me
> And go with me:
> Red river, river, river.

Tiny stroking repeats soothe throughout 'The Lotos-Eaters':

> Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
> Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
> . . . . . .
> Here are cool mosses deep,
> And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
> . . . . . .
> While all things else have rest from weariness?
> All things have rest: why should we toil alone,
> We only toil,
> . . . . . .
> Let us alone . . . Let us alone . . . Let us alone.
> . . . . . .
> Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
> Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine.

Alternatively, to rouse us, hear these beasts from Nahum:

> Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid? (2: 11)

They continue to swarm in the next two verses, and I have noticed, with some amusement, how rare it is to find a lion mentioned singly in the Bible: they multiply at once and they roar:

> Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like
> young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey.
> (Isaiah 5: 29–30)

Stars seem to have drawn Milton into similar repeating.

As a sub-division of the descriptive I take mimetic repetition (drawn on to it by the lions roaring):

> and I heard the voices of harpers harping with their harps.
> (Revelation 14: 2)

Which to choose of the pipers of Spenser and Blake?

> He pypt apace, whilest they him daunst about.
> Pype iolly shepheard, pype thou now apace
> Vnto thy love, (*Faerie Queene*, VI. x. 16)
> . . . . . .
> 'Piper, pipe that song again;'
> So I pip'd: he wept to hear.

When in describing the 'Old Cumberland Beggar' Wordsworth picks up the line 'He travels on, a solitary Man': it seems to me to represent that slow progress, head-bent, where 'one little span of earth / Is all his prospect'.

The phrasing of Ruth's vow to Naomi reinforces her meaning by its movements:

> for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.

The fall of Mulciber is magically done, and I think the repeated 'noon' is partly responsible:

> from morn
> To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
> A summer's day; . . . (*Paradise Lost*, i. 742–4)

Grotesque effects are memorable too: the hissing in Hell at the moment of serpentification; Harry Blake's teeth that 'chatter, chatter still'; those 'feet' that 'have trod, have trod, have trod' in Hopkins's sonnet, and a curious mimicking of the slapping of sails in Donne's verse letter on 'The Storme'. When the wind came at last,

> Mildly it kist our sailes, and, fresh and sweet,
> As to a stomack sterv'd, whose insides *meete*,
> *Meate* comes, it came; . . . [Italics mine]

And last, though perhaps to be thought of first, there is the *lyrical* force as it is felt in joy in the duet of Jessica and Lorenzo

or the solo of the 'Song of Songs', or when George Peele takes off ecstatically:

> Fair and fair and twice so fair,
> As fair as any may be;
> The fairest shepherd on our green,
> A love for any lady.

There is a delicate repeat in Tasso's famous stanza describing the blown rose:

> Ecco poi nudo il sen già baldanzosa
> dispiega; ecco poi langue e *non par quella,*
> *Quella non par* che desiata inanti
> fu da mille donzelle e mille amanti.
> (*Gerusalemme Liberata*, xvi. 14) [Italics mine]

This I owe to a note by Professor Mario Praz and I should like to repay the debt—in small silver for Tasso's gold (or as some would think, his silver-gilt)—by remarking that as Spenser followed on he too used a repeat with a comparable effect of pathos in the parallel passage:

> Lo see soone after, how more bold and free
> Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
> Loe see soone after, how she fades, and falles away.
> (*Faerie Queene*, II. xii. 74)

But chiefly repetition is found in uttering grief, as when there is no more to say:

> O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God
> I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

after that, the *Cymbeline* dirge, even *Lycidas*, sound but faintly.

It is tempting to stray elsewhere in the prose of this period, to Donne's 'Devotions' to the elaborate, persistent repeating of Lancelot Andrewes. Had I not confined myself to poetry I could have illustrated the greater number of these persuasive uses from Donne's sermon preached on the text 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men', with its fascinating exploitation of the logical, connective, and even lyrical effects of repetition.

> So the world is a Sea. It is a Sea, as it hath ebbs and floods, and no man knowes the true reason of those floods and those ebbs. All men have changes and vicissitudes in their bodies, (they fall sick). And in their estates (they grow poore). And in their minds, (they become sad)

at which changes (sicknesse, poverty, sadnesse) themselves wonder, and the cause is wrapped up in the purpose and judgement of God onely, and hid even from them that have them; and so the world is a Sea. It is a Sea, as the Sea affords water enough for all the world to drinke, but such water as will not quench the thirst. The world affords conveniences enow to satisfy Nature, but these encrease our thirst with drinking, and our desire growes and enlarges it selfe with our abundance, and though we sayle in a full Sea, yet we lacke water; So the world is a Sea. It is a Sea, if we consider the Inhabitants. In the Sea, the greater fish devoure the lesse; and so doe the men of this world too.[1]

At one time I was tempted towards a simple comprehensive method along chronological lines, but this proved impractical: there is just too much of it: instead I will draw together what I have shown dispersedly and examine the distinctive contribution of *one* poet.

