

John Lennard, The Poetry Handbook
(Oxford UP, 2005)

on RHYME in 'I heard a Fly buzz'
& 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'

+
a RHYME glossary of terms

Exemplary Poems

1. 'I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—' (p. 97)

Dickinson was an inveterate pararhymer, and dissonance is a major feature of her work. Here, two of four end-rhymes are pararhymes (Room/Storm, firm/Room) and one at best a very loose vowel-rhyme (be/Fly); only in the last stanza does full-rhyme sound (me/see)—a reversal of what one might expect, associating dissonant half-rhymes with continuance and full-rhyme with a supercession of death. The reversal is mapped in the cluster of delayed autorhymes—"buzz" (ll. 1 + 13), "Room" (ll. 2 + 8), and "me" (ll. 10 + 14)—and by the internal half-rhymes giving way to accelerated full- and autorhyme—"I heard [. . .] I died" (1), "Between [. . .] Storm" (4), "Eyes [. . .] dry" (5), "last Onset" (7), "willed my [. . .] Signed away" (9), "Blue [. . .] Buzz" (13), "me be" (10), "And then [. . .] and then" (15), "not see to see—" (16): the last chime of failing sight and life. The aural finality of the mosaic vowel- + autorhyme³¹ is countered by the terminal dash, but prevented from escalating into the hysteria closely proximate rhymes can induce (as in 'Prufrock') by a subtle link between "I willed" (9) and "Windows failed" (15), distending the making of dispositions into the progressive collapse that brings the poem to a (potentially) serene termination.

Chain-rhyme pairs stanzas, creating a central division of statement ("I heard") and resolution ("I willed") marked by initial mosaic auto- + pararhyme, but the confident (even triumphant) resignation of "when the King [I] Be witnessed—in the Room" (ending the first pair) is carried

³¹ Cf. Hopkins, 'Carriage Comfort', ending "wrestling with (my God!) my God."

into the calm business of dying (in the second). "Room/Storm" seems counter-semantic by contrast with quasi-semantic "firm/Room", but the arch-autorhyme of "Room" promotes the chain-pararhyme of "Storm/firm", sowing suspicion this may be the truly semantic rhyme, pointing the unstoppable "Heaves of Storm" and the frailty of flesh. The semantic chain-rhyme 'be/me' (ll. 10 + 14) is also unsettlingly trumped by the unsemantic non-rhyme 'Fly/see' (12 + 16), completing what "I heard a Fly" began.

2. 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (p. 18)

MS drafts (⁶) show the poem's sonnet-form, Shakespearian octave + double-tercet sestet (*abab cdcd eeffeg*) was complete in second draft; a rhyme-scheme revision had to respect:

What passing-bells for you who die in herds?
 — Only the monstrous anger of the guns!
 — Only the stuttering rifles' rattled words
 Can patter out your hasty orisons. (2nd draft)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
 — Only the monstrous anger of the guns!
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
 Can patter out their hasty orisons. (final draft)

Arguing for rhyme as a stimulus to revision, N. S. Thompson makes some interesting points:

the more direct and colloquial phrase to 'die as cattle' [. . .] left [Owen] with a difficult rhyme [. . .]. He was thus forced out of the 'poetic' and inappropriate metaphor of rifle shots as 'words' towards the concrete and active 'rattle'. [. . .] The impersonal 'cattle' is exactly what the context demands rather than the cliché 'herds' because it brings the reader more closely to the implied metaphor of butchery without making it obvious. The benefits of 'rattle' range from the actual use of rattles for communication on the Western Front to the tension between play and death in games of war, with the macabre suggestion of being taunted by a rattle (which in this case brings with it death). The change also supports the revision of 'you/your' to 'these/their' where the distancing lends sympathy rather than diminishes it as it suggests the panoramic scale of the slaughter.³²

³² 'Form and Function', in *P.N. Review*, 295 (May-June 2003), 42-6, p. 45.

