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CHAUCER'S COMPLAINTS: STANZAIC ARRANGEMENT, METER, AND RHYME

by A. Wigfall Green

SIX POEMS USUALLY attributed to Chaucer are called complaints. Chaucer probably borrowed the name from similar poems in French literature, the name apparently having been derived from Old French *complaindre*. In five of these poems Chaucer seems to use the word *complaint* as a synonym of *plaint* or *lament*. This type of verse existed in English literature prior to Chaucer; it is best known in Old English in "The Wife's Lament," sometimes called "The Wife's Complaint." Chaucer follows the type in Anelida's "compleynt" in "Anelida and Arcite." Because of doubt regarding the attribution of "A Balade of Complaint" to Chaucer, this poem is not included in the study.

Except for similarity of name and the fact that these poems are written in verse of five iambic feet, the six complaints are remarkably varied in vocabulary, in number of verses and stanzas, and in rhyme. In *The Legend of Good Women* Chaucer speaks of his great facility in writing a variety of verse forms:

And many an ympne for your halydayes,
That lighten balades, roundels, virelayes; (F422-423)
He hath maad many a lay and many a thing. (F430)

In the same poem Love speaks to Chaucer:

Make the metres of hem as the lest. (F562)

Chaucer's character Aurelius, the lover of "The Frankeleyns Tale," (944-948) like his master, would "wreye/ His wo, as in a general

compleynyng" and make "layes,/ Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes."¹

1

Chaucer's "Complaynt d'Amours," celebrating St. Valentine's Day, is "an ympne for your halydayes." Although ascription to Chaucer is not unquestioned, this poem is found in three manuscript collections of the works of Chaucer. In one manuscript, Harley 7333(14) in the British Museum, the poem is entitled, "And next folowyng begynneth an amerowse compleynte made at wyndesore in the last may tofore nouembre."² The poem consists of thirteen stanzas in rhyme royal, ababbcc. The theme, like that of "A Complaint to His Lady," is unrequited love. Stanzas 1-3 are introductory and introspective, setting forth his reasons for his "deedly compleyninge"; 4-6 are, in general, a prediction of the death of the author because of love; 7-9 are a tribute to the beauty and the unkindness of the lady; 10-12 urge the lady not to be wroth, and express a willingness to live or die for her sake. Stanza 13 is virtually an envoy with verses 1 and 2 as follows:

This compleynte on seint Valentynes day,
Whan every foughel chesen shal his make,

Verses 309 and 310 of *The Parlement of Foules* are almost identical:

For this was on seynt Valentynes day,
Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make,

Chaucer's stanzaic arrangement is so diverse in the minor poems generally that it is difficult to accept the theory of isometrical stanzas in rhyme royal recognized by Bradshaw and developed by Ten Brink.³ It is true, nevertheless, that Chaucer had an affinity for the stanzaic triad and that he frequently made a group of three stanzas. Yet these groupings are sometimes inconsistent. In "Complaynt d'Amours" similarity of refrain appears, not as might be expected in stanzas 1, 7, and 13, but in 1, 2, and 13:

¹Citations from Chaucer in this text are to *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Fred N. Robinson (2nd ed.; Boston, 1957).

²*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1899), I, 411 and 566-568; Eleanor Prescott Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (New York, 1908), pp. 176-177 and 416-417; Aage Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (London, 1925), pp. 437-438; and John Edwin Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400* (New Haven, 1926), pp. 629-630.

³Bernhard Ten Brink, *The Language and Metre of Chaucer Set Forth*, 2nd ed., rev. Friedrich Kluge; trans. M. Bentinck Smith (London, 1901), p. 255.

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That *love hir best*, but sleeth me for my trewth.
 This have I for I *love you best*, swete herte!
 And *love hir best*, although she do me sterve.

More remarkable, the concluding couplet of stanza 5,
 Hath nought to done, although she do me sterve;
 Hit is nat with her wil that I hir serve!

is almost an inversion of the concluding couplet of 13,
 And yit wol I evermore her serve
 And love hir best, although she do me sterve.

Chaucer's architectonic superiority often creates an interlacing between beginning and end: in addition to the use of the phrase "love hir best" in the refrain of the first and last stanzas, *mercy* appears in both stanzas, and *compleininge* in 1 is echoed twice in *compleynte* in the last.