If I had spent a Victorian Sunday I could have worked happily within the Authorized Version of 1611. If on Monday I had been left with Shakespeare I would not have lacked. It is not so hard perhaps to pass over the pretty, formal uses in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, or in the trick phrases of Nym and Fluellen, the impatiences of Hotspur and the delays of the Nurse, the assumed rhetoric of Falstaff, Justice Shallow doddering, Ford's jumpiness, but I do find it hard to part with the idiom of Shylock. All the same I shall leave it unquoted, for the sake of drawing attention to the prevalence of repetition in Milton and the sheer genius of his handling.

There is repetition of almost every kind in *Paradise Lost* alone, so that this lecture could have been confined to that and had matter enough and to spare. It ranges from the simple, *current* touches on 'Hail', 'Say first', 'Go', to the evocative grace of 'airs, vernal airs', or 'amarant and gold, immortal amarant', or

> whereof who drinks
> Forthwith his former state and being forgets
> Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain. (ii. 584–6)

to the *underlining* of 'thrice', 'war', 'wolves', 'light', or 'goodness'—

> O goodness infinite, goodness immense! (xii. 469)

or the final 'hand in hand'.

[1] *Sermons*, ed. Potter and Simpson, 1955, vol. ii, p. 306.

It is found in *complexity*: as here in description of Limbo:

> Up hither like aerial vapours flew
> Of all things transitory and vain, when sin
> With vanity had filled the works of men:
> Both all things vain, and all who in vain things
> Built their fond hopes . . . (iii. 445–9)

with the 'vain' picked up three times and repeated a few lines on.

It comes in *sequences* either close-up or far-spread:

> dying to redeem
> So dearly to redeem, what hellish hate
> So easily destroyed, and still destroys (iii. 299–301)

or

> Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
> Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell
> And in the lowest deep, a lower deep . . . (iv. 74–6)

to the famous, 'Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven' of Book i. Abdiel retorts in Book vi. 183—

> Reign thou in hell thy kingdom, let me serve
> In heaven.

It comes in *figured arrangements*:

> So farewell, hope, and with hope farewell fear,
> Farewell, remorse: all good to me is lost;
> Evil be thou my good; . . . (iv. 108–10)

and in compound, intricate designs when Adam reasons with Eve:

> his creating hand
> Nothing imperfect or deficient left
> Of all that he created, much less man,
> Or aught that might his happy state *secure*,
> *Secure* from outward force; *within* himself
> The danger *lies*, yet *lies within* his power:
> Against his *will* he can receive no harm.
> But God left *free* the *will*, for what obeys
> *Reason*, is *free*, and *reason* he made right, . . .
> (ix. 344–52) [Italics mine]

Proceeding along the same line, one comes to the *all-but-exact* repeats of

> To pray, repent and bring obedience due.
> To prayer, repentance, and obedience due, (iii. 190–1)

or

> who shall go
> Before them in a cloud, and pillar of fire,
> By day a cloud, by night a pillar of fire, . . . (xii. 201–3)

Eve's watery mirror I looked at just now; the more famous lyrical repeating of 'Sweet is the breath of morn' I shall turn to in a moment. The duplicated confession at the end of Book x has something of a ring of ritual.

Passages so closely knit as these are few and they tell the more sharply. In the simpler instances the final calculation must pay regard to quantity and allow for a cumulative effect. There is also repetition of a *form* as in the Devil's set of six rhetorical questions (iv. 515–20) and puns are frequent enough:

> Saw undelighted all delight (iv. 286)
> . . . Beseeching or besieging (v. 869)
> The evening cool, when he from wrath more cool (x. 95)
> Swim in joy, (Erelong to swim at large). (xi. 625–6)

To do anything like justice to the whole tally would be impossible, nor is it necessary to make my point.

I prefer now to look into a particular delicacy in the usage which by its quality saves the quantity from the nausea of the obvious, not to say, excess.

Milton repeats (I repeat), but it is to be noted that he rarely repeats precisely: even in Eve's famous stylized passage the pick-up is very close but still it is not exact.

> *Sweet* is the breath of morn, her *rising sweet*,
> With charm of earliest birds; *pleasant* the sun
> When *first* on this delightful land he *spreads*
> His *orient beams*, on herb, *tree*, fruit and flower,
> Glistering with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
> After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
> Of grateful evening mild, then silent night
> With this her solemn bird and this fair moon,
> And these *the gems of heaven*, her *starry train*: [Italics mine]
>
> But neither breath of morn when she ascends
> With charm of earliest birds, nor rising sun
> On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flower,
> Glistering with dew, nor fragrance after showers
> Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent night
> With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon
> Or glittering starlight without thee is sweet. (iv. 641–56)

It is foreshortened and very slightly changed as though Eve were improvising on her own melody (I have italicized the ten touches that are *not* caught up). The repentance passage is closer but even the mirror image has its ripple of difference.