I suspect it was vice versa, the existing "rattled" in l. 3 suggesting itself as the rhyme enabling "die as cattle" (which appeared in third draft), but about cattle/rattle and pronominal changes Thompson is spot on, and the availability of multiple drafts invites further investigation.

In its earliest complete form ('Anthem for Dead Youth') the structure was very loosely 7 + 7, but thereafter form rapidly clarified and settled:

fast/guns/mouths/burials/none/wail/shells
 lost/eyes/candles/wreaths/palls/minds/blinds (BL MS 43721, fo.54a)

herds/guns/words/orisons
 bells/choirs/shells/shires
 all/eyes/goodbyes/pall/minds/blinds (BL MS 43721, fo.55a)

cattle/guns/rattle/orisons
 asphodels/choirs/shells/shires
 all/eyes/goodbyes/pall/minds/blinds (BL MS 43721, fo.56a)

cattle/guns/rattle/orisons
 bells/choirs/shells/shires
 all/eyes/goodbyes/pall/minds/blinds (BL MS 43720, fo.17a)

The quality of revision is evident in the *b*-pararhyme, guns/orisons, allowing the unstressed full-rhyme cattle/rattle to sound freely. Owen may have been prompted by Hamlet, who in Q2 pairs "awry" and "orizons" ending "To be, or not to be" (F has "away"), but the rhyme is utterly his own, trenchantly counter-semantic yet wrenched toward appalling semanticism, monstrous volleys over massed corpses. The brief appearance in l. 5 of "asphodels" is unexpected, and the third draft—a nearly fair-copy cancelled by a diagonal stroke—is very close to the fourth save in l. 5:

No chants for them, nor wreaths, nor asphodels (3rd draft)

No music for all their no nor
 mockeries for them; ~~from~~ prayers ~~of~~ bells;
 now (4th draft, omitting two braces)

Clearly the line gave trouble, but in the final version ("No mockeries now for them; no prayers or bells;"), with the dactyl "mockeries" interfering at the beginning and "prayers" compressed to a monosyllable, rhythm is much stronger than in the third draft, where only the amphimacer "asphodels" resists over-regularity. The simplicity of bells/shells also offsets the rather less simple choirs/shires better than the

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counter-semantic asphodels/shells, and the octave as a whole becomes as bleakly flowerless as the battlefields in Owen's mind's eye.

In the sestet conversely, though the adjective for "minds" (l. 13) gave trouble (becoming "patient" only in fourth draft), "flowers", "tenderness", "minds" themselves, and all of l. 14 ("And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds") were achieved in first draft. Most of ll. 9–12 was also there, and all but a few words finalised in second draft—as one might expect from the sestet's greater tranquillity, elegiac rather than angry tone, and memorial sentiment. This odd reversal, calm sestet waiting on effortfully wrought octave, registers circumstances of the poem's composition in hospital, and must be deferred to 'Biography' (p. 326).

Yet why did Owen want rhyme at all? His partly paradoxical choice of sonnet-form (p. 18), once made, more-or-less obligated him to rhyme—yet more distorted models were available to him, and in first draft the 14 lines were far from Petrarchan, reaching full-rhyme only in the couplet. For readers today applying formality to the charnel-house of the trenches seems bizarre, but Owen's poetic preferences weren't unusual among the poets of the First and Second World Wars (as anthologies show), and if partly a matter of his generation and the canonical poetry he knew, there is throughout his work a sense of form expressing a desire for order that trench-life made impossible in reality. As an expression of order, rhyme is part of that desire, and here, in its insistent equations of guns with orisons, shells with bells, eyes with goodbyes, all with pall, and minds with blinds, it poses (against the supposed order of military explanations and patriotic ignorance) an alternative interpretation of mass-slaughter that has better withstood the tests of time than less highly-wrought protest.