Each stanza is independent in rhyme except for the following linking of stanzas by rhyme. It should be noted, perhaps, that *reed-womanheed-deed* of 6 do not rhyme with *womanhede-rede-drede* of 10.

| Stanza | Rhyme | Other Stanza(s) | Rhyme |
|--------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>livinge-compleininge</i> | 8 | <i>wonderinge-livinge</i> |
| | | 10 | <i>unkonninge-displesinge</i> |
| 2 | <i>asterte-herte</i> | 10 | <i>herte-smerte</i> |
| 3 | <i>do-wo-go</i> | 7 | <i>also-so-wo</i> |
| 4 | <i>ende-spende</i> | 12 | <i>wende-ende</i> |
| | <i>chere-dere</i> | 11 | <i>here-dere</i> |
| 5 | <i>dye-drye-folye</i> | 6 | <i>dye-ye</i> |
| | <i>sterve-serve</i> | 13 | <i>serve-sterve</i> |
| 7 | <i>take sake</i> | 13 | <i>make-make take</i> |

2

"The Complaint of Mars" is also a tribute to St. Valentine.⁴ The second and third stanzas contain verses

Seynt Valentyne, a foul thus herde I synge . . .
 Without repentyng cheseth yow your make

almost identical to verses from the "Complaynt d'Amours" and *The Parlement of Foules*.

⁴Haldeen Braddy, *Chaucer and the French Poet Graunson* (Baton Rouge, 1947), pp. 66 and 71-73; also "Chaucer and Graunson: The Valetine Tradition," *PMLA*, LIV (June, 1939) 359-368. For general background see Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley, 1957).

"The Complaint of Mars" has some similarity to "Anelida and Arcite": each is written entirely in iambic pentameter in stanzas of both seven and nine verses, and in each there is a complaint proper within the poem; moreover, the organization of the poems is similar.

"The Complaint of Mars" contains four major divisions: stanzas 1-4 are the "Proem" to the entire work; 5-22 the "Story";⁵ 23 is the "Proem" to the "Compleynt" proper; and 24-38⁶ "The Compleynt of Mars" proper. Stanzas 36-38 are in effect an envoy. Each exhorts various persons "to compleyne"; 37 and 38 are bound by the use of *kynde* and *kyndenesse*, and 36 and 38 by *gentillesse*, which creates rhyme in each of the concluding couplets.

The dictum of Lounsbury that the rhyme of each stanza containing nine verses, stanzas 23-38, is divisible "in the proportion of four, three, and two"⁷ is not tenable. Neither the thought nor the poetry of the stanza admits of such proportion. Musically, and often logically, the proportion might be stated as five, two, and two with the pattern aabaa/bb/cc. In general, however, the stanza of nine verses should be considered as a whole; the thought and the punctuation preceding the concluding couplet often preclude consideration of this couplet as an entity.

The following verse forms are used in the stanzas of "The Complaint of Mars":

| <i>Stanzas</i> | <i>Rhyme Scheme</i> | <i>Number of Feet in Each Verse</i> |
|----------------|---------------------------------|---|
| 1-22 | ababbcc (7 verses), rhyme royal | 5 |
| 23-38 | aabaabbcc (9 verses) | 5 |

"The Complaint of Mars" contains greater variety of rhyme than do the other short poems. Recurrent rhyme⁸ is as follows:

| <i>Stanza</i> | <i>Rhyme</i> | <i>Other Stanza(s) and Rhyme</i> |
|---------------|--|---|
| 1 | <i>rede-sprede-drede</i> <i>espye-jelosye</i> | 4 <i>rede-drede</i> ; 12 <i>rede-drede</i> 6 <i>tyrannye-ye-dye</i> ; 13 <i>dye-wrie</i> ; 15 <i>companye-espys</i> ; |

⁵These eighteen stanzas may be grouped in six parts, each with three stanzas.

⁶This division has five parts, each with three stanzas.

⁷Thomas R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer* (New York, 1892), III, 309. Bernhard Ten Brink, p. 257, arranges the verses aab/aab/bcc.

⁸Scientific progress in the pronunciation of Chaucer's works has made the study of Isabel Marshall and Lela Porter, *Rhyme-index to the Manuscript Texts of Chaucer's Minor Poems*, Chaucer Soc., 1st Ser., No. 80 (London, 1889), pp. 55-66, of less value than it was formerly.

