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Textual Echoes of Echoes

Max Nänny

The artistic use of echo, “the ultimate in repetition” (Jean Aitchison), has a long, rich and varied tradition both in literature and music. In literature, echo first made its appearance in the mythological guise of the bodiless nymph Echo as, for instance, described in Ovid’s third book of his *Metamorphoses*. While the first known literary use of an echo dates back to the *Greek Anthology*, the classical genre of the echo-dialogue reappeared in European vernacular literature in 13th century France to become extremely popular from the Elizabethan period till the early 18th century.

From the 17th century on writers were turning their attention more and more to the natural echo, which originates in the incomplete repetition of speech or sounds reflected by inanimate objects such as mountain cliffs, shores, hills, woods, caves and buildings. Since Dryden and Pope, the natural echo acquired new importance and climaxed in the poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson, finding, with a few important exceptions, less interest in modern times.

In the following I shall neither elaborate on the literary and mythological traditions of the echo-device nor on its thematic aspects; neither shall I study its occurrence in the different genres (the masque, for example) nor its complex tropings and metaphorizations. All this has been thoroughly dealt with by Elbridge Colby, Joseph Loewenstein and, best because most perceptive, comprehensive and sophisticated of all, by John Hollander in *The Figure of Echo*.

Instead, I shall fully concentrate on a formal approach to the literary uses of echo: my interest lies in the almost wholly neglected question of whether writers have tried to echo or mime the repetitive and rebounding character of natural echoes in their texts and, if they do, of how, by what specific formal means they achieve this.

On the basis of a reading of roughly 300 echo-passages in English and

American verse and literary prose since the Renaissance I have arrived at a tentative categorization of the chief mimetic or iconic, or, more accurately, diagrammatic devices (for the terminology, see Nänny *passim*) writers have used when striving for textual echoes of echoes.

The Characteristics of Echo

Before we can ascertain whether a text formally echoes an echo, we must have a clear idea of what there is to echo in an echo. In other words, we must become aware of the specific characteristics of the phenomenon of acoustic reflection which we call echo.

Now, what are the characteristics of an *echo*, a Greek word that means both resonance and articulate natural repetition (Loewenstein "Echo's Ring" 290)?

In acoustical terminology, which itself reflects the two meanings in Greek, echoes proper must be distinguished from reverberations generally by the fact that they reach "the listening ear at least one-fifteenth of a second after the originating sound" (Hollander *The Figure of Echo* 1). Hence, reverberations do not affect us as repetitions but rather as prolongations of the original sound or as changes in timbre. But let me quote from Hollander's definition of echoes. He writes:

An echo of any given delay – say of a full second (from a distance of about 543 feet) – will only clearly return sound of that duration or less; the primary sound of a longer phrase of speech or music will interfere with the sound of the echo, and only the last second's worth of the phrase will be heard unconfused with its source. It is for this reason that echoes seem to return fragments of speech. Complex conformations of reflecting surfaces . . . can produce serial echoes – echoes themselves reechoed – as well as divers direct reflections from various distances. These are appreciatively fainter than the first series. (*The Figure of Echo* 1)

As Hollander further points out, until the invention of the gramophone by Edison, echoes were "the only means of perpetuating sound per se" (*The Figure of Echo* 1) – apart, of course, from the parrot.

For my consideration of echo-passages in literary texts I have isolated three chief characteristics of an echo: First, echoes are repetitions, be they single, double, triple or multiple, of sounds or words. Second, echoes

return sounds or words to their acoustic source, to their originating beginning. Third, echoes of speech return as truncated fragments of the last part of a verbal utterance.

After a brief discussion of passages that seem to contain no textual echoes (zero degree) and of wrong uses of echoes, I shall specifically highlight mimetic textual reflections of these three characteristics: First, I shall point to occurrences of repetition or “echoic effects” on the various levels of a text. I shall then turn to formal devices that suggest a return to the beginning such as chiasmus (*a b c – c b a*), that is, a figure of patterned repetition; by “linear rebound” as well as, but less frequently, by syntactic reversals. And last, I shall study forms of truncation of echoed verbal utterances.

I. Zero Degree

Let me start with textual passages in which a natural echo is mentioned but which do not use any formal means of re-enacting the characteristics of an echo listed above, such as repetition, rebound or truncation.

Lord Byron frequently refers to echoes in his poetry but mostly without any or little formal reinforcement. An example is offered by a passage in “The Island” (Canto II, 88-92):

Rung from the rock, or mingled with the wave,
Or from the bubbling streamlet's grassy side,
Or gathering mountain echoes as they glide,
Hath greater power o'er each true heart and ear,
Than all the columns Conquest's minions rear. . .

If we discount some random alliterations, assonances and the slightly echoic repetition of the function-word “or” and the syllable “ing,” there is no striking textual device that imitates echo-features.

A border case can be found in Alexander Pope's *Pastorals* (“Summer” 13-16; Pope's italics¹):

¹ All emphases in the quoted passages are mine if not explicitly attributed to the author.

