

Lack of Coherence in Hamlet's Madness Scenes: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

The present work falls into four in addition to an introduction and an conclusion sections, the first of which is to shed light on the Shakespearian linguistic contributions showing the possibility of the co-occurrence of certain linguistic phenomena from literary works to be familiarized among language users.

The second section is devoted to tackling the notion of pragmatics where it is concerned with studying the communicative and implied meaning. Its goal is to manifest how to bridge the gap between sentence meaning and that of the speaker. This section also shows the similarities and differences between pragmatics and discourse analysis as a way to discuss the notion of coherence. While the third section is to define coherence. To produce coherent utterances, the speaker is expected to ensure that his utterances stand in a way or another to the preceding and following ones. Recognizing such a relation is important for its successful comprehension in communication. To analyse the sense of coherence in Hamlet's utterances, the researcher adopts Grice's 'cooperative principle' as a pillar upon which data analysis is built.

The fourth section is to analyse certain selected speeches to show the extent to which they are incoherent.

At last, the conclusion sums up the findings of the present study.

1.Introduction :

Claudius's utterance, "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (III, ii: 187), represents the core of the present study. Shakespeare's Hamlet is generally considered to be the peak of modern tragedy (Barnard, 1984: 26). Hamlet's father who is the King of Denmark is murdered by his brother. Being spurred on by his father's ghost, Hamlet tries to revenge. He is capable of action, but his mind is speculative, questioning, contemplative. The protagonist's psychological complexity provides particularly intriguing examples of language. Throughout the play, especially in Hamlet's madness scenes, "action is separated by a series of questioning monologues for Hamlet, speeches of surpassing power and insight which have survived centuries of being torn from their context." (Ibid)

In his "To be or not to be" soliloquy, Hamlet presents a sort of utterances which contain oppositional terms yoked together and forced into a position of syntactic and rhetorical similarity which militates considerably against the fact of their semantic differences. It has a complex negotiation between a series of incompatible choices. Such a use of language reflects the controlling personality of the ghost, though the ghost seems a rather limited character; rarely appearing or speaking by taking the imagery diction, and values and reusing them through Hamlet's thoughts and speeches. The present study tackles Hamlet's speeches according to Grice's maxims of the 'cooperative principle' to analyse the degree of relevance from which coherence is derived.

2. Shakespeare's Linguistic Legacy

Shakespeare's coining of new words such as 'assassination', 'courtship' and some other idiomatic phrases such as 'salad day' and 'cold comfort' represents part of his linguistic contributions and influence on the present day English. Reading Shakespeare's works, one can learn how it is possible to explore and exploit the resources of language in original ways. He shows how to dare to do things with language.

What is more reading a text means a meeting of minds; and when minds are separated by so many years of linguistic change, one must expect some difficulties. Some of these are immediately apparent in the sense that one may see a word and has no idea what it means. Sometimes they are hidden, in other words, one may see a word and, because it looks familiar, one thinks s/he knows what it means. Such words, according to Crystal (2003: 176), are referred to as "false cognate" or "false friends", for instance, the word 'demander', in the French language, which seems to mean 'demand', when actually it means 'ask'. Such words are the major source of difficulty to grip Shakespeare's literary meaning. (Crystal, 2005: 3)

Shakespeare's use of several old words may create some sort of ambiguity though it represents a linguistic property, for example, the older verb form 'speken'; which means 'speak', 'shoon' means 'shoes', 'eke' means 'also', [aught] as in Hamlet's utterance "I never gave you aught" (III, i: 97), meaning 'anything' which is not used in ordinary modern English that is why it may seem completely vague. But its opposite 'nought' meaning 'zero' or 'nothing' may familiarize the preceding one, 'aught'.

To the modern English reader, some of the Shakespearian words are current, some old and some new. The older ones are called "obsolete words" or "archaic" while the new ones are "coinages" or "neological" (Crystal, 2003: 113-5), for instance, the word 'amazement' in Shakespeare's Hamlet that means 'bewilderment' not, as in modern English, i.e., 'great surprise'.

