Miller and Rhyme in Chaucer’s "Anelida and Arcite"

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Meter and Rhyme in Chaucer's
"Anelida and Arcite"

A. Wigfall Green

"Anelida and Arcite" may have been written from ten to twenty years before "Sir Thopas," probably Chaucer's greatest achievement in virtuosity of vocabulary, meter, and rhyme. Even though the material is tragic in essence, "Anelida and Arcite" becomes something of a mock-heroic poem, largely because Chaucer cannot repress the humor that wells up in him: the setting, Mt. Haemus in Thrace, becomes "the frosty conte called Trace"; Chaucer's address in the twenty-ninth stanza to "ye thrifty wymmen alle" to take example of Anelida, who "was so meke" that Arcite "loved her lyte"; Anelida's heart in stanza 31 "blak of hewe"; and Anelida's swooning in the last stanza, 45, with "face ded, betwixe pale and grene," are incongruities of which Chaucer, perhaps more than any other poet, would have awareness.

In meter and rhyme, Chaucer is quite as versatile in "Anelida and Arcite" as in "Sir Thopas." The poem as a whole is well designed: stanzas 1-3 are the "Invocation"; 4-30 "The Story"; 31 the "Proem" to "The Compleynt of Anelida"; 32-37 the "Strophe" of "The Compleynt"; 38-43 the "Antistrophe" of "The Compleynt"; 44 the "Conclusion" of "The Compleynt"; and 45 "The Story Continued." The story was not completed. The following forms are used in the various stanzas:

"Anelida and Arcite" published by eGrove, 1961
CHAUER’S "ANELIDA AND ARCTE"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza(s)</th>
<th>Rhyme</th>
<th>Number of Verses in Each Stanza</th>
<th>Number of Feet (All Iambic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-30</td>
<td>ababbcc (rhyme royal)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>aab/aab/bab</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>aaab/aaab/bbba/bbba</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4445/4445/4445</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first eight verses, the a rhymes have four feet, the b rhymes five; in the last eight verses, the b rhymes have four feet, the a rhymes five. Brink calls this a metabolic stanza, “constructed on the principle of the tail-rime (rime-couee).” This stanza, the fifth of the strophe, should be compared to 42, the fifth stanza of the antistrophe.

37 aab/aab/bab

Although like 31-35, this stanza, as has been pointed out by Robinson, French, and earlier Chaucerians, contains internal rhyme. Each verse has at least two internal rhymes, usually with a short pause after each rhyme; after the second pause, there are either one or two words, the last of which creates the end-rhyme, often a booming end-rhyme. The first four verses are typical:

My swete foo, why do ye so, for shame?
And thenke ye that furthered be your name
To love a newe, and ben untrewe? Nay!
And putte yow in sclaunder now and blame, ...

The internal newe-untrewe rhymes with the trewe end-rhymes of stanzas 15, 21, 31, and 38. Echo, repetition, and rhyme are frequent: note ye in the first and second verses and Nay in the third, as well as be and ben in the second and third. Another verse,

Yet come ayein, and yet be pleyn som day,
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is a good example of repetition and rhyme. In the same stanza, but out of the regular rhyme scheme, yow and now are repeated and create rhyme with yow and now of the fourth verse.

Stanza 43 is of similar construction.

38-39
Like 31-35
40
aaaaaaa
9 5
It should be noted that 40, the third stanza of the antistrophe, has a rhyme scheme different from that of 34, the third stanza of the strophe.

41
Like 31-35 and 38-39
42
Like 36
43
aab/aab/bab
9 5
Like 31-35, 38-39, and 41, stanzas 37 and 43 have the rhyme scheme aab/aab/bab; but 37 and 43 differ in that they contain internal rhyme. Such rhyme and alliteration and repetition, which also give power to this stanza, are noted by underscoring:

The longe nyght this wonder sight I drye,
And on the day for thilke afay I dye,
And of all this ryght noght, iwis, ye recche.
Ne nevere mo myyn yen two be drie,
And to your routhe, and to your trouthe, I crie.
But welawe! to fer be they to feche;
Thus holdeth me my destinee a wreche.
But me to rede out of this drede, or guye,
Ne may my wit, so weyk is hit, not streche.

Nyght, 1, and ryght, 3, rhyme, as do day, 2; ye, 3; be, 4 and 6; they, 6; me, 7 and 8; and may, 9. The combination of repetition and rhyme in to your routhe and to your trouthe in 5 is quite effective, as is the assonance created in I in 1, 2, and 5, followed by drye, dye, and crie, the last word in each of those verses.
Like 31-35, 38-39, and 41
Like 1-30

