

# Repetitions in Henry James's Novels

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**Abstract**—This article attempts to analyse and comment upon one of the most notable stylistic features of Henry James's novels, i. e. the repetition. It is analysed in more detail on four levels: lexical level, grammatical level, level of context and cohesion, and phonological level. It briefly tries to explain how the use of different types of repetitions affect the reader. The analysis is based on three novels: *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The American* and *The Wings of the Dove*.

**Keywords**—Henry James, *Portrait of a Lady*, *The American*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *Repetitions*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to Miller, “a long work like a novel is interpreted, by whatever sort of reader, in part through the identification of recurrences and of meanings generated through recurrences (Miller 1982, 1).” He further claims it is necessary to identify these repetitions in order to interpret a novel. A reader may notice repetitions deliberately, spontaneously, or (un)consciously. A novel is a knot of repetitions, which constructs the work within itself and determines to multiple relations outside it. The latter are the author's mind, his life, his other works, literature in general, mythological motifs, historical reality etc. (Miller 1982, 2-3). The act of doing / making is reflected on the deeper level of story, where motifs, scenes, plots, characters, historical events, ways of cohering etc. repeat (Miller 1982, 1).

## II. REPETITIONS

A dictionary definition of repetition is the act of saying, or doing / making something again. Repetitions occur on lexical level, on grammatical level, on the level of context and cohesion, and on phonological level.

### A. REPETITIONS ON A LEXICAL LEVEL

The act of saying reflects itself on verbal level, where two types of repetition in literature occur: recurrences and partial recurrences. According to Cross, “by repeating words and phrases and by recycling them in syntax, dialogue and event, James ‘motivates’ the signifiers and achieves the verbal ‘cross-references’”. (Cross 1993, 37). Furthermore, the repetitions of words give the text a kind of rhythmic and poetic sound.

### B. RECURRENCES

Recurrences are word for word repetitions, which are used to express emphasis, confirmation, reinforcement, surprise, and repudiation (Cross 1993, 37).

As has been said before, recurrences affect the reader in different ways. This is a short section from *The Wings of the Dove*: “Tremendously, yes, quite tremendously, good looking” (James 1998, 117), where the narrator explains Lord Mark's opinion of Kate Croy. By repeating an adverb tremendously twice, he confirms himself and expresses certainty in his own opinion.

“... one doesn't quite make out what we shall have got from her.

What she'll have got from *us*? What she'll have got from us ... is the girl's own affair” (James 1998, 84).

This is an excerpt from the conversation between Kate Croy and Merton Densher, when they discuss their relationship to Milly. Kate's first sentence in an answer is a chiasmic version of Merton's thoughts. She repudiates his selfishness. Repetition of her own opinion functions as a confirmation, emphasis, self-confidence.

“And she was dead, dead, dead” (James 1998, 162).

The sentence is an extract from narrator's summary of Milly's meditation about a portrait she sees. It is an example of tautology (coordinated repetitions of same words), where the adjective dead is repeated three times to express, or better said reinforce, emphasize the state of mind of a woman in the portrait. By watching the woman, Milly experiences joy, because she herself feels full of life.

Another example, featuring tautology: “...he paced and paced” (James 1998, 71).

It is a part of a sentence from his latest novel, which emphasizes calmness, steadiness, and infinity of actions. “He” refers to Merton Densher after a discussion with Kate about meeting Milly.

“It *is* everything; everything *she* thinks it” (James 1998, 78).

Another example from *The Wings of the Dove*, where Kate and Merton discuss a relationship to Milly again, is an example of anadiplosis (repetitions of same words or phrases at the end of one sentence and at the beginning of the successive one). Such repetitions strengthen not only wanted meaning, but also its sound (they create special rhythm) and emotional involvement.

The repetition of “everything” explains the entity the word refers to. If it was said only once, a reader could interpret it as “each person, each object that exists”. By explaining, the reference the meaning is narrowed to Milly’s “everything” - each person, each object that exists in Milly’s world.

“Only now was he having to think if it were prohibitive in respect to marriage; only now, for the first time, had he to weigh his case in scales” (James 1998, 62).

An example of anaphora, where successive sentences begin with same words and/or word phrases, is from *The Wings of the Dove*. As with anadiplosis it gives a special rhythm to the sentence and emphasizes an emotional side of the story – an example is taken from the narrator’s resume of Merton’s thoughts. Repetition stresses that a comprehension is new and therefore stressful for Merton. He never before asked himself about his possibilities concerning a marriage to Kate, he never before had to question the gravity of the situation he was in.

“Proud young women are proud young women” (James 1998, 192).

This is an example of a plocé, which is an emphatic repetition of words with reference to their special significances. This sentence is said by Mrs. Lowder in *The Wings of the Dove* while talking to Milly. The first use of a phrase “proud young women” refers to a group of women of certain age, while the repetition of the same phrase implies certain qualities, entities, or characteristics of the group; in this respective case it implies their pride, enthusiasm, and idealism.

