

SOME ASPECTS OF RHYME AND SUFFIXATION IN *LUCRECE*

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Lucrece is one of Shakespeare's poems, but it is one of the least known. It has been comparatively neglected by the critics. For F. T. Prince⁷² "*Lucrece*, narrative in form, is in substance a tragedy." It has been called a failure⁷³, but it must be remembered that if it is so it is only considering Shakespeare's greater achievements in other works. Nevertheless its study can contribute to a better insight of Shakespeare's poetry.

In this case I have selected the poem because, being the longest of Shakespeare's long poems, (*Venus and Adonis*, *The Passionate Pilgrim* and *The Phoenix and the Turtle*) it gives more scope to study some aspects of rhyme and suffixation. It is easy to understand that phenomena which involve recurrence are better considered in longer works.

In Quirk's *Contemporary Grammar of English* the different kinds of prominence are described as "serving the total sequential organization of the message." The author says that studying these aspects of linguistic structure makes one aware of language as a linearly organized communication system, in which judicious ordering and placing of emphasis may be important for the proper understanding of the message"⁷⁴. He goes on, "The neutral position of focus is what we may call end-focus, that is, (generally speaking) chief prominence on the last open-class item or proper noun in the clause."⁷⁵

⁷² In his introduction to *The Poems*, p. xxxiv

⁷³ Prince says "*Lucrece* is undoubtedly as a whole an artistic failure, despite the magnificence of many of its parts." p. xxv

⁷⁴ Prince, 14.1, 937.

⁷⁵ Prince, 14.3, 967.

In a poem this position which carries special prominence often corresponds to the last stressed word in the verse, which is where the rhyme is, the end of the clause or the end of the phrase.

Of course one must take into account that syntactic units and rhythmic measures can coincide with one another or cut across them. I mean that a verse may belong to one syntactic unit or this unit may overflow into the next verse, which is called *enjambment*. In the case of Shakespeare's *Lucrece* the second procedure is highly infrequent. At one glance it is easy to perceive how many lines end with commas, semicolons, colons, fullstops, question marks or admiration marks. Even the absence of punctuation marks does not mean that there is enjambment. This poem is composed of verses which can be described as "end-stopped lines" as opposed to "run-on lines".

Versification includes some patterns of sound, arranged through parallelism, which form rhythm and rhyme. For the rhyme in English it is necessary that the final measure of the verse is constant, that is, repeated in another verse where it must coincide with the last stressed syllable onwards.

So, we can see how the end of verse position attracts importance on one hand through its final situation, the end-focus, and on the other hand through rhyme repetition, which undoubtedly fixes the reader's attention making this part of the verse more memorable.

It can be argued that word order in poetry is governed by less restrictive rules than prose, and so what was said about end-focus should be invalidated for the end of verse position. Apart from quoting the poem itself, it is also obvious that through versification we can see the interplay of linguistic deviance and conformity. Rhythm and rhyme come under linguistic deviance, but the position of the rhyme, which is fixed and expected, acts as part of conformity within the linguistic deviance.

To sum up, the last position of the verse, which carries rhyme, is given prominence both through the importance of the content and the originality of the form. This has led me to study the words which appear in this position, at the end of the verse in *Lucrece*.

Lucrece is a poem consisting of 1.868 verses, with a total of 16.234 words, of which obviously only 1.868 are placed at the final position of the

verse and the rest, 14.366 words, appear inside the verse. The proportion of end of verse words with inside verse words is 0.13.

From what has been said previously it can be deduced that certain classes of words cannot appear in this final position. There can be no determiners, prepositions or conjunctions. Adjectives are greatly restricted in this position; they can only appear if they are predicative. Personal pronouns can appear either in the object or the subject form; in the latter case appearance must be due to emphasis or to inversion. Only some adverbs can appear in this position.

So the final position is almost exclusively restricted to open-ended word classes: nouns, verbs and, with limitations, adjectives and adverbs. These word classes are, on the other hand, susceptible to variation through suffixes, which can be an extremely interesting fact when we consider the position. It can be assumed as a hypothesis that suffixation can help rhyme, through repetition. This is what I am going to test in *Lucrece*. As a methodological question, suffixes will only be significant if there is a certain degree of repetition at the end of the verse.

First I shall consider those suffixes due to inflexion, what we may call grammatical suffixes:

-ing

In *Lucrece* we find it 301 times inside verse and 49 times in final position, which brings about a ratio of 0.162 . As the general ratio between inside verse and final position words in *Lucrece* is 0.13 it can be said that the *-ing* suffix is slightly more frequent than the ordinary ratio.

-ed (including *-'d*)

The suffix for the past and past participle, which I only consider as *-ed*, brings the following results:

In *Lucrece* we find it 450 times inside verse *versus* 162 times in final position, which brings about a ratio of 0.36, superior to the ordinary ratio of 0.13; so *-ed* is also significant.

