

A STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY  
PRONUNCIATION BASED ON  
ANALYSIS OF POPE'S  
RHYMES

By

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## PREFACE

This study is an outgrowth of discussions in Dr. Gordon Browning's course in the history of the English language. It uses the rhymes of Alexander Pope to determine how far and in what direction our pronunciation has changed since the eighteenth century.

Special indebtedness is acknowledged to Drs. Gordon Browning and Jane-Marie Luecke, both of whom served as thesis directors. The study began under the direction of Dr. Browning; Dr. Luecke kindly assumed direction for the final work when Dr. Browning left Oklahoma State University. I am also grateful to Drs. Lloyd Douglas and Samuel H. Woods, Jr. for serving on my thesis committee.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND METHOD

It is difficult for the reader of eighteenth or nineteenth century literature to realize that although words were usually spelled then as we spell them today, there are often differences in pronunciation. There is an automatic tendency for most people to equate a visible word with an audible one. For this reason, and because the changes are more dramatic, most scholars focus on differences in vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation between the Middle English of Chaucer or the Early Modern English of Shakespeare and the Modern English of the twentieth century. There has been little study of the extent of change since the early eighteenth century. Because differences in language do not make Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Johnson unintelligible to the modern reader, these differences are often neglected.

Rhymes in poetry are a major means of determining pronunciation; therefore, Alexander Pope, as a notable writer of the eighteenth century, and one who specialized in the heroic couplet, is often cited in books on the history of the language as providing evidence of some changes. Such works commonly include the obey-tea rhyme in "The Rape of the Lock," where tea has changed from  $\overline{[te]}$  to  $\overline{[ti]}$ , and

the join-nine rhyme in the same poem, where the diphthong in join has changed from [ai] to [oi]. These rhymes, which seem obviously inaccurate to us today, are evidences of changes in pronunciation. While these particular rhyme-pairs are often presented, I have found no comprehensive study of eighteenth century pronunciation based on Pope's rhymes.

The eighteenth century lends itself particularly well to the study of pronunciation through rhymes, since the age was concerned with accuracy and care in versification. The laws governing the use of the heroic, or Augustan, couplet are presented by Geoffrey Tillotson:

The ten feet of the couplet were to be kept as closely iambic as possible, the metrical surprises accordingly being of fine gradation. The rimes were to fall on monosyllabic words which therefore received, and could bear to receive, the full terminal accent of the line. . . . The monosyllabic rime-word, if possible, should have a long vowel, and it was best if one of the two rime-words of the couplet were a verb. Within the couplet the poet worked out as many contrasts and parallels as he could, providing the maximum number of internal geometrical relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Pope worked well within this rigid framework. Gwynn discusses the near-perfection of the workmanship of Pope's poetry.<sup>2</sup> Gosse, in a comparison of Pope with Dryden, remarks on Pope's excelling in the heroic couplet.<sup>3</sup> Sampson, who speaks of Pope's poetry as the "most polished verse we know,"<sup>4</sup> defines his treatment of the couplet: ". . . the lines are strictly iambic--there are no trisyllabic feet and very few inversions; the rhymes fall preferably on

monosyllabic words . . . ; one of the rhyming words is, where possible, a verb, so that there is a sense-ending as well as a sound-ending."<sup>5</sup>

The heroic couplet was so standard in the eighteenth century that it is defined by its principal practitioners only by implication in comparison with other verse forms. The discussion of relative advantages of rhymed or blank verse was a major topic in Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesy, where Neander observes that blank verse is simply measured prose, and that "measure alone, in any modern language, does not constitute verse . . ." <sup>6</sup> He further observes that no one "is tied in modern poesy to observe any farther rule in the feet of his verse, but that they be dissyllables; . . . only he is obliged to rhyme."<sup>7</sup> The necessity of good rhyme was understood, since

[when modern] languages were brought in, [there was] . . . a new way of poesy . . . This new way consisted in measure or number of feet, and rhyme; the sweetness of rhyme, and observation of accent, supplying the place of quantity.<sup>8</sup>

