Notes on the English rondeaux

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citable link</td>
<td><a href="https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364353">https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364353</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes on English Rondeaux

Marcel Franois

There is a poetical genre which is called by various names: rondel, rondeau, triolet, "roundel," although Berdan wrote that, before Clement Marot, the rondeau "was a name loosely applied to a large number of forms having little more than the use of the refrain in common." As a matter of fact, however, the rondel, rondeau, triolet, "roundel," in spite of the variety of names, belong to one single genre which is well defined, though it presents itself under different forms. It is a lyric genre — that is, it is a literary poetry which was to be sung or accompanied with music — and originally, about the thirteenth century, the musical part of the rondeau and its literary part were closely associated with one another. But the relationship of music and poetry became more and more loose toward the end of the fifteenth century.

Musically, a rondeau was characterized by being formed of two units, which have been represented by the letters S and T, and they were

1 See The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed., rev. (reprinted 1947): "Rondeau . . . later form of rondel . . . A short poem, consisting of ten, or in stricter sense of thirteen, lines, having only two rhymes throughout, and with the opening words used twice as a refrain . . . Rondel . . . A rondeau, or a special form of this late ME." On the rondeau, see Helen Louise Cohen, Lyric Forms from France, Their History and Their Use (New York, 1922), pp. 50-72. Eleanor Prescott Hammond, English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey (Durham, N. C., and London, 1927), p. 466: "A rondeau, i.e., a poem of unequally tripartite structure on two rhymes, repeating its opening lines in two other positions in the poem. Scribes often write only the first word of two of the repeated lines . . . The roundel was originally a French 'rondelet', or lyric sung in dance." In my paper, "Lectures sur le Moyen Age et la Renaissance, I: La Structure du Rondel," Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate, XXVI.1 (marzo 1932), 18-24, I have called M and N the two literary units of a rondeau, which are repeated at the appropriate times, and I called w and n the literary texts, which are different from M and N but complete the different stanzas. Thus, in the case of the triolet (or rondeau distique), M = A, N = B, w designates a line of rhyme a, and n designates a line of rhyme b. While the musical rondeau is built on only two units, the literary rondeau includes new lines besides the ones that are repeated.

arranged according to the following scheme: STSSSTST. The literary
rondeau is characterized by its two rhymes. I have used the letters \( M, N, m, n \) to designate the two parts of the rondeau — \( M \) and \( N \), which
are repeated, and \( m \) and \( n \), the two texts which are used to complete the
rondeau. Thus a literary rondeau corresponds to the following scheme:
\( MN, mM, mM, MN \). In its simplest form, \( M = A, N = B \), while \( m \) and
\( n \) represent \( a \) and \( b \). There is a difference between the musical form
of the rondeau and its literary form, because the musical rondeau is made
up of only two units which are repeated, whereas the literary rondeau is
constructed not only of two units which are repeated, but of other lines
which complete the text, although the rhymes remain always \( a \) and \( b \). Thus the \textit{triolet}, as it has been called since the end of the fifteenth
century, is represented by the scheme: \( AB, aA, abAB \). It is customary to
divide the rondeau into three stanzas, although some editors use only
two stanzas, or one stanza alone for the \textit{triolet}.

The unit \( M \) can represent one line, or two, or three, whereas \( B \) can
represent one or two; depending on the number of lines of \( M \), we may
have what I have called \textit{rondeau distique} (formed by two lines \( A \) and
\( B \)), or \textit{rondeau tercet} (formed by three lines, according to the scheme
\( AA'B, ABA', ABB' \), with two varieties for each type, so that altogether
there are six types of \textit{rondeaux tercets}). The \textit{rondeaux quatrains} are of
two types, depending on whether the scheme of the first stanza is \( ABBA \)
or \( ABAB \). The \textit{rondeaux cinqains} have first stanzas of the scheme
\( AA'BBA' \). We will deal here with the following types of rondeaux:

\[
\begin{align*}
AB, & aA, abAB \\
ABBE, & abAB, abbABB' \\
ABB'A', & abAB, abbaABB'A' \\
AA'B'B'A'', & aabAA'B, aabbaAA'B'B'A''
\end{align*}
\]

There is a great difficulty for modern editors because the scribes, as a
rule, did not write out the complete lines which are repeated. Often
they wrote only one or more words of the lines, sometimes following
these words by “etc,” to indicate that the lines were to be completed
by the singer or poet. Recently an excellent editor decided to give in
italics the full refrain “as used when the rondeau was set to music.”