Ye shady Beeches, and ye cooling Streams,
 Defence from *Phoebus*', not from *Cupid's* Beams;
 To you I mourn; nor to the Deaf I sing,
 The Woods shall answer, and their Echo ring.

In this passage Pope does not make use of any extra formal echo-devices. But by putting "their Echo ring" at the end of line 16 he cleverly and aptly exploits the couplet rhyme "ring" as an echo of "sing." In Samuel Johnson's words, this functional adaptation of the rhymed couplet may be called "representative versification" (Hollander *Melodious Guile* 7).

II. Wrong Uses

There are, surprisingly enough, also wrong attempts at imitating echo effects in some texts. One example is provided by Samuel Butler's doggerel dialogue between Orsin and Echo in *Hudibras* (The First Part, Canto III, 199-202):

Quoth he, "O whither, wicked Bruin,
 Art thou fled to my –" Echo: "Ruin?"
 "I thought thou'dst scorned to budge a step
 For fear." Quoth Echo, "Marry guep"

In this passage, which stands in the tradition of the Echo-dialogue that is based on meaningful truncation and suggestive punning, not the *last* words are reflected, as is the case with natural echoes, but the words in the *middle*: "Bruin" and "step" are echoed by "Ruin?" and "guep!" in order to conform to the demands of the couplet rhyme.

An even wronger use of an echo is made by Lord Byron in *The Bride of Abydos* (Canto II, xxvii):

Hark! to the hurried question of Despair:
 "Where is my child?" – an echo answers – "Where?"

Instead of an echo of the *last* word of an expression – here it would be "child" – we get a repetition of the *first* word "Where?" It is difficult to imagine that any poet can be so unfamiliar with the characteristics of a natural echo to change it back to front. Byron seems to have been more

familiar with the social world than with the world of nature.

III. Mimetic Uses

In the following I shall now deal with the chief formal devices that imitate or mime some of the distinctive features of an echo. As we shall see, writers formally “echo” its repetitive nature by an often obtrusive, and frequently redoubling, repetition of sounds and syllables, of rhymes (triplet rhymes), and of words, phrases and lines. The echo’s return to its source is reflected in the text by either the figure of chiasmus or a rebound to the beginning of the succeeding line or, more rarely, syntactic inversion. And the fragmentary character of the echo is rendered by forms of verbal truncation as consistently used in echo-dialogues.

1. Repetition of Sounds and Syllables

A large number of echo-passages are characterized by “echoic effects,” that is, repetition of identical or similar sounds and syllables.

In a passage from William Wordsworth’s early poem “An Evening Walk” (141-51), which describes the visual and acoustic effects of a quarry on the speaker, the dallying echo of “the various din” (144), especially of the “chissel’s clinking sound” (145), is distributed over the whole passage by means of the repetition of the high-pitched sounds /i/ and /ɪn[ɪ]/, which find a further echo in /i:/ sounds – “steeds” (142), “These,” “ceaseless” (150) – and /ɪ/ and /i:/ followed by nasals – “dim,” “between” (147):

I love to mark the quarry’s moving trains,
Dwarf panniered steeds, and men, and numerous wains:
How busy the enormous hive within,
While Echo dallies with the various din!
Some, hardly heard their chissel’s clinking sound,
Toil, small as pigmies, in the gulph profound;
Some, dim between th’aereal cliffs descryed,
O’erwalk the viewless plank from side to side;
These by the pale-blue rocks that ceaseless ring
Glad from their airy baskets hang and sing.

In all, the sounds /ɪ/ and /i:/ are repeated twenty-five times and the syllable /ɪn[ŋ]/ eight times in this passage.

In the first stanza of “Yes, it was the mountain Echo” (1-4) by the same author, we not only get a repetition of the syllable /aʊnt[d]/ in the two rhyme-words “profound” and “sound” but also in “mountain” and the second “sound” – all of which finds a further resonance in the diphthong /aʊ/ of “shouting”:

Yes, it was the *mountain* Echo,
Solitary, clear, *profound*,
Answering to the *shouting* Cuckoo,
Giving to her *sound* for *sound*!

A pervasive use of echoic effects can also be found in Lord Tennyson’s poetry. A simple syllabic echo – /ʌŋ/ and /ʌndə/ – is found in two lines from “The Defence of Lucknow” (31-32):

Ay, but the foe *sprung* his mine many times, and it chanced on a day,
Soon as the blast of that *underground thunderclap* echoed away

In Tennyson’s *Maud* (Part II. I. 23-28), for instance, we also find a whole web of acoustic echoes: the sound /əʊ/ is repeated seven times (three times as part of the syllable /ləʊ/). In addition, /ʌnt[d]/ is repeated three times:

For *front* to *front* in an hour we stood,
And a million horrible *bellowing echoes* broke.
From the red-ribbed *hollow* behind the wood,
And *thundered* up into Heaven the Christless *code*,
That must have life for a *blow*.
Ever and ever afresh they seemed to *grow*.