If I differentiate *-d* from the full suffix the results alter:

-d

We then obtain 219 times inside verse versus 33 times in final position, which makes a ratio of 0.15, slightly higher than 0.13.

-ied

On the other hand, if we consider the suffix as *-ied*, results come higher: 9 times inside verse versus 8 times in final position, bringing about a ratio of 0.888, clearly superior to 0.13.

Next I am going to contrast the *-es* suffix. I consider it as *-es* and not as *-s*, along the same lines as the past/past participle suffix. I do not differentiate the 3rd person suffix from the plural suffix. On the other hand I cannot take into account the saxon genitive, because it never appears at the end of verse.

-es

We find it 200 times inside verse versus 62 times in final position, bringing about a ratio of 0.31, which is higher than 0.13.

-eth

This suffix is quite significant in *Lucrece*. The important fact is that it appears very frequently in final position. It appears 18 times inside verse and 18 times, the same amount, in final position, bringing about a ratio of 1, clearly superior to 0.13. Jespersen⁷⁶ says that in Shakespeare "the rule may be laid down that *-th* belongs more to the solemn and dignified speeches than to everyday talk, although this is by no means carried through everywhere.". One must realize that I have counted the suffix as *-eth*, and I have not taken into consideration the suffix in auxiliaries, like *hath* and *doth*, which never appear at the final position, although *hath* appears 37 times and *doth* 69 in middle position.

⁷⁶ Jespersen, O. *A Modern English Grammar* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961) 6. 19.

-est

The second person singular ending *-est* appears sometimes, although it is more frequent in its syncopated form, *-'st*. However it is not important for my purpose because it is never present in the final position.

As for the *-est* suffix of the superlative, it is negligible, for it appears 4 times inside verse and only once at the end of the verse; with this limited number of occurrences it is not significant, even though the ratio might have been considered important, 0.25, had there been more examples of the suffix in the poem.

-er, the comparative suffix is more abundant, but it is not significant for the rhyme, as it appears 37 times inside verse and 4 at the final position, bringing about a ratio of 0.11, which is under the ordinary proportion of 0.13.

So far I have been dealing with grammatical suffixes. Now I am going to study the lexical suffixes most frequently used in this poem. The figures show follow the pattern used so far: first the number of occurrences of the suffix in question in inside verse position, then occurrence of the suffix at the end of verse, then the proportion of these occurrences, followed by the ratio the poem has end of verse words *versus* inside of verse words.

<i>-tion</i>	31	22	=0.71	0.13
<i>-sion</i>	15	5	=0.33	0.13
<i>-age</i>	20	17	=0.85	0.13
<i>-ness</i>	14	5	=0.36	0.13
<i>-less</i>	59	2	=0.033	0.13
<i>-ly</i>	95	8	=0.084	0.13
<i>-ment</i>	16	12	=0.75	0.13
<i>-ance</i>	19	10	=0.52	0.13
<i>-ble</i>	22	3	=0.136	0.13
<i>-ous</i>	36	0		
<i>-ant</i>	14	0		
<i>-ful</i>	43	0		

In grammatical suffixes we have seen how they are in general, (-*est*, and -*er* excepted) proportionally more frequent at the end of verse position. But when dealing with lexical suffixes the situation varies. Some of them are never at the end of verse while others, with even a smaller number of total occurrences, are in that position in a ratio proportionally significant. If we take into account the type of the suffixes which are significant for the rhyme according to the word categories they belong to, we must point at nominal suffixes as the most important.

The results of my findings can be accounted to a certain extent by Shakespeare's style but the use of poetic language in that period may also have some influence in this aspect. This consideration has led me to contrast the results with two other poets of his time, repeating the calculations in a *corpus* as similar as possible.

I have chosen Donne for this purpose because he is one of the greatest poets in English and is a contemporary of Shakespeare. There were certain difficulties in finding a *corpus* resembling the one used first, as the nature and length of Donne's poems differ greatly from *Lucrece*. Nevertheless I have selected a *corpus* which includes the two longest poems written by Donne: *The Anatomie of the World* and *The Progresse of the Soule*. Both of them are poems of the same type, they are elegies, and they deal with the same theme, as they are funeral elegies for the first and second anniversaries of the death of Mistress Elizabeth Dury. As it is they form a total of 1.216 verses with 10.769 words, of which, as it is easy to deduce, there are 1.216 words placed at the final position of the verse. The ratio is 0.127, which is slightly lower than the one in *Lucrece*, 0.13.

The other poet I have selected is Milton. The *corpus* is more homogeneous than the one selected for Donne, as it belongs to one poem, instead of being formed by two poems, but the poem is not complete, it is only part of it. I have considered the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. *Paradise Lost*, like *Lucrece*, is a narrative poem. The part selected is nearer in length to *Lucrece*: it consists of 1.862 verses, formed with 15.772 words, of which 13.910 words are inside the verse and 1.862 at the end of the verse. The proportion is 0.134, slightly higher than the one in *Lucrece*, 0.13.