The first example of a rondeau written in English is — as far as we

know — to be found in the works of Chaucer, at the close of his "Parliament of Fowls" and in three rondels which are attributed to him: "Merelles Beauce. A Triple Roundel." 4

Hammond (pp. 231-232) published, as "Translations from Charles d'Orléans," four Chansons, together with the French text of Charles. Here is the first of these pieces:

XX

Chanson
Prenez teste ce baiser mon coer
Que ma maistresse vous presente
La belle honneur je ve-face et genre
Par sa tresgrant grace et douceur
Bon guet feray sur mon honneur
Afin que danger rien ne sente
Prenez etc.
Dangier tente moy en labour
A fair guet er gist on sa tente
Acomplissez brief estre cantaute
Tandis quil dort cest le meilleur
Prenez etc.
Take take this cosse alwayes alwayes my harte
That thee presente is of thi maistres
The godefullye so full of lustynes
Only of grace to lessen wt thi smert
But to myn honoure koke thou well avert.
That danger not persuade my sotilnes
Take take this
That thee
Dangier wocthithal night in his shert
To spye me in a gery currissines
So to hante doon attornes set so thee dresse.
While in a sleepe his eyen ben covert
Take take this
That thee

4 Cohen, op. cit., pp. 68-69; The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, and ed., ed. by F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1937), p. 378, and cf. notes on p. 796: "A roundel, or triole, is a short poem in which the first line or lines recur as a refrain in the middle and at the end. The usual form in Machaut, Deschamps, and Chaucer is abR abR (in which R represents one or more of the first three lines). The length of the poem varies from fourteen lines, when both refrains repeat three lines in full, to nine, when one refrain is omitted entirely and the other consists of a single line. The MSS. do not make clear in the present instance, and in Chaucer's Merelles Beauce, how many lines should be repeated in each refrain . . . . " Now Merelles Beauce, A Triple Roundel (Robinson, p. 342; Cohen, pp. 66-67) is made up of three rondeaux tercets. Let us also remark that the triole (the term used, since the end of the fifteenth century, to designate what I call a rondeau distique) is only a form of the general genre of the rondeau. Cf. my paper, "Note on Chaucer's Rondels and His French Models," Istituto Orientale di Napoli: Annali, Scuole Germaniche, IX (1966), 193-197. Cohen (p. 69) and Hammond (p. 67) quote a rondeau tercet. ABB', abABB, abAbBB'. Cohen notes, "The scribe who set down the lines did not trouble to repeat the refrain in full, though the poem is evidently like Chaucer's roundels in structure." Hammond published "Three Roundels," which evidently have the scheme ABB'A abR bR abR where R stands for the first word or words of the first line of the first stanza, although the division into stanzas is not clear (cf. p. 404).
Let us say that the English pieces said to be translations from Charles d'Orléans correspond to the following schemes:

$$ABB'A, \, ab[AB], \, abba[ABB'A]$$
and
$$AA'BBA', \, aab[AA'B], \, abba[AA'BBA'].$$

But Steele claims, "The rondel consists normally of fourteen lines, six lines of verse then the first two repeated, then four more lines, and lastly the first two again." He explains further about rondels 1, 2, 4-8, 10-14, 16, 18-24, 26-36, 38, 40, 42, 43, 46-53, 60-69, 89, 91, 94, 101, 107, and writes: "Fourteen-line rondels, rhymes abb, aab, ab, alba, ab." This does not agree with my evaluation.

May I note also that what Steele calls "roundels" were what Hammond entitled "chancon." The fifty-two "roundels" printed by Steele were translated from fifty-two chansons by Charles d'Orléans.

It should be pointed out that Champion prints the rondeaux in a different way from the chansons. These are the schemes he adopts for the chansons:

$$ABB'A', \, ab[AB], \, abba[A]$$
$$AA'BBA', \, aab[AA'B], \, abba[A]$$

and for the rondes:

$$ABB'A', \, ab[A], \, abba[A]$$
$$AA'BBA', \, aab[A], \, abba[A]$$

However, it should be added that the manuscript used by Champion gives only one or two of the first words of the repeated lines, AB, A, AA'B. Goodrich follows the practice of Champion, and so does Alice Planche, although the latter does not indicate the state of incompleteness of the repeated lines.