Similarly, G. M. Hopkins invests the textual rendering of a thrush’s echoing song with a rich complexity of reverberating sounds and syllables in his “Spring” (3-5):

. . . and thrush
Through the *echoing* timber does so *rinse* and *wring*
The *ear*, it strikes *like lightnings* to hear him *sing*. . .

Quite apart from the alliterations that are typical of Hopkins' poetry (e.g. "thrush," "Through"), we find that they also are cleverly combined with interlaced resounding syllables: /r]m[n]/, /h]iə/ and /l]a[k]/.

An early 20th century example of echoic effects can be found in E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* (205) where the echoes in the Marabar caves play a central, oracular role. The enigmatic nature of Forster's echo and the theme of unhappy love and the "punishment" of a male by a female as well as the connection of the echo with mirroring – "Did you see the reflection of his match – rather pretty?" said Adela (159) and "they [Aziz and Adela] lit a match, admired its reflection in the polish, tested the echo and came out again" (162) – are all vaguely reminiscent of the myth of Echo and Narcissus and point to Forster's indebtedness to the tradition of the echo-dialogue.

Discussing her experience in the Marabar caves with Ronny and Mrs Moore, Adela in conversation with Ronnie says:

"... there is this echo that I keep on hearing."

"Oh, what of the echo?" asked Mrs Moore, paying attention to her for the first time.

"I can't get rid of it."

"I don't suppose you ever will."

Ronny had emphasized to his mother that Adela would arrive in a morbid state, yet she was being positively malicious.

"Mrs Moore, what is this echo?"

"Don't you know?"

"No – what is it? Oh, do say! I felt you would be able to explain it ... this will comfort me so ..."

"If you don't know, you don't know; I can't tell you."

What is striking about this passage is not just that the word "echo" itself occurs three times but that there is a pervasive reverberation of its diphthong /əu/ in this short passage – it is repeated twelve times.

2. Triplet Rhymes

In the context of the echoic repetition of sounds and syllables it is interesting to note that the triplet-rhyme as a variant of the couplet-rhyme is often used to reinforce an echo-effect by both Dryden and Pope. Thus

Dryden uses the triplet rhyme in the echo passages of "The First Satire of Persius" (198-200), "The Hind and the Panther" (2183-85), "The Cock and the Fox" (746-48) and "Meleager and Atalanta" (101-103). Let me choose Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" (34-36), his famous ode to St. Cecilia, for a brief commentary:

The list'ning crowd admire the lofty *sound*;
 "A present deity," they shout *around*;
 "A present deity," the vaulted roofs *rebound*.

The echo here is not just rendered by a repetition of the phrase "A present deity" but also by the triplet rhyme "sound," "around" and "rebound," the last actually "rebounding" the previous couplet rhyme, and the muted echoes of the diphthong /aʊ/ in "crowd" and "shout."

Alexander Pope, when describing the echo of trumpets in his own contribution to St. Cecilia's Day, namely in his "Ode for Musick, on St. Cecilia's Day" (7-9), had recourse to the very same triplet-rhymes Dryden had used:

Let the *loud* Trumpet *sound*,
 Till the Roofs all *around*
 The shrill Ecchos *rebound*:

But whereas Dryden had half echoed the syllable /aʊnd/ of the triplet rhymes by twice using the diphthong /aʊ/ in his passage, Pope employed /aʊ/ once ("loud") but added the repetition of the syllable /ɪl/ ("Till," "shrill").

3. Repetition of Words, Phrases and Lines

Besides the echoic effect created by the iteration of identical or similar sounds and syllables, the repetition of words, phrases and whole lines (as a kind of refrain) is typical of a large number of echo-passages, some of which even acquire a performative character, that is, they do what they say.

In an echo-passage of Alexander Pope's translation of *The Iliad* (XVI, 767-70) there is a repetition of "Blows," which are the cause of the echoes:

As thro' the shrilling *Vale*, or *Mountain Ground*,
 The *Labours* of the Woodman's Axe *resound*
Blows following Blows are heard re-echoing wide,
 While crackling Forests fall on ev'ry side.

Starting with the echoic effects of the compound "*Mountain Ground*," which the rhyme-word "resound" actually resounds and the chiasmic reversal of the sounds /eɪ > ɪ/ >< /ɪ < eɪ/ of "*Vale*" and "*Labours*," of which more later, the text does what it says in other ways: it not only mimes the sequence of blows of the woodman's axe by the repetition of the key-word "Blows" but it imitates their "re-echoing wide" by adding further, gradually more muted echoes in the unstressed syllables of "following" and "re-echoing." To use the expression "re-echoing" here to obtain an echo-effect is a performative trait with a vengeance!