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| <i>Stanza</i> | <i>Rhyme</i> | <i>Other Stanza(s) and Rhyme</i> |
|---------------|---|---|
| | | 18 <i>companye-dye;</i> 26 <i>dye-ye;</i> 30 <i>hye-companye-esppe-ye;</i> 33 <i>ye-dye-drye;</i> 35 <i>dye-hye</i> |
| 2 | <i>herte-smerte</i> <i>borowe-sorowe-morowe</i> <i>synge-up-sprynge</i> | 9 <i>smerte-herte</i> 28 <i>sorowe-borowe-horowe</i> 4 <i>synge-departynge-</i> <i>morwenynge;</i> 22 <i>departynge-morwenynge-</i> <i>synge</i> |
| 3 | <i>awake-make</i> <i>wyse-devise-servyse</i> <i>dure-aventure</i> | 8 <i>atake-sake;</i> 22 <i>take-make</i> 5 <i>servise-dispise;</i> 37 <i>emperise-chevise</i> 19 <i>endure-armure-cure;</i> 20 <i>endure-mysaventure;</i> 24 <i>cure-endure;</i> 27 <i>endure-aventure;</i> 31 <i>mysaventure-creature-</i> <i>dure</i> |
| 5 | <i>revolucioun-subjeccioun-</i> <i>lessoun</i> | 29 <i>sermoun-doun-distruccioun-</i> <i>savacyoun;</i> 34 <i>possessioun-passioun-</i> <i>conclusioun-confusioun;</i> 36 <i>renoun-devisioun-</i> <i>patroun-compassioun</i> |
| 6 | <i>manere-chere</i> | 20 <i>here-spere-dere;</i> 21 <i>chere-dere;</i> 38 <i>in-fere-chere-dere-manere</i> |
| 7 | <i>governaunce-plesaunce-</i> <i>obeisaunce</i> | 16 <i>disturbaunce-penaunce-</i> <i>governaunce;</i> 32 <i>pleasaunce-myschaunce-</i> <i>penaunce</i> |
| 8 | <i>tyde-glyde-abyde</i> | 14 <i>besyde-hide</i> |
| 9 | <i>swete-mete</i> <i>place-grace-face</i> | 13 <i>grete-hete-wete</i> 35 <i>grace-face-purchase</i> |
| 10 | <i>knyght-wight</i> | 17 <i>lyght-wyght-myght;</i> 26 <i>myght-knyght-wyght</i> |
| 11 | <i>two-go</i> <i>telle-duelle-welle</i> | 19 <i>wo-two;</i> 34 <i>forgo-so-wo</i> 18 <i>helle-duelle;</i> 25 <i>telle-welle-selle-duelle</i> |

| | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| 12 | <i>prively-hastely-sturdely</i> | 23 | <i>skylfully-pitously-folily-I</i> |
| | <i>bryghte-lyghte</i> | 15 | <i>wyghte-fyghte</i> |
| 14 | <i>compleyne-tweyne-peyne</i> | 23 | <i>skylfully-pitously-folily-I</i> |
| | | 29 | <i>peyne-pleyne-sovereyne;</i> |
| | | 37 | <i>peyne-pleyne-reyne</i> |
| 17 | <i>tour-socour</i> | 38 | <i>socour-labour-honour</i> |
| 21 | <i>allone-mone</i> | 31 | <i>done-mone</i> |
| | <i>be-chevache-se</i> | 22 | <i>adversyte-me;</i> |
| | | 27 | <i>fre-be-me;</i> |
| | | 32 | <i>enmyte-se-be-he;</i> |
| | | 35 | <i>me-beaute-adversite-the</i> |
| 23 | <i>redresse-hevynesse</i> | 25 | <i>gentilnesse-humbleesse-</i> |
| | | | <i>swetnesse;</i> |
| | | 27 | <i>distresse-redresse-</i> |
| | | | <i>hevynesse-gesse;</i> |
| | | 36 | <i>gentillesse-hevynesse;</i> |
| | | 38 | <i>gentillesse-kyndenesse</i> |

Sometimes the rhyme is not entirely satisfactory: Chaucer intends rhyme to exist between *revolucioun* and *subjeccioun*, on the one hand, in stanza 5, and *lessoun* in stanza 5, and among similar words in 29 and 36.

When two words create rhyme, they are either the *a* verses of rhyme royal or the concluding couplet of the seven or nine-verse stanza; three words which rhyme are the *b* verses of either the seven or the nine-verse stanza; four words which rhyme are the *a* verses of the nine-verse stanza.

The poem contains an occasional fresh adjective, as in "Wyth teres blewe," or a startling kenning like "the sunne, the candel of jelosye!"