The reason why I chose Milton is that I wanted to contrast results with a poem where the final position of the verse has a different type of

prominence, because there is no rhyme; we are now dealing with blank verse and in blank verse some kind of enjambment is to be expected.

We can see that the results vary considerably:

-ing

In Shakespeare	301	49	=0.16	0.13
In Donne	92	5	=0.054	0.127
In Milton	238	15	=0.063	0.134

-ed (including -'d)

In Shakespeare	450	162	=0.36	0.13
In Donne	176	35	=0.198	0.127
In Milton	463	166	=0.358	0.134

If I differentiate *-'d* from the full suffix the results alter:

-'d

In Shakespeare	219	33	=0.15	0.13
In Donne	100	17	=0.17	0.127
In Milton	0	0		

-ied

In Shakespeare	9	8	=0.888	0.13
In Donne	6	1	=0.166	0.127
In Milton	7	10	=1.428	0.134

-es

In Shakespeare	200	62	=0.31	0.13
In Donne	259	40	=0.154	0.127
In Milton	154	58	=0.376	0.134

-ies

In Shakespeare	23	30	=1.304	0.13
In Donne	44	12	=0.272	0.127
In Milton	26	9	=0.346	0.134

-eth

In Shakespeare	18	18	=1	0.13
In Donne	1	0	=0	
In Milton	0	0	=0	

-est second person suffix is present in the three poets but it never appears at the end of verse.

-est (superlative suffix)

In Shakespeare	4	1	=0.25	0.13
In Donne	19	5	=0.26	0.127
In Milton	50	3	=0.06	

It may be interesting to note that the only superlative which appears in final position in the three authors is the same, *best*.

-er (comparative suffix)

In Shakespeare	37	4	=0.108	0.13
In Donne	21	0	=0	
In Milton	34	0	=0	

-tion

In Shakespeare	31	22	=0.709	0.13
In Donne	28	23	=0.821	0.127
In Milton	52	0	=0	

-sion

In Shakespeare	15	5	=0.25	0.13
In Donne	5	0	=0	
In Milton	28	0	=0	

-age

In Shakespeare	20	17	=0.85	0.13
In Donne	11	7	=0.636	0.127
In Milton	32	8	=0.25	0.134

-ness

In Shakespeare	14	5	=0.357	0.13
In Donne	0	0	=0	
In Milton	26	2	=0.076	0.134

-less

In Shakespeare	59	2	=0.033	0.13
In Donne	1	0	=0	
In Milton	35	7	=0.2	0.134

-ly

In Shakespeare	95	8	=0.084	0.13
In Donne	58	2	=0.033	0.127
In Milton	0	0	=0	

-ment

In Shakespeare	16	12	=0.75	0.13
In Donne	10	4	=0.4	0.127
In Milton	14	9	=0.642	0.134

-ance

In Shakespeare	19	10	=0.52	
In Donne	8	2	=0.25	0.127
In Milton	33	9	=0.272	0.134

-ous

In Shakespeare	36	0	=0	
In Donne	22	3	=0.12	0.127
In Milton	100	2	=0.02	0.134

-ant

In Shakespeare	14	0	=0	
In Donne	7	2	=0.285	0.127
In Milton	12	1	=0.083	0.134

-ful

In Shakespeare	43	0	=0	
In Donne	1	0	=0	
In Milton	42	1	=0.023	0.134

-ble

In Shakespeare	22	3	=0.136	0.13
In Donne	9	0	=0	
In Milton	48	5	=0.094	0.134

The three poets show more similarities when dealing with grammatical suffixes than when we compare the use of lexical suffixes. Although we must grant that there exist great differences between them the three poets abound in grammatical suffixes at the end of verse position. It is true that a highly frequent suffix, *-ing*, does hardly ever take final position in Donne or Milton, while it is significant in Shakespeare. We must also note that Milton does not use the syncopated form of the suffix for the past/past participle, and that *-eth* is almost totally absent in Donne and totally absent in Milton. Nevertheless coincidence stands out far more than disparity.

If we compare the appearance of lexical suffixes personal style seems to be the reason for the choice, as the pattern changes almost with every suffix. Only two of them, *-ment* and *-ance* are significant (highly significant)

in the three poets. If, as I said before, Shakespeare shows his preference for nominal suffixes for the final position, this tendency is not followed by Donne.

So, it would seem that the occurrence of lexical suffixes at the end of verse, that is, suffixes which produce the rhyme, is a matter of personal choice, but the occurrence of grammatical suffixes in that position is backed by the usage of the three poets through works which differ in theme (narrative poems and elegies) and in the form (poems with rhyme and poems in blank verse).

From the data analysed in this brief paper we can see that suffixation helps rhyme considerably in *Lucrece*. The results can be attributed only partially to Shakespeare's style as the variation the other two poets show proves.

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