In a famous passage from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805; 5. 389-422), the Boy of Winander blows "mimic hootings to the silent owls, That they might answer him" (398-99). The owls' shouts, coming from an invisible source, sound like echoes and are echoed themselves. In lines 399-404 we get the repetitions of two words, both repetitions having a performative character:

. . . and they would shout
 Across the watery vale, and shout again,
 Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
 And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud,
Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild
 Of mirth and jocund din;

In this passage the expressions "and shout again" and "Redoubled and redoubled" do what they say: the word "shout" occurs again, being echoed by "loud" too, and the word "Redoubled" is itself redoubled.

In Lord Tennyson's *The Princess* (III ^IV, 5-6) we read:

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

The words "blow," "bugle," "dying" are echoed two to three times in this passage. And the repetition of the word "echoes" in the phrase "answer echoes" has a performative character. It is interesting to note that the

falling stress of the feminine rhyme-word “dying” mimes the fading of the answering echoes.

A humorous example of the echoic repetition of words is offered by Walter de la Mare’s “Quack” (*Poems 1919-1934*, 357; de la Mare’s italics):

What said the drake to his lady-love
 But *Quack*, then *Quack*, then *QUACK!*
 And she, with long love-notes as sweet as his,
 Said *Quack* – then, softer, *QUACK*
 And Echo that lurked by the old red barn,
 Beyond their staddled stack,
 Listening this love-lorn pair’s delight,
 Quacked their quacked *Quack, Quack, Quacks* back.

In this children’s verse, which is a burlesque of the traditional echo-dialogue, the love-lorn ducks’ duet of quacking (five quacks in all), is echoed, in slightly changed form, by exactly five quacks in the second part of the poem and furthermore half-echoed by “stack” (6) and “back” (8).

The repetition of whole phrases is also very common and we have already encountered one example in the repetition of “A present deity” in the quotation above from Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast.” However, echoes may entail the repetition of whole lines as, for instance, in Pope’s *Pastorals* (“Autumn” 57-96) where we get the two slightly varied lines:

Resound ye Hills, resound my mournful Strain!

and

Resound ye Hills, resound my mournful Lay!

These lines do not merely contain a quasi-performative “resounding” dimension in that the word “resound” itself is repeated but they also occur as echoing refrains in lines 57, 65, 71, 77, 85 and 93.

In Dryden’s *The Secular Masque* (33-36) even a whole couplet is repeated in an echoing way: the first “Chorus of All” resounds itself like the echo to the last couplet of Diana’s speech for it also “doubles the cry”:

Diana.

[. . .]

With shouting and hooting we pierce thro’ the sky,
 And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.

Chorus of All.

*With shouting and hooting we pierce thro' the sky,
And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.*

4. Chiasmus

I shall now deal with the various formal means that writers – whether consciously or unconsciously – have employed to reflect the second important characteristic of echo, namely its return of sounds or words to their originating source. One way of formally suggesting this acoustic rebound is by the use of patterned repetition, namely of the rhetorical figure of chiasmus (*abc – cba*), a figure which, having proceeded from element *a* to *b* and then to *c*, returns through *b* again to *a*. Obviously, this figure of reversal may be used on the level of sounds or of words.

a. Chiasmus of Sounds

Let me start with the chiasmus of *sounds*. When reading through the numerous passages in which echoes are mentioned, I was struck by the fact that there often occurs a phonetic chiasmus in the immediate context of the words “echo” or “echoes,” sometimes with these words in a pivotal position.

William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (2.2.160-63) offers such a chiasmus with “Echo” in the middle. Juliet says:

Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud,
Else would I *tear* the *cave* where Echo lies,
And *make* her *airy* tongue more hoarse than [mine],
With repetition of my [Romeo’s name.] Romeo!

The phonetic chiasmus of this passage, which is primarily inherent in the words “cave” and “make,” words that center “Echo,” may be represented the following way:

/k > ei / > “Echo” < / ei < k/.

Taking also the repeated “hoarse” and the identical diphthongs /eə/ of the

words “tear” and “airy” into account we get a somewhat more extended chiasmus:

“hoarse” > /eə/ > /k > eɪ/ > “Echo” < /eɪ < k/ < /eə/ < “hoarse.”

Similar forms of phonetic chiasmus may be found in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (X, 860-62):

O woods, O fountains, hillocks, *dales* and bowers,
With other echo *late* I taught your shades
To answer, and resound far other song.

Apart from the repetitions of two words (“O,” “other”) and some assonances we get the sequence:

/[d] > eɪ > l/ > “echo” < /l < eɪ < [t]/.

Or in Milton’s “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity” (96-100) we discover a more extended chiasmus:

Divinely warbled voice
Answering the stringed noise,
As all their *souls* in blissful rapture took:
The air such pleasure loth to lose,
With thousand echoes still *prolongs* each heavenly *close*.

The sequence of phonetic reversals, which contains chiasmus within chiasmus (as a reflection of the plurality of “echoes?”), reads as follows:

/[s] > əv > l/ >> /l > əv/ > “echoes” < /əv < l/ >> /l < əv/ < [z]/.

And in the first line of the couplet from Lord Tennyson’s *The Princess* quoted further above:

Blow, bugle, blow, set the *wild* echoes *flying*,

we also find the chiasmic sequence: /aɪ > l/ > [consonant] > “echoes” < [consonant] < /l < aɪ/.