A number of the verses of this poem foreshadow more famous verses: for instance, verse 175, "Of beaute, lust, fredom, and gentilnesse," is the feminine counterpart of Chaucer's description of the knight, who, in verse 46 of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, has "Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie" and "any metal this is forged newe," verse 201, resembles "the noble yforged newe," 3256 of "The Miller's Tale."

Repetition is well used to forge the various verses of a stanza and the various stanzas: *sunne* is used in the fourth and last verses of stanza 1 and *sonne* in the last verse of stanza 2; the sixth verse of stanza 2 contains the clause, "a foul thus herde I synge" and the

first verse of stanza 3, "Yet sang this foul"; *Mars* is used in the fifth and seventh verses of stanza 11 and in the first verse of stanza 12; *Venus* appears in the closing verse of stanza 11, *Venus chambre* in the closing verse of stanza 12, and *chambre* in the opening verse of stanza 13; and *cave* closes stanza 17 and opens stanza 18.

Anaphora is abundant: *And* is used four times in 22; *Of* five times in 25; *Somtyme* three times in 28; and *Compleyneth* five times in 38.

"The Complaynt of Mars" proper, stanzas 23-38, is in monologue form. It contains protestations of truth, rhetorical questions, invocations,⁹ and extravagant figures of speech. Such stylization does tend to make the complaint "one of the most common of medieval poetic forms,"¹⁰ as well as to make the result conventional.¹¹ Although this poem lacks Chaucer's idiomatic charm and English flavor, all the conventional perfumes of France cannot quench the wit¹² of Chaucer in vocabulary, simile, rhyme, and repetition. In the second stanza, for example, he says,

Seynt Valentyne, a foul thus herde I syng,
and two verses below this,

Yet sang this foul — I rede yow al awake,
and in stanza 22, at the end of the "Story" proper, he makes application to the human race,

And God yeve every wyght joy of his make!

3

"The Complaint of Venus," written in iambic pentameter, has eight verses in each stanza. The poem has three parts or ballades, each with three stanzas, and, in addition, an envoy with ten verses. The nine stanzas of the poem proper and the envoy create divisions numbering ten, the number of verses in the envoy.

⁹Stanza 36 is addressed to "yow, hardy knyghtes," 37 to "ye, my ladyes," and 38 to "ye lovers."

¹⁰Musatine, *Chaucer*, p. 26.

¹¹Robert Kilburn Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer* (Boston, 1906), p. 63.

¹²See Gardiner Stillwell, "Convention and Individuality in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars*," *PQ*, XXXV (1956), 69-89, and G. H. Cowling, "Chaucer's *Complaints of Mars and Venus*," *RES*, II (1926), 405-410.

¹³Marshall and Porter include this poem, "The Complaint of Mars," and "The Complaint unto Pity" in their index, but they do not indicate stanzaic interlinking.

The rhyme scheme¹⁴ of the three stanzas of Part I is abab/bccb; of Part II dede/eaae; of Part III fgfg/ghhg; and of the envoy iiaii/aaia. It is readily apparent that in each of the three stanzas of the three ballades, or terms, the first quatrain of each octave has identical organization of rhyme, *abab*, *dede*, and *fgfg*, but that the rhyme pattern of the second quatrain of the octave, also within itself consistent throughout, is varied to contrast to the pattern of the first quatrain of the octave, viz., *bccb*, *eaae*, and *ghhg*. Part III, obviously, has no rhyme links with the two preceding parts or with the envoy. Part I, however, with the *a* rhymes *pleasaunce-remembraunce*, *governaunce-avaunce*, and *suffisaunce-contenaunce*, is linked to the rhymes of Part II, *countenaunce-daunce*, *ordynaunce-pleasaunce*, and *penaunce-mischaunce*. Part I, also with the *a* rhymes noted, links itself to the *a* rhymes of the envoy: *suffisaunce-remembraunce-penaunce-Fraunce*. Skeat (I, 559) and many later Chaucerians are inclined to believe that the interlocking of Part I and Part II is adventitious; however, even granting that Chaucer humorously laments the scarcity of rhyme in English, verse 80, when the rhyme links between Parts I and II are associated with such links between Part I and the envoy, the product appears to be that of the skillful welder of rhyme.

In the seventy-two verses of the three ballades, Chaucer used eight rhymes,¹⁵ an average of nine verses for each rhyme. In the ten verses of the envoy, admired for its originality, grace, and rhyme, he uses two rhymes, an average of only five verses for each rhyme. The first half of the rhyme of the envoy, like the first half of each stanza of the ballades, is both balanced against and contrasted to the second half: iiaii/aaia.