For neologisms, the reader may be helped in the sense that some of Shakespeare's characters actually declare that they are using new words and usage. Biron describes the Spanish visitor to court, Don Armado, in Love's Labour's Lost, as "A man of fire-new words". Such "nonce formations" are resorted to on certain occasions in which the speaker cannot remember a particular word, so coins an approximant one, such a sort of ability is called "creativity". (See Formkin et al., 2003: 8-9)

In addition to archaism and neologism, there are certain Shakespearian phrasal and syntactic peculiarities in Hamlet that may seem to the reader as if they were part of the English Language. Being unaware of their origin, some English speakers universally use those phrases due to the popularity of Hamlet, for instance, "the mind's eye" (I. ii. 84) and "a sea of troubles". (III. i. 59). These Shakespearian phrases show how the co-occurrence of certain individual lexical items pass into a language from certain literary works. Literarily speaking, Shakespeare invents such a complicated phraseology to reflect his character' inner turmoil and to create some sort of dramatic effects (Paul, 1971: 96).

3. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and their users; it is concerned with the communicative, rather than simply grammatical competence. The goal of pragmatics is to explain how the gap between sentence meaning and that of the speaker is bridged. It focuses on what is not explicitly mentioned and on how to interpret utterances in certain situational contexts. Thus, pragmatics is the theory of meaning in context, including

implicit meaning or, equivalently, the theory of human natural language understanding in context.

(Finch, 2000: 150)

Interpreting an utterance, according to Sperber and Wilson (1986: 118), is more than merely specifying the assumption explicitly expressed but it basically involves working out of the consequences of adding such an assumption to a set of others that has already been processed. In other words, it involves seeing the contextual effects of this assumption in a context determined by previous acts of comprehension.

Moreover, pragmatics, like discourse analysis, has to deal with meaningful units; meaningless ones cannot be studied as a sort of discourse or conversation. It is plain that discourse analysis has objectives that lie very close, if not shared by, those of pragmatics in the sense that 'discourse' is no more than a sequence of sentences in operation, in other words, utterances. (Puig, 2003: 2)

To Yule (1996: 4), the discourse analyst explains the linguistic elements in question without going outside language while the pragmatician resorts to other ambits of human activity, beliefs, feelings, knowledge and intentions which represent one of the advantages of studying language via pragmatics. Pragmatics relies on the speakers' interpretive strategy in which the matter attributes qualities and moods such as rationality, desires and mental states to other speakers. Such a strategy is oriented towards predicting other speakers' behaviour.

Discourse is a coherent sequence of utterances whose interpretation is based on the expectation that it will have a degree of coherence. Much recent work on the interpretation of discourse has been built on the idea that the way hearers recover messages from utterances is determined by their assumptions that "in discourse, contiguous linguistic strings are meant to be interpreted as being connected, or, in other words, that discourse is coherent." Such a sort of connections is not necessarily made explicit; the hearer is expected to fill them in on the basis of the background or contextual assumptions. This leads one to say that unless the hearer can recognize that the segments of the discourse are coherent in some way, s/he will not be able to recover any kind of message and the discourse will be ill-formed (Blackemore, 1987: 105).

As a result, knowing what 'context' means is very important in studying discursal connectedness. Interpreting the linguistic meaning of an utterance within a discourse represents the main aim of pragmatics. Such an aim can be achieved through analysing semantic relatedness between one utterance and the other together with the current context.

Context may be classified into two types. The first is called the 'linguistic context' in which the interpretation of an utterance depends on the preceding one as in, "amazingly, he loves her". To analyse it regardless of what is before and after, the receiver is unable to know the identity of the pronouns 'he' and 'her'. There are no referents to the personal pronouns 'he' and 'she', and the reason of "amazingly" is ambiguous. But if the preceding utterance was "John met Mary yesterday, its interpretation would be clearer (Fromkin, et al., 2003: 208).