There are, however, numerous examples in which the word “echo(es)” is not pivotal but a part of the chiasmic reversal itself as, for instance, in John Dryden’s “The Twelfth Book of Ovid His Metamorphoses” (647):

His hollow belly *echo’d* to the *stroke*;

or in William Wordsworth’s later adaptation of the same chiasmus in “An Evening Walk” (107):

Th’ unwearied glance of woodman’s *echoed stroke*.

In both examples we get the phonetic reversal: /k > əʊ/ >< /əʊ < k/.

In John Dryden’s translation of Virgil, “The Tenth Pastoral” (10-11), not the echo itself is integrated into the phonetic chiasmus but the echoing grove:

The *vocal grove* shall answer to the sound,
And echo, from the vales, the tuneful voice rebound

The reversal of sounds in “vocal grove” – /v > əʊ/ >< /əʊ < v/ – informs the two immediately contiguous words that define the place where “the sound” is echoed by “rebound.”

However, there are a large number of cases in which the chiasmus of sounds just occurs in the immediate context, without centring or incorporating “echo(es)” at all. Let me quote two examples offered by Alexander Pope. The first is from his *Pastorals* (“Winter” 41-44; Pope’s italics for Daphne and Echo), which is rich in repetition (“silent,” “her Name,” “Pleasure”) – establishing echoic links between the quoted four lines – and also uses a rhetorical figure of repetition, anadiplosis, twice (“silent,” “her name”):

In hollow Caves sweet *Echo silent lies*,
Silent, or only to her Name *replies*,
Her Name with Pleasure once she taught the Shore,
Now *Daphne’s* dead, and Pleasure is no more!

If we discount the difference of voice in /s/ and /z/ we get a chiasmic string made up of smaller chiasmic elements:

/[s] > aɪ > l/ >< /l < aɪ < [z]/ >< /[s] > aɪ > l/ >< /l < aɪ < [z]/.

And in Pope's translation of *The Odyssey* (XVII, 624-25; Pope's italics for Telemachus) there is an equally extended chiasmus of sounds:

*She spoke. Telemachus then sneez'd aloud;
Constrain'd, his nostril echo'd thro' the crowd.*

The partly graphemic chiasmus inherent in this echo-passage is:

/əʊ > k/ > /[ə] > n/ >< /n < [ɒ]/ < /k < əʊ/.

It is worth noting that there are even traces of phonetic chiasmus in the famous echo-scene in the "Caves" section of E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* (158-59) where the unique and "terrifying echo" (158) is described as follows:

The echo in a Marabar cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. "Boum" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or "bou-oum", or "ou-boum" – utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "boum". Even the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling, which is too small to complete a circle, but is eternally watchful. And if several people talk at once an overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently.

The almost identical, inarticulate echoes in a Marabar cave are rendered by Forster in a somewhat chiastic fashion:

/bu:m/ > /bu:/ > /u:[m]/ >< /u:/ < /bu:[m]/ < /bu:m/.

Furthermore, there is in rather close vicinity the repetition in the phrases "echoes generate echoes" and "a snake composed of small snakes" as well. The second half of the last sentence above also contains a phonetic chiastic string in the sequence of the words "generate," (four syllables intervening), "cave," (four syllables intervening), "snake," (four syllables intervening), "snakes":

/ei/ > (4 syllables) > /k > ei/ > (4 syllables) < /ei < k/ < (4 syllables) < /ei/.

b. Chiasmus of Words, Synonyms and Antonyms

But the return of the echoed sound or speech to its source may not merely be indicated by the chiasitic reversal of sounds but also by the repetition of words, synonyms and antonyms in a chiasitic order.

A well-known echo-passage occurs in Pope's *Pastorals* ("Autumn" 47-50; Pope's italics for Delia):

Go gentle Gales, and bear my Sighs away!
Come, *Delia*, come; ah why this long *Delay*?
Thro' Rocks and Caves the Name of *Delia* sounds,
Delia, each Cave and ecchoing Rock rebounds.

The echoing of the name *Delia* – originally it was *Thyrsis* but Pope changed the name to make it chime with "Delay" (Epstein 51) – is not only mimed by the rudimentary chiasitic phrase "Come, *Delia*, Come" but especially by the chiasitic sequence:

"Rock(s)" > "Cave(s)" > "*Delia*" > < "*Delia*" < "Cave" < "Rock."

The reversal of movement is also suggested by the semantic inversion of "Go gentle Gales" and "Come, *Delia*, come" (47-48). When Epstein comments that this passage is "perhaps not mimetic because chiasitic – echoes do not repeat in reverse" (51) he has not taken into account the mimetic or diagrammatic nature of the *movement* in a chiasmus from *a* through *b* to *c* and back again to *a*.

In *Merlin and Vivien* (970-73) Lord Tennyson also employs a chiasitic order of words in a passage that describes an echo:

And shrieking out "O fool!" the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed "fool."