In his use of decasyllabic verse, the same rhymes in the three stanzas of each part, and the same refrain at the end of each stanza of the three parts, Chaucer follows the pattern of the ballade closely. He was, indeed, translating and adapting three ballades of Sir Oton de Granson. Within his pattern Chaucer might have placed an envoy at the end of each ballade. He chose, however, to create a single poem of the three ballades and to place an envoy at the end of all the ballades. In so doing he demonstrated his art as a translator, arranger, and original poet capable not only

¹⁴Ten Brink (*Language and Meter*, p. 263) is correct in stating that there are but nine verses in the envoy and that there is rhyme correspondence between the envoy and Part III.

¹⁵Cf. *Chaucer's Minor Poems*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, Chaucer Soc., 1st Ser., Nos. 57-58 (London, n.d.), p. 411.

of following the complex structure of French verse but of creating a new form even more intricate.

4

"A Complaint to His Lady,"¹⁶ is addressed to quite a different type of lady. Like the Virgin Mary, who in the *Invocacio ad Mariam* of "The Second Nun's Prologue" has "mercy, goodnesse, and . . . pitee," verse 50, Chaucer's lady has "pitee, . . . gentillesse . . . and debonairtee," verses 101-102. The theme, like that of "Complaynt d'Amours," is unrequited love. There are other similarities: the frequent references to love as the cause of death, in verses 23, 30, 34, 44, 79, 84, and 91 of the "Complaynt d'Amours" parallel those in verses 19, 22, 29, 36, 106, 112, 113, 115, 118, and 121 of "A Complaint to His Lady." The couplet in stanza 11 of "A Complaint to His Lady,"

And so gret wil as I have yow to serve,
Now, certes, and ye lete me thus sterve,

is very close to the concluding couplets of stanzas 5 and 13 of "Complaynt d'Amours":

Hath nought to done, although she do me sterve;
Hit is nat with her wil that I hir serve!

And yit wol I evermore her serve
And love hir best, although she do me sterve.

"A Complaint to His Lady," like "Anelide and Arcite," is a series of experiments in verse form, although, unlike "Anelida and Arcite," it is written entirely in iambic pentameter. The work contains thirteen stanzas, usually grouped in four parts,¹⁷ as follows:

| <i>Stanza(s)</i> | <i>Rhyme Scheme</i> |
|------------------|--|
| PART I: | |
| 1-2 | ababbcc; seven verses; rhyme royal |
| PART II: | |
| 3 | aba/cac/dc; eight verses; probably fragmentary |
| PART III: | |
| 4 | a/bcb/cdc/ded/efe/fgf/g; seventeen verses, the first |

¹⁶This poem is not included in the index of Marshall and Porter.

¹⁷Robinson (*Works*, p. 856) combines Parts II and III, which he says are written in *terza rima*, a statement inapplicable to Part II, although *fille-spille*, concluding stanza 2, do rhyme with *fulfille* of the second verse of stanza 3.

introductory and the last concluding; verses 2 through 16 are perfect *terza rima*, possibly the first use of this form in England.

PART IV:

- 5 aab/aab//cd/dc; ten verses
 6 aaaa/bccb; eight verses¹⁸
 7-11 like 5
 12 aab/aab//ac/cd; ten verses; like 5 and 7-11 except for rhyme scheme¹⁹
 13 aab/aac//de/ed; ten verses; like 5, and 7-11 except for rhyme scheme; to force this into the regular pattern would be to require *me*, accented, to rhyme with *tyme*, accented on the first syllable, a requirement not usually found in Chaucer.

The thirteen stanzas of "A Complaint to His Lady" contain the following rhyme:

| Stanza | Rhyme | Other Stanzas and Rhyme |
|--------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>creature-endure</i> | 4 <i>Aventure-dure-creature</i> |
| 2 | <i>fille-spille</i> | 3 <i>fulfille</i> ; 8 <i>wille-fulfille</i> ; 12 <i>spille-wille</i> |
| 3 | <i>herte-smerte-asterte</i> | 13 <i>smerte-herte</i> |
| 4 | <i>fo-wo</i> | 7 <i>fo-wo-mo-so</i> |
| 5 | <i>bore-evermore</i> | 9 <i>sore-yore-more-therfore</i> |
| 6 | <i>fele-stele</i> | 10 <i>wele-fele</i> |
| 7 | <i>be-he</i> | 9 <i>me be</i> ; 11 <i>free-me-pitee-debonairtee</i> ; 12 <i>be</i> |
| 9 | <i>shal-al</i> | 11 <i>al-smal</i> |
| 10 | <i>on-lyve-thryve-dryve-fyve</i> | 12 <i>lyve-foryive</i> |

Considering the number of stanzas, many with ten verses, there is very little repetition of rhyme in this poem; and, probably because of the serious nature of the poem, there is no obviously humorous rhyme.