Johnson pointed out that

the [metrical] musick of the English heroic line strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together; this co-operation can be only obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another as a distinct system of sounds, and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme . . . Poetry may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please; nor can rhyme ever be spared but where the subject is able to support itself . . .<sup>9</sup>

Both Dryden and Johnson attack the bad rhymes of poets whose work offends them. Dryden shows a concern for rhyme

when he dismisses Elkanah Settle as "an animal of a most deplored understanding, without reading and conversation . . . His style is boisterous and roughhewn; his rhymes incorrigibly lewd, and his numbers perpetually harsh and ill-sounding . . ." <sup>10</sup> In a letter to Walsh, commenting on Walsh's own lines, "Blend 'em together, Fate, ease both their pain/ And of two wretches make one happy man," Dryden criticizes the rhyming of pain and man: "An half rhyme is not always a fault; but in the close of any paper of verses, tis to be avoyded." <sup>11</sup> Included in Johnson's discussion of the "abatements" of Waller's excellence of versification is the observation that "his rhymes are sometimes weak words." <sup>12</sup> Some of Prior's rhymes are also condemned as being disproportioned, without sufficient consonance. <sup>13</sup> Watts is said to write "too often without regular measure . . . ; the rhymes are not always sufficiently correspondent." <sup>14</sup> In a discussion of Akenside's odes, Johnson finds "the rhymes dissonant or unskilfully disposed, too distant from each other or arranged with too little regard to established use . . ." <sup>15</sup>

Pope himself apparently never mentioned the subject of accurate rhyming, although he is known to have been concerned with "correctness," <sup>16</sup> which would probably include accuracy of rhyme. Contemporaries who offered adverse criticism usually attacked Pope's subject matter or the nearness of his translations to the originals. The mechanics, if referred to at all, are generally treated rather briefly by both



friendly and opposing critics. "Numbers" and "versification" are the terms most often used. "Numbers" is defined as "verses; poetry" in Johnson's dictionary, but the OED restricts the meaning to metrics alone; "versification" can apply either to the metrics of a single line in isolation or to both the meter and the rhyme. As is evident from his comments on Cowley, Denham, Milton, and Waller, for example, as Johnson used the term in his discussions of the poets, it included rhyme. Swift does make a direct reference to over-frequent and inaccurate rhymes in Pope's poetry: "Yet I am angry at some bad Rhymes and Triplets, and pray in your next do not let me have so many unjustifiable Rhymes to war and gods."<sup>17</sup> He was commenting on Pope's translation of the first four books of The Iliad. Considering Johnson's obvious interest in propriety of rhyme, it is significant that his discussion of Pope's faulty rhymes apparently concerns those same words. He does not indicate specific rhymes, but refers only to Swift's criticisms:

With those rhymes which prescription had conjoined he contented himself, without regard to Swift's remonstrances, though there was no striking consonance; nor was he careful to vary his terminations or to refuse admission at a small distance to the same rhymes.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, Boswell quotes Johnson as saying, "Sir, a thousand years may elapse before there shall appear another man with the power of versification equal to that of Pope."<sup>19</sup> Also, in his Life of Pope, he states that

to attempt any further improvement of versifi-

cation [over Pope's] will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Warton preceded an attack on Pope's imitation of Chaucer in "The Temple of Fame" with the statement that "Pope has imitated this piece, with his usual elegance of diction and harmony of versification."<sup>21</sup> William Hazlitt, writing in 1819, pointed out that "Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear; . . . The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony."<sup>22</sup> It is quite possible that his criticism ignores the probability of some changes in pronunciation during the seventy-five years since Pope's death. Byron, however, writing in 1820, passes briefly over the question of versification in order to refute charges that Pope was without genius and imagination: "It is this very harmony [of versification] . . . which has raised the vulgar and atrocious cant against him:--because his versification is perfect, it is assumed that it is his only perfection . . ."<sup>23</sup> In 1858, John Conington wrote in his discussion of Pope's "correctness" that "even in his most finished pieces there may be occasionally something that more study might have mended--an ill turned thought, an inaccurate expression, a bad rhyme . . . The point is not that Pope was universally correct, but that . . . the instances of carelessness which can be quoted from his works are not sufficiently numerous or important to disturb the general impression."<sup>24</sup>