Again we have a chiasmic order of words:

“fool” > “the forest” > < “the forest” < “fool”

In addition, the symmetry is reinforced by the fact that both the shriek and its echo are in direct speech. Furthermore, in true echo-fashion, “O fool” is truncated to a mere “fool.”

Quite often, however, the chiasmic sequence of words in an echo-text is complemented by synonymous or antonymous words, phrases or periphrases, sometimes even reinforced by phonetic elements. A simple example is provided by a passage in Pope’s translation of *The Odyssey* (XXIII, 143-44):

The voice, attun’d to instrumental sounds,
Ascends the roof; the vaulted roof rebounds;

The ascent of the “instrumental sounds” to the “roof” (ceiling) and their rebounding echo is imitated by a chiasmic figure that includes two quasi-antonyms:

“Ascends” > “roof” > < “roof” < “rebounds”

Let me now have a look at a two-line excerpt from the passage in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Liber III, 500-1) where Echo bids farewell to Narcissus, and then at two translations of this excerpt into English. The passage in Ovid reads:

“heu frustra dilecte puer!” totidemque remisit
verba locus, dictoque vale “vale!” inquit et Echo.

Taking into account periphrasis and synonyms, we recognize a chiasmic pattern that enacts the rebound of the echoed words:

“totidemque remisit verba locus” > “dictoque” > “vale” > < “vale” < “inquit et” < “Echo”

Now let us compare this passage and its pattern with two early translations into English, the one by George Sandys and the other by Joseph Addison.

In Sandys' version (*Ovid's Metamorphosis*, Book III, 503-4: Sandys' italics) we read:

Ah, Boy, below'd in vaine! so *Eccho* said.
Farewell. Farewell, sigh't she. Then down he lyes:

Also in Sandys' version there is a chiastic repetition in terms of words and synonyms that closely reflects the pattern in Ovid:

“Eccho” > “said” > “Farewell” > < “Farewell” < “sigh’t” < “she”

Addison (*Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Book III, 611-12) piles repetition upon repetition in the whole passage but in the last two lines he, so to speak, turns Ovid's chiasmus inside out:

“Farewel,” says he: the parting sound scarce fell
 From his faint lips, but she reply'd, “Farewel:”

The chiastic sequence of repeated words, synonyms and antonyms now runs as follows:

“Farewel” > “says” > “he” > < “she” < “reply'd” < “Farewel”

As a last example let me quote a passage from William Shakespeare's *King John* (5.2.167-73) where Philip the Bastard says:

. . . Do but start
 An echo with the clamor of thy drum,
 And even at hand a drum is ready brac'd
 That shall reverberate all as loud as thine.
 Sound but another, and another shall
 (As loud as thine) rattle the welkin's ear,
 And mock the deep-mouth'd thunder . . .

Apart from the repetition of the word “drum” we have, in descending order, a neat chiastic organization of the lines 170-73 in terms of, first, two largely synonymous phrases (“reverberate all” and “rattle the welkin's ear”), then a repeated phrase (“as loud as thine”) and finally a repeated word (“another”):

“reverberate all” > < “rattle the welkin’s ear”
 “as loud as thine” > < “(As loud as thine)”
 “another” > < “another”

The fact that the second “(As loud as thine)” is put between parentheses in this echo-passage seems to me to signal a conscious insertion on Shakespeare’s part in order to safeguard a chiasmic reversal.

5. Linear Rebound

Reading through the numerous echo-passages I was struck by the fact that in many of them the words “echo(es),” “echoed,” “echoing,” their synonyms, periphrases for them or the actual echo itself somehow seem to be flung back or rebounded to the beginning of the line that succeeds the line mentioning the echoed utterance. Let me call this phenomenon “linear rebound.” Furthermore, the expression occurring in the linear rebound position often stands either after or especially before the verbs “rebound” and “resound.”

But let me illustrate this formal device by first quoting a few passages with the verb “rebound” mostly following the rebounded term. John Dryden offers two examples. In his translation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, *The Third Book* (77-78) we read:

From hills and dales the cheerful cries rebound;
 For Echo hunts along, and propagates the sound.

Here the echoed shouts, “the cheerful cries,” and the fact of their rebounding are mentioned in the first line. However, the term “Echo” itself is rebounded to the beginning of the second line. In another translation of Virgil, “The Tenth Pastoral” (10-11), by Dryden (quoted above) the verb “rebound” does not precede but follows the word “echo” in the initial line position:

The vocal grove shall answer to the sound,
 And echo, from the vales, the tuneful voice rebound.

Pope has an example in his translation of *The Iliad* (II, 249-52) in which the

word “echo” is paraphrased by “The Rocks remurmur” which verbally echoes “Murmuring” of line 249:

Murmuring they [the troops] move as when old
[. . .]
The groaning Banks are burst with bellowing Sound,
The Rocks remurmur, and the Deeps rebound.

