Some Uses of Rhyme in English Poetry

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1

Relatively fewer rhymes in are available in the English language than in, for instance, Italian or French. The nouns, adjectives and verbs in those other languages often have grammatical endings which provide rhyming last syllables. Here are some examples in French:

"préparé", *"dévasté"*, *"supprimé"*, *"habitué"* …
("prepared" "devastated" "suppressed" "habituated")

– and in Italian:

"fantasìa", *"pasticcerìa"*, *"allegrìa"* …
("fantasy" "pastry shop", "cheerfulness").

In this set of lectures I will have a good time reciting some poems and jingles, and will comment on them all. I hope you'll enjoy it and that it will give you a sharper perception of (and a richer feeling for) how rhyme works in English-language verse.

Having said that, I suddenly recall a true (I believe) story which a famous poet, Robert Frost, told in a guest lecture I heard at Harvard College in 1955.
He said that the College had, once upon a time, hired him to teach a course on 'reading poetry', and he had done it, and for the final exam he had asked each student to write (in a bluebook) an essay on the topic of 'What I Have Learned in This Course'. One student had written, "Not a dam thing" and handed in the bluebook. Frost told us: "I wanted to give him a 'B', but he misspelt 'damn', I had to give him a 'C'."

OK, let’s start with a Romantic poem with brilliantly resonant rhymes. I have been told, by people who have studied the details more than I have, that this poem was written under the influence of opium. The poet had literally dreamt it (after taking opium before he went to sleep) and then had woken up, and was writing it down from his memory of the dream, when a friend of his who was also a professional poet came into the room and deliberately interrupted him (because he disapproved of opium, or was jealous, or something) and so the poem we have is a fragment.

More than 100 years later, a devoted and diligent scholar put together a list of all the books that the poet had owned or might otherwise have read, and showed which stories and ideas from which books were to be found in this wonderful poem. The most important finding was the historical story of how

Marco Polo (1254-1324), an Italian merchant, adventurer and writer (in French), visited *ca*.1275 a place in China which he called “Xanadu”. On the basis of his account of it, a British writer published in 1613 the following paragraph: “In Xandu did Cublai Can build a stately palace, encompassing sixteen miles of plain ground with a wall, wherein are fertile meadows, pleasant springs, delightful streams, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the midst thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure, which may be moved from place to place.”

Excerpts from
"**Kubla Khan; or,**
A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment"
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1797)

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea....

A savage place! – as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover! …

(N.B. In British pronunciation when this poem was written, ”enchanted” rhymed more closely with “haunted” than it does in American pronunciation nowadays.)

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

(N.B.: In reciting this, don't let "war" sound like "wore". Instead, open your mouth more, so that "war" rhymes a bit better with "far" – and stretch out the vowel-sounds in both of those words.)

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!

(N.B.: Let your voice grow louder in these last two lines, so that you're virtually shouting by the time you get to "caves of ice!". And then say the next two lines softly and, after that, let your voice build up until you get to the final four lines of the poem.)

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, ‘Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.’

(N.B.: Pause momentarily before reciting these last four lines, and then recite the first two of those four lines in a somewhat deliberate way, as if they were a magic spell.)

Now let’s hear, for comparison, a poem in which the rhymes came, not from an opium-inspired dream, but – obviously – from a rhyming-dictionary. Do you know what that is? It’s a kind of dictionary where, when you look up a word in it, you don’t get a definition, you get a list of words that rhyme with it. For instance, if you look up “lumber”, you get “encumber, number, slumber”. (“Slumber” is a synonym for “sleep”.)

The author of this poem was maybe the best poet in the USA at the time he wrote it. But… well, let's see how good the poem is. It's entitled "A Psalm of Life". The 'Book of Psalms' in the Bible is a collection of (translations of) poems that were originally sung; and, Christian monks and nuns sing those psalms in their worship.

In the first line of this poem, the word “number” is used to mean music. There’s a fancy name (I forget what it is) for that kind of rhetorical device: you refer to something by naming something else that is associated somehow with it. Number is associated with music because musical rhythms and ‘intervals’ (i.e. the differences in pitch between the notes) can be analysed in terms of numerical ratios. (For instance, the ratio between the sound-wave frequencies of a *SA* and the *PA* five notes above it in the scale is 2:3. Between *SA* and *GA* it’s 4:5. And so on.)