The second type of context is the 'situational context'. It refers to the speaker, hearer along with their beliefs and their beliefs about what others believe. It involves the physical environment, the subject of conversation, the time of day, and so on. Almost any imaginable extralinguistic factor may influence the way language is used or interpreted. (ibid). To Sperber and Wilson (1986: 120), an utterance is relevant to a context if and only if it has some "contextual effects" in that context. Having such contextual effects is a necessary condition for relevance.

Moreover, discourse should follow certain rules or maxims, according to Grice's 'cooperative principle', to create some sort of relevance from which coherence is derived. These maxims are:

1. Quantity which means "to say neither more nor less than what the discourse requires."
2. Relation which is simply "to be relevant."
3. Manner that is "to be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity and obscurity."
4. Quality is "do not lie, do not make, unsupported claims.". (Yule, 1996: 37)

What is influential in pragmatic theory is conversational implicature, that is a subclass of 'non-conventional implicature'. It arises from the necessity that speakers feels in communication to make utterances coherent, clear and orderly. To Grice, "what guarantees these features is the cooperative principle. This, with its associated maxims, enables one to make inferences over and above what is explicitly stated.". (Finch, 2000: 167). Inference is one of the concepts, in addition to context and intention, that pragmatic theory is built on. It is the process of deduction which listeners basically use or depend on in interpreting utterances. It is crucial to interpretation since a good deal of meaning is implied rather than being directly or explicitly delivered (ibid).

4. Coherence

The notions of coherence, cohesion and the informational structure or any other concept related to internal organization are among the properties that discourse should bear. Both cohesion and coherence are "text-centered notions, designated operations directed at the materials." (Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981: 84). To Halliday and Hasan (1976: 10), coherence may be established through providing "cohesive relations", that exist between the referring item and the item that is referred to in the text. In other words, the text should have "texture". Such a sort of relations is called a "tie", e.g., "reference".

Brown and Yule (1983: 122) suggest that Halliday and Hasan do not attempt to explain how texts are understood, but are instead concerned with the linguistic resources available in English for making relationship with a text, i.e., they are concerned with 'cohesion' rather than coherence. To explain, it is acknowledged that pure formal linguistic features of utterances in discourse, 'cohesive markers', do not suffice to establish "coherence" or to provide evidence for the internal organization. Coherence, according to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 85), "is not a mere feature of texts, but rather the outcome of cognitive processes among text users. The simple juxtaposition of events and situations in a text will activate operations which recover or create coherence relations."

To account for the "well-formedness" of discourse, one needs not just an account of the relationship between the sentences of a text, but also an account of the way that each sentence is related to a unified topic of discourse. Coherent continuity of a discourse implies information distribution which, in turn, refers to the introduction, continuity, expansion, topicalisation and focusing. (Dijk, 1977: 95)

Moreover, Hobbs (1979: 83) and Dijk (1977: 84) assume that coherence of content can be explicated in terms of coherence relations between propositions. A speaker who wishes his/her utterance to be understood must ensure that it stands in one of the relations to the preceding utterances and the recognition of the particular relation it bears is essential for its successful comprehension in communication.

According to Blakemore (1987: 111), the notion of coherence is derived from the notion of relevance. Coherence is a semantic property of discourse that is built on the interpretation of each individual utterance relative to that of the preceding one. It may arise

from a match between expectation and actuality allowing receivers to predict what will come next. To be coherent, any two utterances must be shown to have something to do with each other as far as meaning is concerned (Cook, 1994: 29).

5. Data Analysis

In Shakespeare's masterpiece Hamlet, there is much debate around the protagonist, Hamlet, and whether or not his madness was real or feigned. It was a disastrous time in Hamlet's life as his father had just murdered away, his uncle then took the kingship and did wed Hamlet's mother, then the ghost of his deceased father appeared to him with instruction for revenge saying "So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear./... Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." (I.V. 7-25)

Although the ghost is a rather limited character, rarely appearing or speaking on stage, Shakespeare establishes and maintains the audience's sharp awareness of the ghost's controlling personality by taking the imagery, diction, and values that are present in the ghost's brief speeches. The ghost's impact on Hamlet's mind is very clear in his first speech after the meeting with the ghost which is

*O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? – O, fie! Hold, hold, myheart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old.
But bear me shiffly up.- Remember thee!
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!*

In his speech, Hamlet refers to his head. Hamlet's mind is perplexed just like the real world of Denmark. He has nothing in mind but remembering the ghost. Linguistically speaking, his speech is composed of short phrases ending either with an exclamation or a question mark reflecting the idea that he is astonished and in need of filling in the gaps of what he has already heard from the ghost.