Rebecca Parkin, a modern critic, states that over the years, "as a result of the direction given to English criticism by the reforms sought in the language and content of poetry in 1798, Pope came to be commended, at best, for such qualities as his dry (and by implication, unpoetic) wit, his mechanical skill in manipulating the couplet, and the epigrammatic finish of his quotable commonplaces."<sup>25</sup> It is her own viewpoint that "Pope is greatly concerned with an exact, a nice representation of values . . . . Diction, metaphor, rhyme, and meter contribute to this precision and all the elements are carefully controlled to that end."<sup>26</sup> Jacob H. Adler, however, believes that Pope's poetry is not as precise as it is generally thought to be. He has tabulated by percentages "rimes probably inaccurate, not including identities or rimes on syllables not normally bearing a primary accent"<sup>27</sup> in a number of Pope's poems, including Spring, Windsor-Forest, Essay on Criticism, Messiah, Eloisa, Unfortunate Lady, Rape of the Lock, Essay on Man, Moral Essays I and II, Arbuthnot, First Satire of the Second Book, Augustus, Epilogue, and Dunciad. His method of identifying these inaccurate rhymes is not made clear, as he also stresses the point that it is difficult to know which rhymes are accurate and which inaccurate since pronunciation has changed. Adler points out several other varieties of carelessness in rhyme, such as identities, rhymes on unstressed syllables, and repetition of rhyme-words, which convince him that Pope's versification may not

be as accurate as it is usually considered to be. Even these modern writers who would be expected to be familiar with pronunciation changes fail to agree on the accuracy of Pope's rhymes.

Since the above evidence shows that Pope's contemporaries considered his rhymes to be basically good, I shall accept them as accurate unless evidence exists to prove their inaccuracy. It is the purpose of this paper to determine which rhymes are certainly inaccurate, eliminate them, and then trace the remaining rhymes through several poems in order to provide evidence of pronunciation changes. If the rhyme sounds are consistent through the poems, the words involved are probably rhymed as Pope pronounced them. If that pronunciation is different from today's, the extent and direction of change can be determined.

Adler's discussion of Pope's inaccuracies is itself of questionable accuracy. His use of percentage figures for inaccurate rhymes implies an accuracy improbable considering his admitted lack of knowledge of pronunciation change. In addition, he is incorrect in his reference to the portion of Swift's letter to Pope quoted on page five of this paper. While Swift writes war and gods, Adler writes love and God; he uses Sherburn's edition of Pope's correspondence, but has the wrong page number. His discussion does provide, though, some suggestions for determining accuracy of rhyme which should be valuable in providing a starting point for determination of the procedure to

be employed in this study. His "clues" for identifying inaccurate rhymes include "the fact that the offending word in what seems to us an inaccurate rime is rimed elsewhere in a way which seems to us correct; the fact that some poems . . . have more rhymes which seem inaccurate than other poems; and of course such knowledge as we have of actual pronunciation shifts . . ."28

Adler thus assumes that a single word rhymed with two or more words which do not rhyme to us must be incorrectly rhymed at least once. On the basis of this, one would have to assume that when sphere is rhymed with both fair and ear, the rhyme with one of them, probably fair, is inaccurate. I shall instead assume that such apparent inaccuracies are evidences of pronunciation changes. Instead of assuming that sphere-fair is inaccurate, I shall assume that both ear and fair had the same vowel sound as sphere unless evidence exists to the contrary. It is also possible that words which were in the process of changing in pronunciation as Pope wrote may have had the alternate pronunciations reflected in his poetry. Adler's second clue, that some poems have more apparently inaccurate rhymes than others, may be evidence of greater carelessness in some poems than in others, but may also be explained at least partially by the times when the poems were written or revised. This study will make allowance, as Adler does, for pronunciation shifts which we know have taken place since the eighteenth century.