"**A Psalm of Life**"

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1838)

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
    Life is but an empty dream!—
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
    And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each tomorrow
Find us farther than today.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

(Not much regard for cows *there*!)

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

(He did, with that last line, contribute a famous phrase to the language.)

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

Here are the first two lines of a hymn which we had to sing every week in my grade-school (for boys):

Rise up, O men of God!

Tread where His feet have trod!

It is a bit of a problem for religious poetry that the language doesn't have a good rhyme for "God". But, there was once a man whose name rhymed with that word and he wrote an epitaph for himself (an epitaph is a short poem about someone who has just died) which I consider quite beautiful because it makes a good joke *and* it means practically the same as the Christian prayer to God to "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us" and the Muslim "Rahman, Rahim".

The epitaph is on an early-19th-century tombstone in Pennsylvania:

Here lie I, Martin Elginbrod.
Have mercy on my soul, O God,
As I would do if I were God
And You were Martin Elginbrod.

(What if his name hadn't rhymed with "God" and hadn't had the right rhythm in its syllables? "Here lie I, Mark Lindley. / Have mercy on my soul, O God, / As I would do if I were God / And You were Mark Lindley." – No, it doesn't work.)

Here is couplet with a clever rhyme – too clever, in my opinion – from a play in verse (*Murder in the Cathedral*) written by T. S. Eliot in 1935:

> …And this, O Lord, is the greatest treason:
> To do the right thing for the wrong reason.

It’s a powerful little bit of poetry – rhyming “reason” with “treason”, and evoking resonantly the Lord, and with its rhythmically sharp of use of the words, “right” and “wrong”. But really, wouldn’t it be, after all, worse to do a terrible thing for an evil reason than to be impelled by mixed motives to do a good thing? I feel like saying to T.S. Eliot, “Be sensible!” (And in fact he wasn’t very sensible in politics: he liked Fascism.)

2

The simplest kind of rhyme-scheme is that of pairs of lines: *aabbccdd…* (as in the following excerpts from an impatient love-poem written in 1660):

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day….
My vegetable love would grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot drawing near….
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now, however, let's hear a poem in which the rhyme-scheme helps give structure to a poem with several four-line stanzas. The scheme is *aaba bbcb ccdc* etc. The third line of each stanza introduces what will be the main rhyme in the *next* stanza – and we are thus constantly 'led on'. It's a great trick.

But what about the last stanza? Will its third line end with a word for which we don't hear a rhyme? That would be a defect (in a poem in which *all* the other lines are somehow rhymed), wouldn't it? Let's see how the poet has solved the problem in this case.

The supposed narrator is traveling on a snow-covered road or path, in a sled drawn by a horse:

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

by Robert Frost (1922)

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

The darkest evening of the year in the Northern Hemisphere is on December 22nd, the day of the winter solstice. Maybe the narrator is delivering some Christmas presents.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

Here the word “downy” doesn’t mean that the snowflakes are falling down from the sky; it means, instead, that they are as soft as the very softest feathers. (Such feathers are called “down”, and are put in the most luxurious pillows.)

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

“Stopping by Woods on a Cruel Evening”

as if by Donald Trump

Whose woods these are I think I know.
They're mine to take; just sue the shmo.
And I have promises to break,
And lies to tweet when I awake.

(Another poem by Robert Frost)

Mrs. Someone's been to Asia.
What she brought back would amaze ye.
Arguments too stale to mention
'Gainst American invention –
Most of all the mass production
Destined to prove our destruction.
What are telephones, skyscrapers,
Safety razors, Sunday papers
But the silliest evasion
Of the truths we owe an Asian?

So much for Gandhi! Frost was enamoured of capitalism. (I wonder how he might feel about it now that it is destroying relentlessly the capacity of Planet Earth to sustain Humankind.)

But of course not all poems are about politics; lots of them are, for instance, about falling in love. Here is one with beautifully sharp rhymes between single-syllable words. (The poet who wrote it would never have consulted a rhyming dictionary. I know a little about her; it’s not the kind of thing she would have done.)

"**A Very Short Song**"
by Dorothy Parker (1930s)

Once, when I was young and true,
Someone left me sad –
Broke my brittle heart in two.
And that is very bad.

Love is for unlucky folk,
Love is but a curse.
Once there was a heart I broke
And that, I think, is worse.