Many of the verses are alliterative, repetitious, and balanced, like 13, "To wepe ynogh, and wailen al my fille"; and many are antithetical, like 58, "My dere herte and best beloved fo."²⁰ Repetition

¹⁸Robinson (*Works*, p. 856) implies that this stanza has ten verses. Wells (*Manual*, p. 637) says incorrectly that there is identical rhyme in Part IV.

¹⁹Root (*Poetry*, p. 68) notes only the rhyme aabaabdcddc. Skeat (*Complete Works*, I, 76) does not comment upon the rhyme scheme of the ten-verse stanzas, but he accepts this use as the first in English.

of words and cognates is common: *Rewtheless*, 27; *rewthe*, 49; *rewe*, 95 and 124. Some of the verses, like 117, are studied without being polished, "As good were thanne untrewe as trewe to be." Occasionally there is an effective word-link between two stanzas: *worthy*, verse 87, and *worthiest*, verse 88.

5

"The Complaint unto Pity" contains seventeen stanzas of rhyme royal.²¹ In stanzas 1 through 8 the author plans to appeal to Pity for relief from the tyranny of Love, but he finds Pity dead. Stanzas 9 through 17 are "The Bill of Complaint" against Love. This poem, therefore, like "The Complaint of Mars" and "Anelida and Arcite," contains a complaint proper within the poem. Ten Brink (p. 259) states that this poem and "The Complaint of Mars" are "lyric poems with epic introductions."

Ten Brink postulates (p. 261) that the nine stanzas of "The Bill of Complaint" of "The Complaint unto Pity" are arranged in three groups, each containing three stanzas, but he gives no reason for such arrangement. Frederick J. Furnivall earlier used this arrangement in his publication of the poem.²² Robinson (p. 856) recognizes the same grouping and notes that each group ends with the same rhyme, namely *tweyne-seyne*, *pleyne-peyne*, and *pleyne-peyne*, stanzas 11, 14, and 17. While this is true, it should be noted that stanza 1 contains the rhyme *peyne-feyne-compleyne* and that stanza 4 is concluded similarly with the rhyme *peyne-compleyne*. Thus a link is formed between proem and "The Bill of Complaint" that has not been noted. Furthermore, in stanza 14 *seyne* appears internally and rhymes with *peyne*, the second word of stanza 15. Stanza 14, with the final rhyme *pleyne-peyne* contains near-rhyme in *quene-sene*; 16, with *peyne-peyne* also approaches double rhyme with *sustene-sene*; and *sene*, the last word of 16 is echoed in *seyne*, the fourth word of 17. *Seyne* also rhymes internally with *peyne* in 17, and both rhyme with the final rhyme *pleyne-peyne*. The word *pleyne* is echoed in *compleynt* and *pleynte* in 7 and in *complaynt* in 8, which also contains the proximate rhyme *seyne-sleyn-ageyn*. Ten Brink's hypothesis (p. 261), in which the triad is ever in the ascendancy, that the first eight stanzas have a

²⁰Braddy (*Chaucer and the French Poet*, p. 67) citing Arthur Piaget, *Oton de Grandson* (Lausanne, 1941), noted that Graunson calls his mistress "tresdoulce ennemye."

²¹Skeat (I, 62) calls this "the earliest example, in English."

²²Chaucer Soc. No. 24 (London, 1871), pp. 40-44.

5-3 arrangement is untenable. It could be argued more cogently, on the basis of thought and rhyme, that the arrangement is 4-4.