A major difficulty in making this allowance is that

linguists today do not agree on the dates of these shifts. As Bryant points out, "It is impossible to pin down a linguistic change to a particular century, but the linguist Zachrisson is of the opinion that the tense vowel changes of English extended in the main from 1400 to 1700. Wyld agrees regarding the beginning, but would place the end somewhat later."<sup>29</sup> Bloomfield and Newmark state that

After the period of the Great Vowel Shift was over, the changes that were to take place in English phonology were few indeed. The exact dates of those that did occur are often not certain. Even the exact time of the Great Vowel Shift has not been definitely established, although we do know that it was still in progress well after the Modern Period had begun. Some of these phonological changes are early (1350-1500) and some late (1550-1700).<sup>30</sup>

There is agreement that changes in the tense vowels took place up to 1700, and possibly beyond, but there is disagreement on how far into the eighteenth century the changes could have extended. Some changes are still taking place. Cassidy mentions the British diphthongization of [i] to [ij] and the American change from [i] to [ɪ].<sup>31</sup> In addition, [e] and [o] are being diphthongized to [eɪ] and [oʊ].<sup>32</sup> Such words as soot, with the vowel sound pronounced [u], [ʊ], and [ʌ], and roof and root with both [u] and [ʊ] acceptable, are evidences of changing pronunciations today.<sup>33</sup> Changes in the lax vowels have been less carefully studied and are in addition less regular; thus it is difficult to find information on dates and extent of lax vowel shifts.

Part of this confusion or disagreement depends on the great differences always to be found in individual pronunciations. These differences depend on such things as family, social standing, education, occupation, and location. Even within a group, conservative individuals will retain old-fashioned pronunciations while others will not. This paper necessarily treats Pope's rhymes as evidence of a single person's pronunciation. Since, however, I have found no evidence that his contemporaries considered his speech odd, it can be generalized that his pronunciation reflects that of his period. His most likely pronunciations will be determined primarily on the basis of his rhymes. Chapters Two, Three, and Four of this paper will consider his rhymes. Chapter Five will consist of a summary and conclusions.

The same general procedure will be followed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. The poems considered are "January and May" (1709), "The Wife of Bath Her Prologue" (1713), "The Rape of the Lock" (1714), "The Temple of Fame" (1715), "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717), "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" (1717), "Essay on Man" (1733-34), and "The Dunciad" (1743). This group includes a major poem from the beginning, middle, and end of his career and a number of early shorter poems. The final versions of "The Rape of the Lock" and "The Dunciad" are used, as Pope revised and added to the earlier versions, but retained the couplets he particularly liked. Every rhyme-word appearing in these poems will be alphabetized by initial letter with its rhyme to

facilitate the tracing of the rhymes. The purpose of this is to make sure that none of the couplets can be overlooked later when the rhymes are traced. In the first four lines of "January and May,"

There liv'd in Lombardy, as Authors write,  
In Days of old, a wise and worthy Knight;  
Of gentle Manners, as of gen'rous Race,  
Blest with much Sense, more Riches, and some Grace.<sup>34</sup>

"write, Knight 1-2" is the first entry under W in the alphabetization; "Knight, write 1-2" is the first entry under K; "Race, Grace 3-4" and "Grace, Race 3-4" are the first entries under R and G, respectively. The line numbers are included in the alphabetical lists to allow for easy reference to the text, so the rhymes may be checked or quoted. The process is carried out for every rhyme-word in all of the poems considered. When the list is complete, any apparently inaccurate rhymes can be traced.

For example, in the sphere-fair rhyme mentioned above, all other words rhyming with sphere will be listed, as care, ear, and there. All rhymes with these words will then be added to the list, along with any additional rhymes to them. I will eliminate from consideration any rhymes that are obviously incorrect. The damn-man rhyme in "The Dunciad" will not be traced, as it is apparent from the Oxford English Dictionary's listings under damn and damme that damn was not pronounced to rhyme with man. In addition, no other seventeenth or eighteenth century poets or orthoepists with whose works I am familiar rhyme damn in this way.



When the list is complete, I shall check the vowel shifts described by Robertson and Cassidy.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the vowels involved in the Great Vowel Shift, they list the principal lax vowel shifts and the changes already mentioned that have taken place primarily during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If any seeming inaccuracies can be explained by a vowel shift described there, I shall assume that the rhyme was accurate to Pope unless I can find evidence that it was not.