### C. PARTIAL RECURRENCES

With partial recurrences, the mention of the same notion is achieved, avoiding literal repetitions. Examples of partial recurrences are parallelism, paraphrase, polyptoton, chiasmus, tautology etc. Both types of repetitions mentioned above occur in James’s works.

The use of synonyms enables a writer to achieve all effects of recurrences (e. g. emphasis, repudiation, confirmation etc.), but without repeating himself literally. A writer’s device of using coordinated synonyms is called tautology.

Examples of tautology:

“... pauses and waits ...” (James 1998, 173) – both meaning “a break”;

“... betwixt and between...” – betwixt being the archaic form of between (James 1998, 166);

“... living by option, by volition ...” (James 1998, 179) - option and volition are synonyms referring to free will.

The following example is from *The Wings of the Dove* illustrating the use of polyptoton: “... with its dance all danced ...” (James 1998, 171). Polyptoton is the repetition of same words, but as a different part of a speech. Here a word dance occurs first as a noun and then

repeats as a verb. It enables the author to use previously activated word again with adapting it to context. It has similar effects as a recurrence and periphrases do (confirmation, emphasis, reinforcement etc.).

### D. REPETITIONS ON A GRAMMATICAL LEVEL

Repetitions on grammatical level include repetitions of sentence patterns, clause types, clause structures, and phrases (mainly prepositional). Repetitions of words and clause structures give the text a kind of rhythmic and poetic sound.

### E. REPETITIONS OF SENTENCE PATTERNS

One of the most noticeable repetitions is also the repetition of sentence patterns 3B (subject – predicate – subject complement, realized by a nominal phrase): “... the air had grown mellow ...” (James 1999, 17), and 3A (subject – predicate – subject complement, realized by an adjectival phrase): “... it was an unusually large cup ...” (James 1999, 17).

### F. REPETITIONS OF CLAUSE TYPES

Copulative and adversative coordinates are frequently repeated throughout James’s canon: “Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality” (James 1999, 17).

### G. REPETITIONS OF CLAUSE STRUCTURES

“James constantly blurred reference by using neutral words like ‘it’ or ‘there’ to start a sentence (Cross 1993, 59).” There are numerous cleft sentences, realized by emphatic it, and existential sentences, realized by anticipatory there.

Examples:

“It was an advantage never to have known anything particularly unpleasant” (James 1999, 41).

“There had really been a change in her life” (James 1999, 40).

Negative sentences recur throughout James’s canon. He used various ways of negation: auxiliaries, words no and not, conjunction neither...not, adverbials, negative prefixes, negative suffixes, adjectives, and applied negative meaning: “... it was scarcely even painful to have to suppose him too generous” - with adverbs (James 1999, 40).

Parallelism

Parallelism is the repetition of words and sentences that are similar; thus reinforcing the similarities in meaning. It also emphasizes the likeness between two ideas. This long sentence is an extract from *The Portrait of a Lady*, where the narrator describes Touchett’s house:

“The house had a name and a history; the old gentleman taking his tea would have been delighted to tell you these things: how it had been built under Edward the Sixth,<sup>1</sup> had offered a night’s hospitality to the great Elizabeth (whose august person had extended itself upon a huge, magnificent and terribly angular bed which still formed the principal honour of the sleeping apartments), had been a good deal bruised and defaced in Cromwell’s wars, and then, under the Restoration, repaired and much enlarged; and how, finally, after having been remodelled and disfigured in the eighteenth century, it had passed into the careful keeping of a shrewd American banker, who had bought it originally because (owing to circumstances too complicated to set forth) it was offered at a great bargain: bought it with much grumbling at its ugliness, its antiquity, its incommodity, and who now, at the end of twenty years, had become conscious of a real aesthetic passion for it, so that he knew all its points and would tell you just where to stand to see them in combination and just the hour when the shadows of its various protuberances—which fell so softly upon the warm, weary brickwork—were of the right measure” (James 1999, 18).

Sentence structures 2 (subject – predicate - adjunct) and 4 (subject –predicate – direct object) keep repeating themselves.

Repeated sentences of type 2:

it had been built under Edward the Sixth;

had been a good deal bruised and defaced in Cromwell’s wars.

Repeated sentences of type 4:

whose august person had extended itself upon a huge, magnificent and terribly rectangular bed etc.;

who had bought it;

he knew all its points;

The house had a name and a history etc.

These sentences, although slightly ironically, stress the magnificence of the sumptuous house, which is important enough to accommodate the Queen. They express pride at owing a house having been built during the reign of Edward the Sixth.

Furthermore, participial clauses repeat:

the old gentleman taking his tea;

owing to circumstances too complicated to set forth;

after having been remodelled and disfigured in the eighteenth century etc.

These sentences additionally stress the grandeur of the mansion, which was remodelled anew and difficult to obtain, but is now offering a home to an elderly gentleman.

Paralleled structures give certain rhythm, flow, and balance to the text.