Rhyme used more than once in "The Complaint unto Pity" is as follows:

| <i>Stanza</i> | <i>Rhyme</i> | <i>Other Stanzas and Rhyme</i> |
|---------------|---|---|
| 1 | <i>agoo-woo</i> <i>peyne-feyne-compleyne</i> | 15 <i>therto-goo-woo</i> ; 17 <i>foo-woo-soo</i> 4 <i>peyne-compleyne</i> ; 11 <i>tweyne-seyne</i> ; 14 <i>pleyne-peyne</i> ; 16 <i>peyne-pleyne</i> ; 17 <i>pleyne-peyne</i> |
| 4 | <i>falle-calle-alle</i> | 9 <i>alle-calle-yfalle</i> |
| 5 | <i>newe-knewe</i> <i>I-sodeynly-besely</i> | 8 <i>shewe-fewe</i> 6 <i>lustely-richely</i> |
| 6 | <i>me-Jolyte-Honeste</i> | 8 <i>Pite-Cruelte</i> ; 10 <i>Cruelte-Beaute</i> ; 11 <i>Bounte-adversyte-Beaute</i> |
| | <i>Gouvernaunce-alliaunce</i> | 12 <i>alliaunce-obeisaunce</i> |
| 10 | <i>place-Grace</i> | 13 <i>place-grace</i> |
| 14 | <i>quene-sene</i> | 16 <i>sustene-sene</i> |

The rhyme index of Marshall and Porter, largely because of their method of listing rhymes, suggests that there is much rhyme in this poem. Considering the length, however, there is very little repetition of rhyme. As always in Chaucer, rhyme is dependent upon meter, spelling, and pronunciation: *seyn* in 8 does not rhyme with *seyne* in 11 or with *sene* in 14. Chaucer varies pronunciation to meet the exigencies of meter: *Pite* in the fifth verse of stanza 1, *Pitee* in 2, *Pittee* in the second verse of 7, and *Pite* in 13 are accented on the first syllable, but *Pite* in 4 and 8, like the other usages in 1 and 7, is accented on the second syllable. The pronunciation of other words absorbed directly from the French needs little comment. The accent is usually on the last syllable if the word appears at the end of a verse; otherwise, in the dissyllable, it is usually on the first syllable: *Bounte*, terminal in 11, is accented on the second syllable, but in 10, where it is internal, it is accented on the first syllable.

6

Chaucer's purse becomes his "lady dere" in "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse," in Pepys MS. 2006 called "La

Complaint de Chaucer A sa Bourse Voide." With cunning artlessness Chaucer calls his purse his "saveour, as doun in this world here." He, "shave as nye as any frere," implores his purse to become heavy. In the envoy, which Skeat (I, 88) says "is almost certainly Chaucer's latest composition," not the purse but the holder of the pursestrings, King Henry IV, is begged to hear Chaucer's supplication. The rhymes of this *balade*, included in the index of Marshall and Porter, are as follows:

Stanza 1: *wight der lyght chere bere crye dye*

Stanza 2: *nyght here bryght pere stere companye dye*

Stanza 3: *lyght here myght tresorere frere curtesye dye*

Envoy: *Albyon eleccion sende amende supplicacion*

The scheme for each of the stanzas is rhyme royal, ababbcc, and for the envoy ddeed. The refrain of each of the stanzas, "Beth hevy ageyn, or elles moote I dye!" is balanced by the last verse of the envoy, "Have mynde upon my supplicacion!"

The repeated rhyme within each of the six complaints having been noted, it may be valuable to indicate how Chaucer has used this rhyme in the other five of the six complaints. The table on the following page presents a comparative study of Chaucer's rhyme in these poems. The stanza number of the key rhyme is noted under the name of the poem; reference to this stanza will lead back to the same rhyme within a given poem.

It is apparent that "The Complaint of Venus" is, in rhyme, relatively independent of the other complaints. It is surprising, because of its brevity, that "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" has several rhyme links with other complaints; such links are attributable, perhaps, to the fact that the rhymes are rather conventional. The sparsity of conventional rhymes, like *do-wo-go*, is a tribute to Chaucer's inventiveness; and it is commendable that when Chaucer uses a simple rhyme like *be* he combines it with a more difficult rhyme like *chevache*. Chaucer's facility in rhyming and his superior vocabulary appear in the frequency of rhyme of long words like *governaunce*: of the twenty-nine such words, fifteen, or more than half, are new rhymes in the three poems; in "The Complaint of Mars," three-fourths of the words rhyming with *governaunce* are used for the first time.