Next, I shall see whether Alexander Ellis has a direct reference to any of the words in question in his study of Early English pronunciation, which traces sounds from Old English through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> There are two major difficulties involved in consulting his study; one is that there have been some pronunciation changes since he wrote, and the other that his method of phonetically describing words is involved and sometimes unclear. The extent of pronunciation change since 1869 may be guessed by his reference to Franklin's giving men, lend, name, and lane as examples of the same sound in 1768, and Ellis's comment that "this is nearly the modern practice."<sup>37</sup> It is difficult to tell how close "nearly" implies the vowels to be; in any case, I should consider the vowels quite distinctly [ɛ] and [e] today. His phonetic alphabet, palaeotype, is apparently his own invention. It includes distinctions so fine as to be beyond the scope of this paper. Also, since my pronunciation of his key-

words may differ from his, I am forced to rely on approximations of the sounds he intended. Nevertheless, his discussions of eighteenth century pronunciation are valuable. Most helpful is his pronouncing vocabulary compiled of words he found pronunciations for in "The Expert Orthographist," Dyche, Buchanan, Franklin, and Sheridan; in addition he includes a brief section of comment on rhymes of a group of eighteenth century poets, whose birth and death dates range from 1683 to 1826.

Also, I shall look up the words in question in the OED to see whether there is a note on the seventeenth or eighteenth century pronunciation of any of the words. While Pope lived most of his life during the eighteenth century, he was born in 1688, and would have had his pronunciation reasonably well established during the very earliest part of the eighteenth century. Also, since he was the only child of elderly parents living outside London, it is possible that he retained some archaisms of pronunciation. According to Ellis, Pope and his contemporaries "were greatly influenced by the pronunciation of the XVIIth century, in which some of them were born, and to which their parents all probably belonged, and hence they might be apt to consider those rhymes which would have been correct in their parents' mouths even more correct than others which they now permitted themselves."<sup>38</sup> In any case, he must have been familiar with old-fashioned pronunciations, and may have taken advantage of them occasionally for his rhymes.

If it obvious that Pope is using a rhyme justified only by tradition, I shall point that out.

Finally, I shall see whether other writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries regularly rhymed questionable words in the same way. I plan to use primarily the early works of Swift.

In order to illustrate this method of determining pronunciation and to set standards for what shall be required of a set of rhymes to establish probable accuracy, the obey-tea rhyme is here traced and examined. Every couplet containing either of these words as the rhyme-word, or a word which is rhymed with either, must be considered. Certainly it is evident that the couplet

Here Thou, Great Anna! whom three Realms obey,  
Dost sometimes Counsel take--and sometimes Tea,  
(RL III 7-8)

taken in isolation is not sufficient to establish the accuracy of the rhyme, or to determine whether the pronunciation of obey or of tea has changed if the rhyme is assumed to be accurate. The word tea is rhymed only one other time in the works considered in this paper. The same rhyme-sound, [ē], is used in

Soft yielding Minds to Water glide away,  
And sip with Nymphs, their Elemental Tea.  
(RL I 61-62)

In order that the rhyme might be traced, all rhymes of obey and away must also be found. Obey is used only four other times,

Thus doubting long what Nymph he shou'd obey,

He fix'd at last upon the youthful May.  
(JM 242-243)

We, wretched subjects tho' to lawful sway,  
In this weak queen, some fav'rite still obey.  
(EM II 149-150)

"Yet go! and thus o'er all the creatures sway,  
"Thus let the wiser make the rest obey,  
(EM III 195-196)

"One of us two must rule, and one obey,  
"And since in Man right Reason bears the Sway,  
"Let that frail Thing, weak Woman, have her way.  
(WB 192-193)

while away is used twenty-six times. It rhymes thirteen times with day, four with say, three with decay, and one time each with stay, lay, play, they, prey, and sway. To trace the rhyme one step further, one finds the rhymes with each of these words. Day, for example, is rhymed six times with ray, four times each with way and play, three times with lay, twice each with display, May, say, stray, and array, and once each with sway, gay, pay, and decay. When rhymes to all these words are found, it is evident that the rhyming vowel-sound in all of them is [ē]. Since this is the only way tea is rhymed, and the only way either of its rhymes is rhymed, it is highly probable that Pope pronounced tea [tē].