Her most famous poem (even shorter):

Men seldom make passes
At girls who wear glasses.

(A young librarian – female of the species – commented on this poem, in a letter to a newspaper, “It made me laugh so hard my glasses fell off.”)

Here is an equally short and successful poem, written in New York by a man (Ogden Nash) in 1931:

Candy is dandy,

But liquor is quicker.

(That’s how it was for middle-class folks in New York City in the 1930s. But times change, and some of politics is about that, and also some poems.)

(Here, by the way, is a translation of a short and sharp Turkish poem written soon after Turkey became a modern republic.)

All the things we did for this country of ours!

Some of us died.

Some us gave speeches.

The next poem benefits nicely from a slightly tricky rhyme-scheme: *abacbc*. The trick is that the rhyme for the second line does come, but later than expected.

Another trick is that while the poet has used the word "bad" to mean 'morally bad', the word "good" is used in such a way that it takes us a moment figure out whether it means 'morally good' or 'good *at something*', i.e. 'skillful'.

(Meanwhile, "base words" means 'low-class, vulgar ways of saying evil things'.)

A short private poem by W.H. Auden, maybe written in the 1930s:

Base words are clearly base,
And can, as such, be clearly understood,
But noble platitudes – ah, there's a case
Where careful scrutiny is needed
To tell the orator who's really good
From one who's bad but has succeeded.

A shorter private poem by W.H. Auden:

Who can cure the Nation's ill?
A leader with a selfless will.
How to get that leader of yours?
By a process of natural selection, of course.

(The first two lines recall implicitly the lesson Gandhi took from the *Gita*, while

the last two lines make fun of social Darwinism, and the bad rhyme is part of the joke:

Who can cure the Nation's ill?
A leader with a selfless will.
How to get that leader of yours?
By a process of natural selection, of course.

I have one more serious poem to recite in this lecture. But first let's have a few silly (and yet perfectly flawless) limericks and clerihews. (I trust you know what a limerick is. A clerihew is a four-line poem in which the first line is someone's name, the second line is short and rhymes with it, and the other two lines rhyme with each other and say something witty about the person.

Two anonymous limericks:

There was an old man from Peru
Who dreamt he was eating his shoe.
He awoke in a fright
In the midst of the night
And found it was perfectly true.

Wonderful rhymes!

A limerick by Bertrand Russell
(*who was a good-hearted atheist*):

There was a man from Shanghai
Who was exceedingly shy.
When undressing at night,
He would turn out the light,
For fear of the All-Seeing Eye.

(*A limerick polished by me*:)

A *caballero* from Spain
Could never go out in the rain.
He had lent his umbrella
To Queen Isabella,
Who never returned it again.

Two clerihews, one by Auden and one by a philosophy professor at Oxford in the 1950s:

Dante ← He was a superbly great Italian epic-religious poet.
Was *enchanté* His muse was a chaste lady named Beatrice.
When Beatrice said, in a voice that was peachy,
"*Noi siamo amici*." ← This is Italian for "We are friends."

Willard van Orman Quine ← He was a Harvard professor
Is just fine. allegedly super-sharp at logic,
All we want is to be left alone but he wasn't really quite as
To muddle through on our own. good at it as he was
supposed to be.

The last poem to be heard in this lecture was written in 1804 by the same poet, William Blake, who wrote “Tyger, tyger, burning bright / In the forest of the night…” (which I think you may know already).

It’s the same length – 16 lines, in four 4-line stanzas – as Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”. But in most of the stanzas, only the even-numbered lines rhyme.

In the third stanza, where the rhyme-scheme is *abab*, the poet goes beserk, calling implicitly on the Sun to send him its fire so he can start here on Earth a revolution against the factory-system. He will fight by using a spear and a bow and arrow with the arrows made of “desire” and the bow made of red-hot money.

The poem is religious as well as political. It uses the word “Jerusalem” – and that’s the title of the poem – to mean what Gandhi meant by ‘Ram-Raj’, i.e. God’s ideal kingdom realized here on Earth. And, it refers implicitly to a legend that Jesus (“the holy Lamb of God”) had visited England.

The factories Blake was objecting to were historically the first ever with machines powered by fossil fuel (coal). The engines were inefficient in the technical sense that they exuded vast amounts of heat and smoke in addition to running the machines. The factories were hell-holes inside and spewed smoke into the sky. I think you can guess what they produced: cotton cloth. (The thread came from the USA back in those days; later it came from India.)