The number of feet in each verse of the six complaints is consistently five. The number of verses in each stanza runs from

TABLE OF RHYME IN CHAUCER'S COMPLAINTS

| Rhyme | d'Amours | Mars | Venus | Lady | Pity | Purse |
|---|----------|------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>aserte-herte</i> | 2 | 2 | <i>herte-smerte</i> | 3 <i>herte-smerte- asterte</i> | | |
| <i>be-chevache-se</i> | | 21 | | 7 <i>be-he</i> | 6 <i>me-Jolyte-Honeste</i> | 1 <i>dere-chere-bere</i> |
| <i>chere-dere</i> | 4 | 6 | <i>manere-chere</i> | | 1 <i>peyme-feyne- compleyne</i> | |
| <i>compleyne-tweyne- peyne</i> | | 14 | | | 1 <i>agoo-woo</i> | |
| <i>do-wo-go</i> | 3 | 11 | <i>two-go</i> | 4 <i>fo-wo</i> | | |
| <i>sure-aventure</i> | | 3 | | 1 <i>creature-endure</i> | | |
| <i>dye-drye-folye</i> | 5 | 1 | <i>espye-jelosye</i> | | | 1 <i>crye-dye</i> |
| <i>ende-spende</i> | 4 | | | | | Env. <i>sende-amende</i> |
| <i>governance- pleasaunce- obeisaunce</i> | | 7 | 1-6 <i>pleasaunce and remembrance</i> Env. | | 6 <i>Governance- alliaunce</i> | |
| <i>knyght-wight</i> | | 10 | | | | 1-3 <i>wight-lyght</i> |
| <i>lyvinge- compleynge</i> | 1 | 2 | <i>synge-up-sprynge</i> | | | |
| <i>place-grace-face</i> | | 9 | | | 10 <i>place-Grace</i> | |
| <i>prively-hastely- sturdely</i> | | 12 | | | 5 <i>I-sodeynly- besely</i> | |
| <i>take-sake</i> | 7 | 3 | <i>awake-make</i> | | | |
| <i>telle-duelle-welle</i> | | 11 | | 6 <i>fete-stele</i> | | |

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five, in the envoy of "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse," to seventeen, in stanza 4 of "A Complaint to His Lady." The rhyme scheme of the former is aabba. The seven-verse stanza rhyming ababbcc, or rhyme royal, is used in "The Complaint unto Pity," "A Complaint to His Lady," and "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse."

From rhyme royal, the transition to *ottava rima* was not difficult: the addition of an *a* verse to rhyme royal would have created the traditional rhyme scheme of *ottava rima*, abababcc. Chaucer, however, in "The Complaint of Venus," created a new rhyme, abab/bccb, basically rhyme royal with a final additional *b* verse; and in "A Complaint to His Lady" additional new rhymes: aba/cac/dc and aaaa/bccb.

The stanza of nine verses found in "The Complaynt" proper of "The Complaint of Mars" rhymes aab/aab/bcc. From one point of view, this is but rhyme royal with an *a* rhyme interpolated initially in each of the first two tercets. This stanza, of course, is the prototype of the celebrated stanza of Edmund Spenser rhyming abab/bcbc/c.

In his use of the stanza of ten verses, Chaucer shows even greater versatility. The envoy of "The Complaint of Venus" is rhymed aab/aab/b/aab; in stanza 5 of "A Complaint to His Lady," aab/aab/cddc; in stanza 12, aab/aab/accd; and in stanza 13, aab/aac/deed.

Stanza 4 of "A Complaint to His Lady," however, is the classic of verse experimentation. The rhyme scheme of this stanza of seventeen verses is a/bcb/cdc/ded/efe/fgf/g. If the first verse, which introduces, and the last verse, which concludes, are not considered, the remaining fifteen verses are a perfect specimen of *terza rima*, in which the middle verse of each tercet provides the rhyme for the first and third verses of the succeeding tercet. If, however, verses *a* and *b* are disregarded as introductory, a new pattern evolves: ab/cbc/dcd/ede/fef/gfg, the first and third verses of each tercet providing the rhyme for the middle verse of the succeeding tercet; such rhyme might be called regressive rhyme.

In his complaints, Chaucer introduced *ottava rima* and *terza rima* from Italy and varied them. He also imported various patterns from France. If stanzas 5 and 13 of "Complaynt d'Amours" may be considered a unit, it is quite similar to the rondel with the initial rhyme omitted. It is in the ballade, however, that Chaucer

excels. "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse" is a fine specimen of this type, consisting of the usual three stanzas with the same rhyme and an envoy. "The Complaint of Venus," arranged in three groups, each group containing three stanzas and each stanza of each group the same refrain, and an envoy of ten verses, equal to the whole number of stanzas, is a triumph in poetic architectural design.

If a poet may be evaluated in the light of his age and by the fecundity of his vocabulary, rhymes, and metrical forms, in English versification Chaucer is nonpareil.