What is more vocating 'hell', 'earth', and 'heaven' reflects the idea of lacking the decision on what to say or to what or who he should address.

Throughout Hamlet, the protagonist speaks ambiguously and this is clear in Hamlet's utterance, "A little more than kin, and less than kind." (I, ii, 65), replying on Claudius's saying, "But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son." (I, ii, 64). To illustrate, Hamlet uses certain strategy through the use of language, playing on words, to discover certain facts. He uses "kin" and "kind" intentionally; both of these words, in old English, are of one root or species. (Paul, 1971: 14)

Such a use of language is not a sort of bathos but represents sensitivity. For Hamlet, Claudius is more than an uncle who is not as kind and antimate as the real uncle. Hamlet's linguistic trickery only reflects his turmoil and thoughts. Many utterances convey implicit meaning which requires the hearer to disambiguate or assign appropriate interpretations to vague expressions or approximations. (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 2). Having no idea concerning Hamlet's implied information, Claudius will never be able to comprehend and communicate with him. In other words, he is unable to infer what Hamlet intends to say, thus Claudius says "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" (I, ii, 66) Knowing Hamlet's conversational implicature, according to Finch (2000: 167), one can understand Hamlet's reply "Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun." which Claudius couldn't understand.

Moreover, one can notice Hamlet's duality with others through the way he is using language as in his utterance to Horatio after the meeting with the ghost

Hamlet: I am sorry they offend you, hearting; yes, faith, heartily.

Horatio: There is no offence, my lord.

Hamlet: Yes, by saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio. And much offence too.

(I.V. 134-37)

Pragmatically speaking, Hamlet plays on the words "offend" and "offence". Hamlet's 'much offence' is not a reply to Horatio's 'offend' but it is an echo to what he has previously been informed by the ghost; it represents his 'implicature' concerning his father's untimely death. Horatio may mean that I [Horatio] am not offended but Hamlet picks up the word to mean Claudius's offence or crime. This gives the impression that Hamlet starts to see everything in two different ways; everything has two meanings after the meeting with his late father's ghost.

Hamlet reuses the word "offended" with his mother to refer to the same idea but in a clearer way when she tells him "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended/" he says "Mother, you have my father much offended." (III, iv: 10-11) Having no shared information between the speakers, neither Horatio nor Gertrude could understand Hamlet's intended meaning. According to Grice's conversational maxim of "quality" which means "the speaker must make his "contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)." (Yule, 1996: 37). Accordingly, in both cases, with Horatio and Gertrude, Hamlet informs them nothing. As a result, Hamlet's utterances are apparently disjointed or incoherent. In producing an utterance, the speaker should limit him/herself to the ability of providing relevant and coherent information that is formulated in the best possible way to serve certain communicative purpose and making the hearer draw not just some relevant conclusion, but a specifically intended one. (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 9)

Adopting Grice's conversational maxims to analyse Hamlet's speeches pragmatically, one can notice that there are series of utterances which are disjointed or incoherent, as, it is shown in the following discourse which gave rise to Polonius' saying "Though this be madness, yet there is a method in it" (II, ii: 205)

Polonius: What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet: Words, words, words.

Polonius: What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet: Between who?

Polonius: I mean, the matter that you read, My lord.

Hamlet: Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that old men have

gray beards, that their faces are wrinckled, their eyes purging thick

amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit,

together with most weak harms:

all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not

honesty to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir, should grow old as I am, if

like a crab you could go backward

(II, ii: 192-204)

Resorting to feigning insanity, Hamlet refuses to answer Polonius' questions. He has violated conversational conventions, or, maxims of conversation. One of such maxims is the maxim of "quantity". Hamlet has violated this maxim in both directions; in answering "Words, words, words" to the question of what he is reading, he is providing too little information. His final remark goes to the other extreme in providing too much information.