What happens here gives us the principle of the technique used elsewhere: there is always *some slight shift*, e.g. the *indicative* will pick up a *participular* use,

> What *pleasing* seem'd, for her now *pleases* more,
> She most, and in her look sums all delight.
> Such *pleasure* took the serpent . . . (ix. 453–5).

> *Contrive* who need, or when they need, not now.
> For while they sit *contriving*, . . . (ii. 53–4) [Italics mine]

a *verb* links with its *noun*:

> Where all life dies, death lives, . . . (ii. 624)

an *adjective* to an *adverb*:

> and if not equal all, yet free,
> Equally free, . . . (v. 791–2)

It is effected by a *change of tense*:

> So clomb this first grand thief into God's fold:
> So since into his church lewd hirelings climb. (iv. 192–3)

or *the order of words* in the phrase is changed:

> and reasoned high
> Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
> Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, . . . (ii. 558–60)

> Not that fair field
> Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers
> Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
> Was gathered, . . . (iv. 268–71)

or where a superlative turns back to comparative:

> and O yet happiest if ye seek
> No happier state, and know to know no more. (iv. 774–5)

Art is there always hiding its own artifice; the static effect of something said twice is relieved and instead we know we are moving, moving on in the development of argument.

Had I time I could show this by analysing the sequence on 'reason' in the Father's speech in Book iii, or on 'love' when Adam confides in Raphael in viii, and above all on 'forbid'

which culminates in the appalling 'Our great Forbidder' as Eve blasphemes in Book ix. I would remind you how when Satan has played on 'wise/wisdom'; 'death/die'; 'life/live'; 'knowledge/know'; and finally 'God/gods/godlike/goddess' Milton remarks how

> the sound
> Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn'd
> With reason, to her seeming, and with truth. (ix. 736–7)

But I must fine it down to a couple of passages chosen from among some 46 that I have noticed. In ix. 294 Milton takes advantage of variant forms to ram a warning home:

> but to avoid
> The *attempt* itself, intended by our foe.
> For he who *tempts*, though in vain, at least asperses
> The *tempted* with dishonour foul, supposed
> Not incorruptible of faith, not proof
> Against *temptation*: . . . (ix. 294–99) [Italics mine]

Using a pattern of a b b a already used in

> and deliver ye to woe,
> More woe, the more you taste is now of joy; (iv. 368–9)

he composes a passage which I might be drawn, for other reasons, to quote in this year:

> In which of all these *shining* orbs hath man
> His fixed *seat*, or fixed *seat* hath none,
> But all these shining *orbs* his choice to dwell; . . .
> (iii. 668–70) [Italics mine]

These, then, are *some* of the ways by which the mechanical is transformed to the vital and the difficulty of the syntax greatly eased. But behold, the tenth has not been told. Though I kept myself to *Paradise Lost* my feet were in a large room. Had I had to settle for something shorter I should have turned to Arnold's 'The Forsaken Merman' where the repetition, obvious enough as it is, is most subtly deployed and essential to its nostalgic power.

What all this amounts to is a study in *tact*, and what, after all, is style but tact with words? So instinctive, and familiar a habit as repetition constitutes a test case. Taken at one strength it alerts the mind, as in the emphatic uses I have quoted, but by a couple of turns of the same screw the effect

can be reversed and *via* the hypnotic we are reduced to irritation and ennui. To illustrate the ambivalence by a grander analogy one might compare the paradisal intimation of timeless repetition as Florizel watches Perdita:

> When you do dance, I wish you
> A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that; . . .

with the horror of Joyce's hellish clock as it ticks

> Ever, never, ever, never.

The observable faults are, in one way or another, forms of excess whether the repeating argues poverty of vocabulary, affectation, or sheer clumsiness. I could cite infelicities from Sidney, Fairfax, Tennyson, and Smart (leaving out of count such accidental overlapping as can be detected in Berowne's long speech in *Love's Labour's Lost*, or possible duplications in the last act of *Antony and Cleopatra*), or (with respect) to the twenty-nine mentions that 'there is a time for' in Ecclesiastes one is tempted to add and there is 'a limit' too. In echoing this passage Eliot is discreetly sparing. These flaws are easily detected and better forgotten. What is more worth scrutiny, I submit, are the modes of control, the ingenious variations, the nice spacing, the palpable aptness, the sensitive deviation from a pattern set up, which is also the sanction for rhythm in prose.

> And overmuch (as all men knowe) [said Thomas Wilson], was never good yet. Yea a man may have overmuch of his mothers blessing if she will never leave blessing. Therefore a measure is best, yea, even in the best thinges.

Was it perhaps for violation of the wisdom of this platitude that historically, in very fact, men had cause to cry

> Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen?

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