Fox seems to follow the model of Steele, but suggests that the lines 4255, 4256, 4261, and 4262 ought to be completed. Here is the way he published what Steele had published among the roundels (p. 142, number 92, lines 4249-4262), lines 4255-4256 and 4261-4262 having been printed by Steele as

As he that no thing may profite
What do y now but wayle and crie
As for myn bowre in which to die
Not settyng bi my liif a myte
And of alle this who is to wite
Not dare y sey no no trowly
As he that . . .
What do y . . .
So nys hit wandir but a lile
Though that y go ful drepyngly
And drawe me sol from company
Til deithis darte lust on me smyte
As he that . . .
What do y . . .

Let me add that Champion published two poems, "Myn hert hath send" and "Whan shal thow come" (I, 256-257), and completed the lines 7-8 and 13 according to the scheme which he adopted for all the chansons — that is, three stanzas, and the rimes ABB’A’, abAB, abbaA. But for these two pieces Steele (p. 224) used only one stanza of thirteen lines, and printed lines 109 and 115 as “Myn hert &c.”, line 110 as “Vnto comforf &c.”, lines 122 and 123 as “Whan shal &c./Thow hast &c.”, and line 128 as “Whan shal &c.” Moreover, I disagree, at least partially, with Champion, when he writes:

Le rondeau dont a surtout usé Charles d'Orléans n’a plus rien à voir avec l'archaïque rondeau d'Eustache Deschamps. Notre poète usera surtout du rondeau double de 3 strophes de 4, 4 et 5 vers: aRbba/abaaR/abaaR. (p. xxxv)

On the contrary, the rondeaux (and the chansons) of Charles d'Orléans are absolutely traditional, and their scheme is that of

Machaut, Deschamps, and Chaucer (who used only one type of rondeau which is also traditional). There may be one or two misprints, for the type of rondeau most often used by Charles d'Orléans is ABB'A', abAB, abbaABB'A' (cf. Hammond, pp. 221-223, 231-232) and the rondeau tercet, ABB', abAB, abbaABB', of Hoëclevc (Hammond, p. 67; Cohen, p. 69), and what Cohen calls a "fourteen-line poem" by Lydgate: three stanzas and rhymes ABB'A', abAB, abbaAB; but I should print the full refrain, ABB'A', at the end of the third stanza, and make it a rondeau of sixteen lines.10

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

RICHARD A. COSROVE is Associate Professor of History at the University of Arizona. His dissertation (1967) at the University of California, Riverside, was "Sir Eyre Crowe and the English Foreign Office, 1905-1914."

MARCEL FRANÇON, Associate Professor of French Literature, Emeritus, at Harvard, has contributed to four previous issues of the Harvard Library Bulletin. N. 16, terza serie (ottobre-dicembre 1975) of Francia, Periodico di Cultura Francese, a "Numero Speciale Dedicated a Marcel Françon," included a list of 20 of his books and editions and 252 articles and notes that he has written.

MASON HAMMOND, Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature, Emeritus, and Honorary Associate of Kirkland House at Harvard, is a member of the Harvard Class of 1915. Two of his recent books, both published by the Harvard University Press, are The City in the Ancient World (1972) and Latin: A Historical and Linguistic Handbook (1976).

ROBERT D. Hume, who was teaching at Cornell when his three previous contributions to the Bulletin were published, is now Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University. In 1976 the Clarendon Press at Oxford published his The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century and the University of Pennsylvania Press published The Country Gentleman, a "jest" play by Sir Robert Howard and George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham, which he edited with Arthur H. Scouten, for his edition of The Frolicks, see the note on Professor Milhous which follows.

JUDITH MILHOUSS, Assistant Professor of Theatre History and Dramatic Literature at the University of Iowa, was the co-author (with Professor Hume) of articles in the October 1974 and January 1977 issues of the Harvard Library Bulletin and co-editor of The Frolicks or The Lawyer Cheated (1671), by Elizabeth Polwhole (Cornell University Press, 1977).

ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ-BUCKINGHAM, Director of the Division of Library and Information Science at St. John's University, Jamaica, New York, was formerly Librarian of the Tozzer Library of Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. His dissertation (1977) at the University of Michigan, "Colonial Peru and the Printing Press of Antonio Ricardo," was an outgrowth of research on which he first reported in the January 1968 issue of the Harvard Library Bulletin.