Rhyme

Rhyme and Inspiration

Some rhyme with ease — others find a difficulty. The coming of the rhyme is a part of the inspiration just like the coming of the form of the language. The rhyme often comes of itself and brings the language and connection of ideas with it. For all these things are quite ready behind somewhere and it is only a matter of reception and transmission — it is the physical mind and brain that make the difficulty. 2 February 1934

Imperfect Rhymes

These [“life” and “cliff”, “smile” and “will”] are called in English imperfect rhymes and can be freely but not too freely used. Only you have to understand the approximations and kinships of vowel sounds in English, otherwise you will produce illegitimate children like “splendour” and “wonder” which is not a rhyme but an assonance. 19 December 1935

It is no use applying a Bengali ear to English rhythms any more than a French ear to English or an English ear to French metres. The Frenchman may object to English blank verse because his own ear misses the rhyme or the Englishman to the French Alexandrine because he finds it rhetorical and monotonous. Irrelevant objections both. Imperfect rhymes are regarded in English metre as a source of charm in the rhythmic field bringing in possibilities of delicate variation in the constant clang of exact rhymes. 21 November 1935
“Lure” and “more” are rhymes? It is enough to make the English prosodists of the past turn in their graves or if they are in heaven to make their imaginative hair angelic or archangelic stand up erect on their beatified heads. I am aware that modernist poets rhyme anything with everything. They would not shudder even in rhyming “hand” with “fiend” or “heat” with “bit” or “kid”, — probably they would do it with a wicked leer of triumph. But all the same crime is crime even if it becomes fashionable.

21 May 1937

I never heard of two pronunciations of “lure” and “pure” one of which approximates to “lore” and “pore” — of course they may exist in some dialect, but anything that would make “pure” rhyme with “more” seems to be horribly impure and “lure” rhyming with “gore” does not lure me at all. I am aware of Arjava’s rhyming of “bore” and “law” etc., — but that is quite new as a permissible imperfect rhyme — “dawn” and “morn” were in my time held up as a vulgarism, the type of all that is damnable. As for “decrease” and “earthiness” that is quite a different matter from “lure” and “more”; the former are long and short of the same vowel sounds, long e sound and short e sound, the latter are two quite different vowel sounds. If you can rhyme a pure long u sound with a pure long o sound, there is no reason why you should not rhyme Cockney fashion “day” with “high”, “paid” with “wide”, and by a little extension why not “jade” with “solitude”. Finally we can come to the rhyming of any word with any word provided there is the same or a similar consonant at the end. Modernism admits imperfect — very imperfect rhymes, but that is really a different principle and cannot be extended to blank verse, mongrelising all similar ending sounds.

22 May 1937