“**Jerusalem**”
by William Blake (1804)

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England’s mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England’s pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold,
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my Spear! O clouds, unfold:
Bring me my Chariot of Fire!

(Here we have the most worn-out rhyme in the whole language ("Roses are red, violets are blue; / I'm on *fire* / With hot de*sire* / For you"), but it's *not* in a love-poem, and so the rhyme works in a different way. In the last line of the poem we'll see how that crazy poet in effect predicted, back in 1804, not only the violent agitation of the late 19th and 20th centuries against industrial capitalism, but also the 21st century's pro-Ecology cause.)

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.

This poem was set to music about a hundred years ago, and most Brits would like *that* song to be the national anthem instead of “God Save the Queen”. They love to sing it even though no one ever tells them it’s their duty to do so. Here’s a video of it:

[Here we see and hear the video.]

3

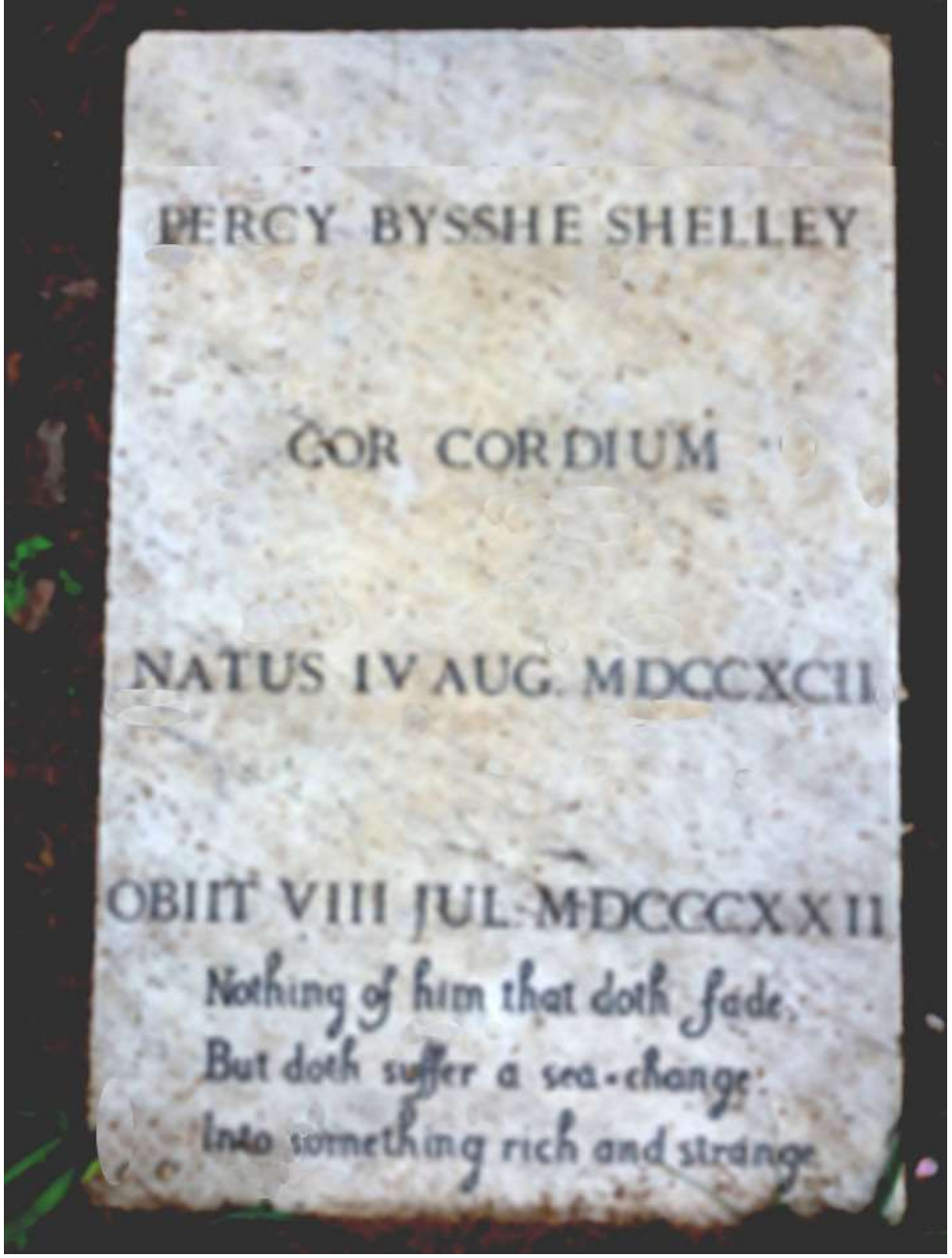
Here is a lyrical poem by Shakespeare
(from his last play, *The Tempest*):