The forty-five stanzas in “Anelida and Arcite” contain the following rhymes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza</th>
<th>Rhyme</th>
<th>Other Stanza(s) and Rhyme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>rede-drede</td>
<td>40 womanhede-dede-ede-ede-drede-sede-ede-ede-ede-ede-ede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trace-place-grace</td>
<td>6 face-grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guye-crye</td>
<td>10 espye-tyrannye; 18 flaterie-jelousye; 22 bigamye-lye; 23 traitoritie-espie; 43 drye-dye-drie-crie-guye</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arcite-bite</td>
<td>7 write-Arcite; 16 lyte-Arcite-wite; 25 lyte-Arcite; 29 Arcite-lyte-delyte; 30 write-Arcite; 36 respite-guyte-Arcite-write-delyte-wite-myte-byte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>storie-memorie</td>
<td>5 victorie-glorie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>glade-shade-fade</td>
<td>6 hadde-ladde-spradda (proximate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wynne-Corynne</td>
<td>15 wynne-twynne-synne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>wente-entente</td>
<td>19 entente-wente; 23 mente-wente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>quene-shene</td>
<td>11 quene-shene; 20 quene-tene; 21 grene-quene; 24 quene-tene; 26 sustene-tene-grene; 45 quene-grene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>thus-Theseus</td>
<td>9 Tydeus-Campaneus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yevynge-rydinge-bridge</td>
<td>11 dwellynge-springe-likynge; 27 lyvynge-singe; 30 langwisshinge-wepinge-compleynynge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>fulfille-kille-stille</td>
<td>28 fille-wille</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>also-two-ago</td>
<td>14 so-a-two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>fairenesse-stidfast-</td>
<td>15 besynesse-distresse; 21 newfangle-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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nesse-Luressé

nesse-stidfastnesse; 35 gentilesse-
humblese-besynesse-maistresse-hevy-
nesse; 39 unkyndenesse-gladness-hevy-
nesse-witness

seyn-pleyn

30 ageyn-geyn; 41 ageyn-reyn-sovereyn-
slayn-feyn

knyght-wyght-
bryght

17 wyght-myght-knyght; 32 wight-
myght-knyght-ryght-plyght

assure-creature

42 aventure-creature-discomfiture-
endure-figure-asure-asure

throwe-lowe-
yknowe

28 knowe-lowe

trewe-trewe

21 trewe-newe-hewe; 31 hewe-trewe-rewe-
newe;

thoght-broght

39 soght-thoght-noght-oght-broght

noon-agoon

24 ston-agon-noon

feye-pleyne

33 deyne-pyeene-restreyne-pleyne; 38 sey-
ne-pleyne-cheyne-tweyne-pyne

remembrance-
plesaunce-daunce-countenaunce - ob-
servaunce

The first verse of this stanza, which is the proem to
"The Compleynt of Anelida,"

So thirleth with the poyn of remembrance
closely parallels the last verse of stanza 44, which is the
conclusion,

Hath thirled with the poyn of remembrance.

more-yore-lore-ev-
ermore

44 more-evermore-lore-yore-sore

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CHAUCER'S "ANELIDA AND ARCITE"

The rhymes are appropriate when serious, and delightful when humorous: Anelida, in 11 and 45, is the quene-shene; Arcite causes tene in 20, 24, and 26. Anelida, in 12, has fairenesse and, in her stidfastnesse, 21, is like Lucrese in 12. Having become maistresse of Arcite, who no longer has gentilesse and humblesse because of his besynnesse elsewhere, she can have only hevynesse in 35. She must, in 39, flee from gladnesse to hevynesse without witnesse because of his unkyndenesse. In stanza 1 the author says that he must crye to Mars to guye him; in 43, Anelida makes her criе to Arcite because her wit cannot guye her, and the sorrow she must drye causes her to criе so that her eyes will not be drie, and she must dye. The tyrannye of Creon in 10 leads naturally to the flaterie and jelousye of Arcite in 18, to the bigamy of 22, and to traitorie and trecherie in 23.

There is occasional rhyme of proper names within themselves: Theseus in 7 and Tydeus-Campaneus in 9; sometimes a proper noun, like Arcite in 2, appears to establish the rhyme for common nouns.

The rhyme of one stanza sometimes is merely repeated in another: quene-shene in 6 and 11. At other times it is repeated with increment: wyght-myght-knyght of 17 becomes wight-myght-knyght-ryght-plyght of 32; and occasionally, as in 36, there seems to be an attempt to repeat all previously used rhymes: Arcite-write-delyte-wite-byte.

Sometimes the spelling determines the rhyme: seyn-pleyn in stanza 13, with additional rhyme in 30 and 41, do not rhyme with pleyne in 23 or with similar rhymes in 33 and 38; nor do upbreyde-obeyde of 17 rhyme with seyd-apaid-breyd of 18.

Although two final syllables are spelled identically, if there is no correspondence of accented vowel sound there is no rhyme: throwelowe-ynowe of 14 and knowe-lowe of 28 do not rhyme with narowe-arove of 27.

Stanza 40 is something of a proving-ground for rhyme: although the material is basically serious, the multiplicity of rhyme makes the entire stanza comic: womandede-dede-nede-lede-drede-bede-medee-sede-hede.
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In addition to links in language between the various stanzas, there are sometimes links between the first and last verses of a stanza, as in 18:

And eke he made him jelous over here,

Without love, he feyned jelousye.