Misinterpreting the question about the reading matter as a matter between two individuals, he violates the maxim of relevance. To be coherent, Hamlet's utterances should have something to do with those of Polonius as far as meaning is concerned, i.e., any change in the topic of conversation represents the idea of lacking coherence.

Suspecting a trick is being played on him, Hamlet deliberately makes his utterance vague, as Polonius says "How pregnant sometimes his replies are!". (II, ii: 119). Hamlet initiates his meeting with Polonius using the word "a fishmonger" as in:

Polonius: Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet: Excellent well; you are a fishmonger.

(II, ii: 174-75)

To such a simple minded man, Polonius is unable to understand what Hamlet means. Hamlet's "Excellent well" is different from that of Polonius, i.e., Hamlet depends on certain previous knowledge to say such words. Polonius does not understand what Hamlet aims at; that is why he says: "Not I, my Lord."

Apparently, Hamlet's 'a fishmonger' does not have relevant information to the previous utterance. It may be interpreted in two different ways, either a man who is selling a woman for immoral purposes; Hamlet is near to say that Polonius is trying to 'sell' his daughter to him or expecting Polonius to be sent to have or discover Hamlet's secret. (Paul, 1971: 25). To Sperber and Wilson (2002: 1), "Pragmatic interpretation is ultimately an exercise in metapsychology, in which the hearer infers the speaker's intended meaning from evidence he [speaker] has provided for this purpose". An utterance represents a linguistically coded piece of evidence, so communication involves an element of decoding which is the starting point for an inferential process that results in the attribution of a speaker's meaning.

Being unable to infer what Hamlet means, Polonius could not communicate with Hamlet. As an element of decoding, Polonius' speech should reflect the real world that Hamlet lives in, what he feels to be able to fully interpret Hamlet's utterances. Polonius leaves believing that Hamlet is really mad, and is blind to the means through which Hamlet has made him appear ridiculous.

To recheck Hamlet's state of mind, all of the King, the Queen and Polonius decided to spy on a previously arranged meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia:

Ophelia: Good my lord,

How does your honour for this many a day?

Hamlet: I humbly thank you. Well, well, well.

Ophelia: My lord, I have remembrances of yours that I have longed long to re-deliver.

I pray you, now receive them.

Hamlet: No, not I:

I never gave you aught.

(III, i: 92-97)

Here, Hamlet denies the fact that he is the giver of such things. The word "aught" refers either to the idea that he did not give her any thing valuable or that he is a Hamlet that is different from that one who gave those "remembrances". In either case, he violates the maxim of quality for saying something which is not true and at the same time he violates that maxim of manner in the sense that he uses ambiguous, not direct, utterances. (See Yule, 1996: 37)

After that, Ophelia tries to hand the presents back to Hamlet but he replies with certain ironical style saying "Ha, ha! Are you honest?". Hamlet's saying is an echo to the noise which is made by the king and Polonius; they are hidden behind the arras to spy on Hamlet, this

represents extra linguistic factor (see 1.2), or to discover his reality. Hearing such a noise, Hamlet realizes at once that he has been tricked into the meeting, and begins to ask such disconnected questions.

Putting Hamlet's saying out of the situational context, Ophelia, as a receiver, is unable to interpret the utterance that's why she replies with a question "What means your lordship?". For Sperber and Wilson (1988: 118), interpreting an utterance does not merely imply identifying the assumption explicitly expressed but rather it crucially includes working out of the consequences of adding such an assumption to a group of assumptions that have already been processed.