In some cases the echoed words themselves are rebounded to the beginning of the succeeding line as in the already quoted example from Dryden’s *Alexander’s Feast* (34-36):

The list’ning crowd admire the lofty sound;
“A present deity,” they shout around;
“A present deity,” the vaulted roofs rebound.

In the poetry of Pope we also find examples for this, as in his *Pastorals* (“Autumn” 49-50; Pope’s italics), discussed above, where the name *Delia* is rebounded by means of the rhetorical figure of anadiplosis:

Thro’ Rocks and Caves the Name of *Delia* sounds,
Delia, each Cave and echoing Rock rebounds.

Or in Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (Canto V, 103-4; Pope’s italics), which harks back to the quotation from Dryden’s *Alexander’s Feast* above, we get a similar linear rebound:

“*Restore the lock!*” she cries; and all around
“Restore the lock!” the vaulted Roofs rebound.

A large number of echo-passages makes use of the verb “resound.” An early example of a linear rebound introduced by “resound” occurs in Edmund Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* (“August” 159-60) where in the second stanza of Colin’s sestina the rebounded “hollow Echo” itself is of an echoic nature – /ɒ/, /əʊ/, /əʊ/:

The forest wide is fitter to resound
The hollow Echo of my carefull cries.

An interesting case is furnished by John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (V, 178-79):

In mystic dance not without song, resound
His praise, who out of darkness called up light.

The phrase "resound His praise," which echoes the earlier "sound his praise" (172), straddles an enjambement that "cuts the amplifying echo . . . in half" (Hollander *The Figure of Echo* 38). But it does more than this: it also enacts a linear rebound of the echoed words, "His praise," to the beginning of the succeeding line. In the whole passage (171-204) from which these lines have been taken "his/new praise" occurs seven times. But line 179 offers the only echoic use of "His praise" and the only instance, with the exception of line 192 where it is the subject of a new sentence, in which the phrase is put at the beginning of the line.

In a later passage of *Paradise Lost* (X, 860-62) we get a double linear rebound ("other echo" and "To answer"):

O woods, O fountains, hillocks, dales and bowers,
 With other echo late I taught your shades
To answer, and resound far other song.

In addition to this there is also a phonetic chiasmus inherent in "Dales" and "late,"

$$/[d] > eɪ > l/ >< /l < eɪ < [t]/,$$

plus a muted echo of the sound /eɪ/ in "Shades" as well as repetition of words – "O" and "other" – and an echoic redoubling of synonyms ("To answer" and "resound") in the last line.

There remain some examples of linear rebound that fling back the words "echo(es)," "echoing" and "echoed" or a periphrasis of the echoed words without the occurrence of the verbs "rebound" or "resound."

Again John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (IV, 680-82) offers a case of a double rebound, "echoing" and "Celestial voices," in three lines connected by enjambement:

. . . how often from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices to the midnight air,

In the final chorus of “Clorinda and Damon” (27-30), Andrew Marvell uses the verb “echo” in a linear rebound – at the same time semantically echoing it by means of the synonym “ring”:

Of Pan the flowry pastures sing,
Caves echo, and the fountains ring.
Sing then while he doth us inspire;
For all the world is our Pan’s choir.

It should be noted that the whole passage is also characterized by a chiasmus of words and synonyms:

“Pan” > “sing” > “echo” > < “ring” < “Sing” < “Pan”.

Lord Byron in “The Prisoner of Chillon” (63-64) offers a clear case of linear rebound:

Our voices took a dreary tone,
An echo of the dungeon stone,

as does Wordsworth in “On the Power of Sound” (155-58) – at the same time enriching the echoic nature of the passage by repeating the syllable /kəʊ/ in “cold,” “Echoed,” with muted echoes of /kɒ/ in “coffin” and “Convict,” as well as by the jingle /lɪ/ in “little,” “sprinkling” and “lid”:

. . . hear
The little sprinkling of cold earth that fell
Echoed from the coffin lid;
The Convict’s summons in the steeple knell.

Lord Tennyson also makes use of linear rebound, for instance in “The Palace of Art” (25-28):

And round the cool green courts there ran a row
Of cloisters, branched like mighty woods,

Echoing all night to that sonorous flow
Of spouted fountain floods.

and in a passage of “The Princess” (III ^IV, 13-16) where he does the same thing with “Our echoes”:

O love, they [bugle echoes] die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.

This quatrain is also pervaded by repetitions of the sound /əʊ/ (“O,” “echoes,” “roll,” “soul,” “grow”) and the syllable /əʊl/ is iconically repeated in the echo-line (“roll from soul to soul”) to suggest the continuity of the rolling movement.

Without mentioning the word “echo,” William Wordsworth offers an especially graphic instance in “On the Power of Sound” (33-36) where the rebound device is used twice:

Ye Voices, and ye Shadows
And Images of voice – to hound and horn
From rocky steep and rock-bestudded meadows
Flung back, and, in the sky’s blue caves, reborn.