Sometimes the repetitions approximate refrain. Anelida and Arcite are contrasted in the following stanzas, as are false and fair:

7 Of quene Anelida and fals Arcite.
20 Thus lyveth feire Anelida the quene
For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene.
21 This fals Arcite, of his newfanglenesse,

And falsed fair Anelida the quene.
23 This fals Arcite, sumwhat moste he fayne
24 That suffreth fair Anelida the quene.

"Anelida and Arcite" is not the most attractive of Chaucer's works, but it is an important experiment in language, meter, and rhyme.

To recapitulate, the narrative of the poem, comprising stanzas 1-30 and 45, is written in rhyme royal, ababbcc. Stanza 31, the proem to "The compleynt of Anelida," is like stanzas 32-35, 37-39, 41, and 43-44 in that the stanza of nine verses is used, containing only two rhymes, aab/aab/bab. After the proem, the next six stanzas comprise a strophe, stanzas 32-37; the strophe is followed by an antistrophe, consisting also of six stanzas, 38-43. To give symmetry to "The compleynt," the antistrophe is followed by a conclusion, stanza 44, which counterbalances the proem. The master architect of poetry has also given balance to strophe and antistrophe in designing sixteen verses for the fifth stanza of the strophe and the fifth stanza of the antistrophe, each stanza, however, containing only two rhymes, like the remainder of the stanzas of "The compleynt." Each of these stanzas, 36 and 42, is arranged in units of four, aaab/aaab/bba/bba, the second half being tied to the first half by the b rhyme. To vary
his general pattern, Chaucer placed an extra foot in every fourth verse; thus the twelve verses of lyrical lament are exalted to the heroic level by the introduction of four verses of five feet each. One might expect a similar rhyme scheme in the third stanza of the strophe and the third stanza of the antistrophe, stanzas 34 and 40. Stanza 34, however, has the usual arrangement and the rhyme scheme of the majority of stanzas in "The compleynt," aab/aab/bab, in which the b rhymes of the third tercet neatly link themselves with the b rhymes of the first two tercets. These stanzas, then, unlike stanzas 36 and 42 which are arranged in units of four, are arranged in units of three. But Chaucer provides a welcome asymmetry in stanza 40 in making it rhyme aaaaaaaa, thus establishing himself as a poetic virtuoso. But, as if to demonstrate that the highest art has not only a pattern but variety within that pattern, he introduced internal rhyme into the sixth and last stanza of the strophe and of the antistrophe, as previously indicated. The conclusion of "The compleynt," stanza 44, is in the same metrical form as the poem, stanza 31. The last stanza of the poem, 45, in which Chaucer resumed the narrative, is in the same metrical form as the first stanza of the poem. Thus Chaucer has rounded out not only "The compleynt" but also the poem as a whole even though the poem was not completed.

In his use of balance, antithesis, repetition, and alliteration, Chaucer is at his best in "The compleynt." Here also, as in "My swete foo" of 37, he uses oxymoron, later so precious to the poet of the Renaissance. In the first stanza of the strophe, 32, five of the nine verses begin with And, the type of polysyndeton which Shakespeare developed to the ultimate in sonnet 66, in which ten of the fourteen verses begin with the same conjunction.

Throughout the poem Chaucer ingeniously links stanza with stanza: "fals Arcite" in the last verse of stanza 20 prepares for "This fals Arcite," the first three words of 21, in which falsed is used in the last verse; fals appears twice in 22; the opening of 23 is identical to the opening of 21, "This fals Arcite," and is followed by fals and falsnes;
this group of five stanzas, 20-24, is brought to near perfection, but with a change in mood, by closing 20 with the couplet:

    Thus lyveth feire Anelida the quene  
    For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene.

and 24 with the couplet:

    That suffreth fair Anelida the quene  
    For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene.

Various stanzas, as previously suggested, have also been skillfully interwoven by rhyme. The first two rhyming words of stanza 1, rede-drede, provide rhyme for the nine rhymes of stanza 40; the concluding couplet of stanza 1, rhyming guye- crye, creates a bond with 43 in which the rhyme is inverted to crie-guye; the four rhyming words of 34 reappear in four of the five rhyming words of 44; the first rhyme of stanza 6, quene-shene, becomes the first rhyme in stanza 11 and rhymes with quene-grene of 45, the last stanza.

In "Anelida and Arcite" there are five distinct types of stanza. There is merit, therefore, in the statement of Lounsbury⁶ that the poem contains "unusual metrical forms" and "daring experiments in versification." In skill of versification, poetry has not excelled that of stanzas 36, 37, 40, 42, and 43.

**FOOTNOTES**

⁠³The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Walter W. Skeat (2d ed.; Oxford, 1899), I, 529. The arrangement of Skeat has been followed by most later scholars.


⁠⁵The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (2d ed.; Boston, 1957), p. 790; quotations from the poem have been taken from this edition.