## H. REPETITIONS OF PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

“Strings of prepositional phrases serve as a formal means of locating the entities described in the phrases at the same level” (Zupan 2006, 263).

“... the very air of the place, the pitch of the occasion, had for her both so sharp a ring and so deep an undertone. The smallest things, the faces, the hands, the jewels of the women, the sound of words, the shape of the forks, the arrangement of the flowers, the attitude of the servants, the walls of the room were all touches in a picture and denotements in a play; and they marked for her moreover her alertness of vision. She had never ... been in the state of vibration” (James 1998, 115).

The above example is from *The Wings of the Dove*, where the narrator discusses Milly’s attitude towards life and her acceptance of her disease. With such repetition reader’s attention is drawn to the sentence. The same type of prepositional phrase is used to emphasize that each of the items mentioned contributes to the state Milly is in.

## III. REPETITIONS ON THE LEVEL OF COHESION AND CONTEXT

### A. REPETITIONS ON THE LEVEL OF COHESION

Repetitions in this category include repetitions of logical links between sentences and clauses, elegant variations, significant words, and substitute forms.

Three coordinates are repeated frequently to formulate coordination: and, but, and however. Copulative coordination is formed by the conjunct “and”. Punctuation varies – “and” is preceded by commas, semi-colons or no punctuation mark at all. Adversative coordination is repeatedly formulated with the conjuncts “but” and “however” – coordinates often oppose themselves resulting in antithesis. Conjuncts all occur in initial, final and most often in middle sentence position. When in the middle position, all conjuncts are separated by one or even two commas or by semicolon.

Omission of conjuncts (so called asyndeton) is very recurrent in James’s work. An example from *The American*: “Suddenly he became conscious of the germ of the mania of the “collector;” he had taken the first step; why should he not go” (James 1957, 15)?

There is a certain amount of words that repeat throughout James’s canon. Some of these words are nouns vista and portrait, and adjectives good and bad. The latter are particularly recurrent in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Used in different contexts, the meaning of these words becomes ambiguous and blur. He gives shades of meaning to the same word: very good, quite good, good enough, good husband etc.

Cohesion means are very usual in all kinds of texts; one of these is the use of pro-forms, economical short words,

usually without its own context, substituting other meaningful expressions. The use of a pro-form after a referent expression is called anaphora, while the use of a pro-form before a referent expression is called cataphora. Both, anaphora and cataphora, repeat frequently in James's works.

Example: "Her visitors were numerous and extremely loquacious, and they exacted much of their hostess's attention. She found time, however, to bestow a little of it on Newman ..." (James 1957, 98 - 99).

The former example from *The American*, where the narrator describes Newman's view of Mme. De Cintré's attitude towards him, shows the use of anaphora. The pro-word it in the second sentence refers to previously used phrase, i. e. their hostess's attention. Pronoun it is the most recurrent pro-word in James's canon.

### B. REPETITIONS ON A LEVEL OF CONTEXT

Repetitions in this category include repetitions of motifs, scenes, familiar patterns, and ways of narrator's intrusions. The narrator is usually omniscient and often intrusive. He draws attention to himself and addresses readers, but still manages to keep certain distance. He intrudes to give opinion or evaluation – he tries to affect readers to the point of their liking or disliking characters.

An example of the narrator's intrusions:

"It was our friend's eye that chiefly told his story" (James 1957, 7).

This is a sentence from *The American*, where the narrator introduces Christopher Newman. The use of the third person singular not only reminds a reader of the narrator's presence, but also includes the reader – Christopher Newman becomes the narrator's and reader's friend and the story is somewhat familiarized.

### REPETITIONS ON A PHONOLOGICAL LEVEL

i) "... goundless from position, somewhat sallow with years of celebrity, somewhat sombre even at midsummer" (James 1998, 172).

This is an extract from the description of a London home – it is an example of repetition of the same sound (consonant) at the beginning of two or more stressed syllables in consecutive words (so called alliteration). In this example, sound /s/ is repeated seven times. Alliteration (and other types of phonological repetitions) occurs on the basis of emotional emphasizing. Reading this passage a reader gets the impression of gloom, which is reinforced by the constant hearing of the sound /s/.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Repetitions are a very important feature of James's style. Here only the most typical and noticeable repetitions are included. Recurrences and partial recurrences occur on a

lexical level in the form of chiasmus, tautology, anadiplosis, anaphora, and plocé. The effects they create are emphasis, reinforcement, confirmation, and repudiation. Repetitions on a syntactic level include repetitions of sentence patterns (mostly types 3A and 3B), clause types (mostly copulative and adversative coordinates), clause structures (cleft and existential sentences, negative sentences, and parallelism), and prepositional level (of phrases). On a level of cohesion repetitions of logical links between sentences and clauses (omission of conjuncts, repeated conjuncts and, however, but, elegant variations, significant words (e.g. vista), and substitute forms (pro-word it) are analysed. On a phonological level, an example of alliteration is shown.

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