Full fathom five thy father lies.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Of his bones are coral made.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell. (*Here some kind of bell rings offstage*)
Hark! Now I hear them: ding-dong bell.

The next poem will be a famous sonnet, entitled "Ozymandias", by Percy Bysshe Shelley, an atheist, vegetarian, politically radical poet whose advocacy of nonviolent political resistance influenced Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi.

(In 1822, Shelley drowned (at the age of 29) when a poorly designed sailboat was caught in a sudden storm off the coast of Italy. On the following page is a picture of his tombstone in Rome.)


PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
COR CORDIUM
NATUS IV AUG. MDCCXCII
OBIIT VIII JUL. MDCCCXXII
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange

At the end of Blake's poem we heard the word "land" rhymed with "hand". ("Nor shall my sword rest in my hand / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant land"). In this sonnet by Shelley, it's rhymed with "sand", "command" and "stand" as well as "hand".

I met a traveler from an antique land,
Who said: “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
‘My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

On the next page is an American sonnet about the Statue of Liberty in the New York City harbour between Manhattan (which is an island) and Brooklyn (another part of the great city, located on part of 'Long Island'. Soaring over the water between Manhattan and Brooklyn is the famous 'Brooklyn Bridge' (historically the first big steel-cable bridge). The sonnet begins with a reference to the fact that in ancient Greece, there was a legend about an imaginary giant soldier, Hercules, who could stand with one foot on one island and the other foot on another. In the third line of the poem there's a reference to the fact that when you sail into the New York harbour, you're sailing west. The poem was written shortly *before* the Statue of Liberty (which was made, in France, of steel, not stone) was brought across the ocean and put up on a separate little island between Manhattan and Brooklyn. The statue is of a woman holding a torch; the poet mentions that this 'torch' is actually made of electricity, not fire.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

It’s a cleverly wrought poem, full of information about New York and the steel statue etc., but most of it is hard going; it takes wing only in the last 4½ lines (“Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free…”). Those lines are famous in American culture and are often cited on one side of the current political debate.

On the next page is a sonnet published in 1922 by Edna St Vincent Millay, a notably craftsmanly and sharp-minded poet who, according to her biographer (Nancy Milford), became, in US cities in the 1920s, “the herald of the ‘New Woman’”. She wrote more than 140 sonnets. The rhymes seem to me clever but seldom resonant with meaning.

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favorite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And vows were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far, —
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

(The last line implies clearly that they were using some kind of contraceptive(s) and weren't contemplating getting married and raising a family. Did you notice the poor rhyme between "lived" and "contrived"? The words look like they ought to rhyme, but they don't really.)

On the next two pages is a poem by Edmund Waller, published in 1645:

Go, lovely rose!
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that’s young,
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst thou sprung
In deserts, where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die! that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee;
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!

(That poem by Waller was soon to music by a composer named Henry Lawes.)

On the next three pages is a poem written in 1919 by an American poet, Ezra Pound. In it he spoke as if to a person but ostensibly to a book which he himself had just published, and he called the book “dumb-born”, partly because it consisted of poems (without any song-melodies) and partly because it was published in a small edition which he expected hardly anyone to read.

Go, dumb-born book,
Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:
Hadst thou [i.e. the book] but song
As thou hast subjects known,
Then were there cause in thee that should condone
Even my faults that heavy upon me lie,
And build her glories their longevity.

There's a tradition in English poetry that it's OK to 'rhyme' words ending with "-ty" as if it were pronounced in a very old-fashioned way when it did rhyme with the personal pronouns, "I" and "my". You may recall that William Blake did it in the fourth line of "Tyger Tyger Burning Bright": "What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" And we have seen the somewhat different but analogous licence taken in Edna St Vincent Millay's sonnet where she rhymed "lived" with "contrived"?