Moreover, Hamlet continues to act the role of being mad questioning Ophelia directly. "Where's your father?" (III, i: 130) to test her honesty. She replies saying "At home, my lord." Being a lie, her reply represents a violation to Grice's maxim of quality. It is a reply that makes Hamlet, unfairly ascribe all women's faults to Ophelia. He ends the meeting saying: "I have heard of your painting too, well enough,/God has given one face, and you make yourselves another. Apparently, such an utterance refers indirectly to the idea that Hamlet has discovered the King's and Polonius' plan; 'yourselves' is a reference to all of the King, Polonius, who are behind the arras just like "a rat" as Hamlet's describes in (III, iv: 25). Hamlet thinks of something that is not explicitly announced to Ophelia that is why she is unable to communicate with him. He changes the topic of discourse where she talks about "remembrances" while he, according to certain contextual effect, talks about other things. Hamlet, as a speaker, is expected to make his utterances as relevant and coherent as possible, and hence as easy as possible to be understood. Accordingly, the plausibility of a particular hypothesis about the speaker's meaning depends not only on its content but also on its accessibility. (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 9)

To Blakemore (1987: 105), discourse is composed of certain linguistic segments to be interpreted as being connected or coherent. Such connections are not always obviously manifested; the hearer is expected to fill them in depending on contextual assumptions. In other words, unless the hearer can recognize that the segments of the discourse cohere in some way, s/he will not be able to recover any kind of message and that discourse will be incoherent and this is very clear in Ophelia's inability to understand Hamlet's utterances.

Comparing the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia with that which is between Hamlet and his mother, one can notice the same event; his mother's inability to understand and communicate with Hamlet since she cannot see what Hamlet sees as in

Hamlet: Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings, you heavenly guards!

–[To the Ghost] What would your gracious figure? ...

Queen: Alas, he's mad!/....

To whom do you speak this?

Hamlet: Do you see nothing there?

Queen: Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.

Hamlet: Nor did you nothing hear?

Queen: No, nothing but ourselves.

(III, iv: 103: 134)

Being unable to see the ghost, the Queen thinks that all what Hamlet is saying is part of "ecstasy" Hamlet's utterances have no relation with those of the Queen. He is different from that Hamlet who is of "an idle tongue". To Fromkin et al. (2003: 209), such an extralinguistic factor, the appearance of the ghost, "may influence the way language is used or interpreted."

Furthermore, Hamlet continues his speech saying
*That I essentially am not in madness
 But mad in craft, 'Twere good you let him know;
 For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
 Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
 Such dear concerning hide? Who would do so?
 No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
 Unpeg the basket on the house's top,
 Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,
 To try conclusions, in the basket creep,
 And break your own neck down.*

(III, iv: 189-197)

In a way or another, Hamlet tries to make his mother understand the fact that he is not really mad but feigning. He in reality does not want his mother to tell the king that his madness is not real. Having no faith in her discretion, he says ironically that she is fair, sober, wise; she is likely to "let the birds out of the basket, i.e. give away his secret (Paul, 1971: 144).

6. Conclusions

It is necessary to include various contextual devices, typically the recourse to discourse relations in interpreting one's utterance. It is also necessary to notice that spans of a text with all markers and clear rhetorical relations may well be incoherent according to a commonsensical intuitions of the notion of coherence. Thus, it is quite common to encounter sequences of utterances which are almost entirely bare of coherence. But in the view of pragmatics, such sequences may be seen coherent through pragmatic inference; connected through the functions they perform.

Pragmatics depends on three central concepts which are: context, intention and inference. In Hamlet, one can notice how these three concepts play an important role in the use of language; Hamlet's madness represents a strategy through which he tries to discover the secret of his father's death. None of characters can arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of Hamlet's utterances for being unable to succeed in recovering the content that Hamlet intended to communicate by means of such a use of language.

To fully interpret Hamlet's utterances, hearers, Polonius, Ophelia, the Queen and others must know Hamlet's real world, Hamlet's world is "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable/Seem to me [Hamlet] all the uses of this world." (I, ii: 133-34). Having no inference to all what Hamlet intended to say according to the situational context he is in, they were unable to comprehend and communicate with Hamlet; they believe as the queen informs the king, that Hamlet is "Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend/which is the mightier." (IV, i: 7-8). It is an utterance that reflects what Hamlet intended to inform Polonius saying

"I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly." (II, ii: 360).

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