A basic assumption in this method of determining rhymes is that most words are now pronounced as they were in the eighteenth century. The tea-obey couplet, taken alone and assumed to be correctly rhymed, must involve either [tē]-[ōbi] or [tē]-[ōbe] as the rhyme-words. Until other related couplets are found, both alternatives must be consid-

ered as possible. When one adds the away-tea couplet to this, however, the probability that tea is pronounced [te] increases. An [i] vowel would make two of the three words incorrect today; an [e] would make only one different. When the twenty-nine other couplets involving away and obey are added to the first two with tea, and all of them involve [e], the possibility of an [i] pronunciation decreases still further. By the time the rhymes are traced completely, there are more than one hundred couplets, all with [e], with the one exception of

Where the gilt Chariot never marks the Way,  
Where none learn Ombre, none e'er taste Sohea!  
(RL IV 156-157)

where Sohea, given in Webster as [bohɪ], is apparently pronounced [bohe]. If one assumes that either tea or its rhymes have changed in pronunciation, he must decide whether it is more reasonable to assume that one word has changed or that more than twenty-five have changed. It is extremely improbable that all of the words involved in the rhyme-set except tea and Sohea could have changed. In addition, an [e] to [i] shift follows the Great Vowel Shift pattern described in Chapter Two of this paper. Therefore, the assumption must be that tea rather than obey has changed in the obey-tea couplet.

In this paper, no conclusions will be advanced on the basis of a single rhyme. Every rhyme combination discussed must have at least two couplets with that combination of end-sounds, preferably with the same questionable word.

Thus, while it is possible that Bohea was pronounced [b<sup>o</sup>he], it will not be discussed at length since only one couplet involves a rhyme with it. A tentative pronunciation can be advanced on the basis of the similar apparent inaccuracy of [i] and [e] in tea-away-obey, but it must be recognized as tentative. The more rhymes that can be found for each word of a seemingly inaccurate pair, the more nearly certainly it can be stated that a word has changed in pronunciation or that the rhyme was inaccurate.

There are some bad rhymes in Pope. He used the half-rhyme that Dryden complained to Walsh about: man-pain. Swift complained about war and god in Pope's translation of the first four books of Homer's Iliad. There Pope rhymes war with bear, spare, share, care, dare, car, far, and afar. God or gods rhymes with loads, road, abodes, load, rod, bestow'd, owed, and nod. In the works considered for this paper, he used most of these same rhymes for god. Of the ten different rhyme-words, four end in [-od],

Full in my view set all the bright abode,  
And make my soul quit Abelard for God.  
(EA 127-128)

The Maker saw, took pity, and bestow'd  
Woman, the last, the best reserv'd of God  
(JM 63-64)

Here, like some furious Prophet, Pindar rode,  
And seem'd to labour with th' inspiring God.  
(TF 212-213)

We nobly take the high Priori Road,  
And reason downward, till we doubt of God;  
(Dun IV 471-472)

five in [-ad],

His Feet on Sceptres and Tiara's trod,  
 And his horn'd Head bely'd the Lybian God.  
 (TF 153-154)

And now to this side, now to that they nod,  
 As verse, or prose, infuse the drowzy God.  
 (Dun II 395-396)

If Calvin feel Heav'n's blessing, or its rod,  
 This cries there is, and that, there is no God.  
 (EM IV 139-140)

Persist, by all divine in Man unaw'd,  
 But, 'Learn, ye DUNCES! not to scorn your GOD.'" <sup>1</sup>  
 (Dun III 223-224)

When the dull Ox, why now he breaks the clod,  
 Is now a victim, and now AEGYPT'S God:  
 (EM I 63-64)

and one in rod,

In the same temple, the resounding wood,  
 All vocal beings hymn'd their equal God:  
 (EM III 155-156)

Abode also appears as a rhyme in (Dun III 133-134); rode in (Dun I 323-324); road in (EM II 115-116) and (EM IV 331-332); trod in (Dun I 201-202), (EM III 147-148), and (EM III 233-234); nod in (EM I 255-256); and rod in (EM IV 247-248) and (Dun IV 283-284). In addition, gods is rhymed with abodes in (Elegy 13-14), (EM I 125-126), and (EM III 255-256) and with nodes in (Dun III 7-8), (Dun III 107-108) and (Dun IV 605-606). The three different vowel sounds in these rhymes are not cross-rhymed elsewhere in the poems. This is in contrast to the pronunciation difference in the tea-away-obey rhyme-set discussed above, where both away and obey rhyme with sway, and the next level of rhymes includes many identical words.