Tell her that sheds
Such treasure in the air,
Recking naught else but that her graces give
Life to the moment,
I would bid them live
As roses might, in magic amber laid,
Red overwrought with orange and all made
One substance and one colour
Braving time.

(I don't know what he was getting at by saying, in this part of the poem, that the lady wasn't 'singing out' the song, but
he and she presumably did.)

Tell her that goes
With song upon her lips
But sings not out the song, nor knows
The maker of it, some other mouth,
May be as fair as hers,
Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone.

(i.e. she didn't know about Lawes)

That poem has some rhymes here and there – enough to give us a feeling that we're hearing some – but the poet didn't discipline himself about it. There's no discernible rhyme-scheme and there are quite a few lines that don't rhyme. Hello freedom!

Here are two poems by Sarojini Naidu:

My proud soul shall be unforgiven
For a passionate sin it shall ne’er repent,
And I shall be doomed, O Love, and driven
And hurled from Heaven’s high battlement
Down through the deep ages, alone, unfrightened,
Flung like a pebble through burning space;
But the speed of my fall shall be sweet, and brightened
By the memoried joy of your radiant face.

As a university student, I lived in a large ‘house’ (i.e. a residence with a dining hall, an interesting library, etc.) named after an elder cousin of T. S. Eliot (i.e. Charles William Eliot, who had served for forty years as president of the university; the residence is called ‘Eliot House’) and this led to my having, in 1957, an opportunity to chat with T. S. Eliot about some advantages and disadvantages of the English language for poetry. He said that two advantages were the rich vocabulary (of English) and a certain freedom in the syntax, for example in regard to word-order. The freedom is greater in the poetry than in the prose. But I think Sarojini Naidu overstrained it in the first two lines of the following poem – where I like, however, the basic metaphor:

O Fate, between the grinding stones of pain
Though you have crushed my life like broken grain,
Lo! I will leaven it with my tears, and knead
The bread of Hope to comfort and to feed
The myriad hearts for whom no harvests flow
Save bitter herbs of woe.

The word “myriad” means “various different”. I think the poem would be better if that word were deleted from the next-to-last line. See what you think:

O Fate, between the grinding stones of pain
Though you have crushed my life like broken grain,
Lo! I will leaven it with my tears, and knead
The bread of Hope to comfort and to feed
The hearts for whom no harvests flow
Save bitter herbs of woe.

Here is a shocking thought for you to consider: Since Sarojini is dead, the poem is *ours* now, no longer hers; so, it would be OK for us to make of it what we wish (as long as we don't misrepresent the result as being exactly what she wrote). That is how folk-songs become so beautifully polished….

Sometimes I think that “Full fathom five” could be improved upon by switching the second and third lines,

i.e. changing from:

Full fathom five thy father lies.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Of his bones are coral made.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

to:

Full fathom five thy father lies.
Of his bones are coral made.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

– for the sake of a more varied rhyme scheme (*ababcc* rather than *aabbcc*).

But maybe the *aabbcc* rhyme-scheme is better after all, because the clear and simple pattern set by *aabb* causes us implicitly to wonder what will be the rhyme for the word “change” in “sea-change”. See what you think:

Full fathom five thy father lies.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Of his bones are coral made.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange….

On the next two pages is a poem about baseball (written in 1908) the second part of which is extremely popular in the USA. (The words “sou” and “beau” are French words which are sometimes borrowed in English. A sou is a tiny unit of money (like an anna); a beau is a boyfriend. (The word in French is masculine form of the adjective meaning ‘beautiful’; the feminine form is “belle”. “Cracker Jacks” are a kind of candy – popcorn coated with sticky sugar. Cracker Jacks used to be (and peanuts and hot-dogs still are) on sale throughout the ball-game and throughout the stadium in professional baseball parks.

Katie Casey was baseball mad,
Had the fever and had it bad.
Just to root for the home-town crew,
Ev'ry sou Katie blew.
On a Saturday her young beau
Called to see if she'd like to go
To see a show, but Miss Kate said "No,
I'll tell you what you can do:

Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out with the crowd;
Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack,
I don't care if I never get back.
Let me root, root, root for the home team,
If they don't win, it's a shame.
For it's one, two, three strikes, “You're out!”,
At the old ball game.”