3. 'Sestina' (pp. 69–70)

Despite Swinburne's rhyming sestinas the form's *donné* (given basis) is substituting repetition for rhyme, and audible full- or half-rhymes are liable to disrupt the prescribed autorhyme. But cycling brings each autorhymed word in turn into proximity across a stanza-break and otherwise keeps them at least 3 and usually 6–8 lines apart, which can over-isolate. Bishop controls this with delicate consonance supporting each end-word in every line:

September rain falls on the house.
In the failing light, the old grandmother
sits in the kitchen with the child

Chapter Glossary

accelerated : of rhyme, occurring relatively more proximately than others in a given poem ; thus ll. 3–4 of limericks produce metrically accelerated rhyme, and couplets are accelerated by comparison with cross- or arch-rhyme. The opposite is delayed rhyme.

alliteration : the repeated use of the same consonant/s in two or more proximate words.

arch-rhyme : mirror symmetry, as *abba*.

assonance : the repeated use of the same vowel/s in two or more proximate words.

autorhyme : a word rhymed with itself (my coinage) ; sometimes called 'null' rhyme.

broken rhyme : a word split between lines to facilitate a rhyme, as 'rent'/'vent'// ricle'.

chain-rhyme : systematic carrying-over from one stanza or component unit of form to the next of one or more rhyme-sounds, as in *terza rima* and Spenserian sonnets.

counter-semantic rhyme : between words with opposite or antagonistic meanings, as 'tall/small' or 'fear/leer'.

cross-rhyme : alternating double-rhymes, as *abab*.

delayed : of rhyme, occurring relatively more distantly than others in a given poem ; thus the cross-rhymes of Shakespearian sonnets are delayed by comparison with the couplet. The opposite is accelerated rhyme.

embedded rhyme : between a word and part of another word, as 'pit/hospitality'.

end-rhyme : between words ending lines.

eye-rhyme : (or *printers' rhyme*) between words which, having endings spelt identically, look as if they rhyme, but are not so pronounced, as 'though/rough'.

free rhyme : deployed without specific interlinear pattern ; free end-rhyme is also sometimes called 'occasional' or 'random' rhyme.

full-rhyme : (or *perfect rhyme*) between words whose last stressed vowel and all following sounds are identical.

half-rhyme : (or *near* or *slant rhyme*) between words whose last stressed vowel or all following sounds are identical, but not both ; includes vowel- and pararhyme.

homographs : words with different meanings spelt identically.

homophones : words with different meanings pronounced identically.

imperfect rhyme : all kinds other than *rime riche* and full-rhyme.

initial : of rhyme, between words beginning lines.

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internal rhyme : within a line, between two medial or a medial and the end-word, or between medial + medial or medial + end-words in different lines ; includes leonine rhyme.

leonine rhyme : between the word preceding the cæsura and the end-word of the same line.

medial : of rhyme, between medial words in successive lines.

monorhyme : when all lines rhyme, as *aaaa*.

mosaic rhyme : between a word and phrase, or between phrases.

pararhyme : between words whose last stressed vowels differ but following sounds are identical.

rhyme : the coincidence of sounds.

rhyme-scheme : an alphabetic method of notating rhyme-pattern in a stanza or poem ; line-lengths may be indicated, by placing the number of beats after the letter denoting the line.

rime riche : (or *identical rhyme*) between words whose sounds before and after the last stressed vowel are identical, as rhyming homophones.

semantic rhyme : between words with related or cognate meanings, as 'jeer/sneer' or 'love/give'.

single-rhymed : of a quatrain or other short unit of form, having only one pair of rhyming lines, (as *abcb* or *abac*) ; the pattern of non-rhyming lines thereby created.

spelling rhymes : between words deliberately (and usually comically) misspelt or abbreviated to create the rhyme, as 'hisses/Mrs' or 'devilry/S.O.B'.

stressed : of endings, with one or more stressed hypermetrical beats ; of rhymes, with the stressed vowel in the last beat.

thematic : of rhyme, puns etc., between or involving words whose meanings are engaged to the major theme/s of the work.

unstressed : of endings, with one or more unstressed hypermetrical beats ; of rhymes, with one or more unstressed beats following the last stressed vowel.

vowel-rhyme : between words whose last stressed vowels are identical but following sounds differ.

wrenched monorhyme : between unstressed participle endings (my coinage).