Here the echoes, in the conventional periphrasis of “Images of voice,” are rebounded to the beginning of line 34. The verb for the rebounding of the echo itself, “Flung back,” is also typographically flung back to the beginning of line 36.

The frequency of the phenomenon of linear rebound in echo-passages, which sometimes involves repetition – and only a selection has been presented here – seems to me to indicate that this stylistic device is not just a matter of accident.

6. Syntactic Inversion

The last, but far less common, device of miming the acoustic reversal of direction inherent in the process of echoing may be found in some form of inversion or change of the syntactic function of repeated words.

A closer look at John Dryden's translation of the "The Twelfth Book of Ovid His Metamorphoses" (644-47) reveals such an inversion:

"Since downright blows," he cried, "and thrusts are vain,
I'll prove his side." In strong embraces held,
He prov'd his side; his side the sword repell'd:
His hollow belly echo'd to the stroke.

In this echo-passage there is not only a repetition of the sound /l]əʊ/ ("blows," "hollow," "echo," "stroke"), a phonetic chiasmus informing "echo" and "stroke" and the echoing repetition of phrases ("prove his side" and "prov'd his side") and, with truncation, ("his side"), but "his side" is also affected by a change of its syntactic function from object to subject: the first "his side" is the object of "He prov'd" whereas the second "his side" is the subject of "the sword repell'd."

Finally, let us again consider an extract from Lord Tennyson's *Merlin and Vivien* quoted before:

And shrieking out "O fool!" the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed "fool."

Apart from being characterized by a chiasmus of words and by truncation, as pointed out already, there is in this echo-passage a syntactical change-over: the second "the forest" no longer functions as an adverbial of place but as a subject.

7. Truncation

The last quality typical of a natural echo is the fact that the original utterance is repeated or echoed only in truncated form: merely the final word(s) can be heard clearly. We have encountered two examples of truncation in the echo-passages quoted so far but the most thorough use of truncation is made in the genre of the echo-dialogues. In these dialogues truncation may be of a syntactical nature involving the shortening of whole sentences to a mere phrase or of a morpho-semantic character entailing the truncation of the initial letters of a word or name, be this either graphemic or phonemic.

and the last two lines go:

Light, joy, and leisure; but shall they persevere?

Echo. Ever.

In lines 4-5 of Jonathan Swift's "A Gentle Echo on Woman," where a shepherd's question about how to woo a woman – "What must we do our passion to express?" – is answered by the nymph Echo saying: "Press."

The genre of the echo-dialogue has all but disappeared except for its use in children's verse and in parodies. In the children's poem "The Lion and the Echo" Brian Patten uses semantic truncation in the fourth stanza where an echo fearlessly answers the roar of the King of the Beasts:

The lion swore revenge if only it could

Discover the intruder in the wood.

It roared "Coward! Come out and show yourself!"

But the fearless echo replied simply ". . . elf."

As to the parodies of the echo-dialogue there is a further instance in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (512), where Bloom's exclamation, "Hurray for the High School!" is truncated by Echo to "Fool!"

A more modern parody of the dialogue between Echo and Narcissus can be found in John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (97-99). This postmodern novel contains a chapter entitled "Echo" in which echoing repetitions abound – e.g. "And Echo's. Echo's?" (97).

Barth offers a parodic dialogue between Echo and Narcissus (97-98), which in part is indebted to Jonson's punning use of echoes in his *Cynthia's Revels*:

I'll repeat the tale. Though in fact many are bewildered, Narcissus conceives himself alone and becomes the first person to speak.

I can't go on.

Go on.

Is there anyone to hear here?

Who are you?

You.

I?

Aye.

Then let me see me!

See?

A lass! Alas.

Et cetera et cetera.

By letting Echo repeat not the *last* word of Narcissus' "Then let me see me!" (in which the sequence "me see me" creates both a reversal and a mirror-effect) but the *second last* word, "See?", he gives the tradition of the echo-dialogue a comic twist. But Barth is also explicit about echoic truncation (97):

Echo never, as popularly held, repeats all, like gossip or mirror. She edits, heightens, mutes, turns others' words to her end.

Barth then incorporates semantic truncations in his narrative that are also indebted to traditional echo-dialogues. Thus he writes about Narcissus (99):

He's resolved to do away with himself, his beloved likewise. Together now.

Adored-in-vain, farewell!

Well. One supposes that's the end of the story.

This shortening of "farewell" to "Well" probably goes back to the last two lines of Edward Herbert's "Echo to a Rock" (Howarth 210):

Thou art my Monument, and this my last farewell.

Echo. Well.

But Barth goes even further in his parodic truncation. In the sentence "As for that nymph [Echo] whose honey voice still *recalls* his [Narcissus'] calls . . ." (99) he attributes the truncation to Narcissus instead of Echo.

I hope enough has been shown to prove that through the ages, from Ovid, Spenser and Shakespeare to John Barth and Brian Patten, writers have exploited divers devices of repetition – and ancillary formal means – that are capable of generating textual echoes of echoes.

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