Throughout the remainder of this paper the criteria

demonstrated above will be followed in establishing probable accuracy of rhyme: There should be at least two rhymes of each questionable sound-pair; words on the secondary or tertiary level should be cross-rhymed. Where possible, additional evidence, such as that from linguistic studies, rhymes of other poets, or dictionaries, will be cited to help confirm any conclusions advanced on the basis of Pope's rhymes.

The chapters treating pronunciation will be arranged according to the type of change that has apparently taken place. Chapter Two will deal with pairs of words where one has raised. Chapter Three will involve a consideration of lowered vowel sounds. Chapter Four will include consonant changes, diphthongs, and any vowel changes not included in Chapters Two and Three.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Tillotson, "Eighteenth-century Poetic Diction (I)," Essays in Criticism and Research (Cambridge, 1942), p. 54. For a more extended discussion, see Tillotson, "Correctness: Versification: 'Certain Niceties,'" On the Poetry of Pope (2nd ed., Oxford, 1950), pp. 105-140.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Gwynn, The Masters of English Literature (New York, 1910), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup>Edmund Gosse, A History of Eighteenth Century Literature: 1660-1780 (London, 1898), pp. 24-25.

<sup>4</sup>George Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1961), p. 465.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>6</sup>John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," Criticism: the Major Texts, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York, 1952), p. 156.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, ed. Arthur Waugh (The World's Classics, Nos. 83 and 84 [London, 1961]), I, 130.

<sup>10</sup>John M. Aden, ed. The Critical Opinions of John Dryden: A Dictionary (Nashville, 1963), p. 232.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>12</sup>Johnson, I, 204.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 19.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 367.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 451.

<sup>16</sup>John Conington, "Correctness, Homer, and Horace," Discussions of Alexander Pope, ed. Rufus A. Blanchard (Boston, 1960), p. 44.

<sup>17</sup>Swift to Pope, June 28, 1715, Alexander Pope, Correspondence, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford, 1956), I, 301.

<sup>18</sup>Johnson, II, 326-327.

<sup>19</sup>James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D. (New York, 1931), p. 1781.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas Warton, History of English Poetry, (1774) quoted in The Twickenham Edition of Pope, II, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (London, 1940), 218.

<sup>22</sup>William Hazlitt, "On Dryden and Pope," Discussions of Alexander Pope, ed. Rufus A. Blanchard (Boston, 1960), p. 40.

<sup>23</sup>George Gordon, Lord Byron, "Some Observations upon an Article in Blackwoods Magazine," Discussions of Alexander Pope, ed. Rufus A. Blanchard (Boston, 1960), p. 35.

<sup>24</sup>Conington, p. 46.

<sup>25</sup>Rebecca Price Parkin, The Poetic Workmanship of Alexander Pope (Minneapolis, 1955), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>27</sup>Jacob H. Adler, The Reach of Art (Gainesville, Florida, 1964), p. 24.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Margaret M. Bryant, Modern English and Its Heritage (2nd ed., New York, 1965), p. 193.

<sup>30</sup>Morton W. Bloomfield and Leonard Newmark, A Linguistic Introduction to the History of English (New York, 1963), p. 293.

<sup>31</sup>Stuart Robertson and Frederic G. Cassidy, The Development of Modern English (2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1954), p. 102.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>34</sup>The Twickenham edition will be used throughout this paper. Pope's italics are omitted. Poems will be referred to parenthetically in the text by abbreviation and line number. JM refers to "January and May," WB to "The Wife of Bath Her Prologue," RL to "The Rape of the Lock," (Canto numbers will be included before line numbers; this will be done with the sections of "The Dunciad" and "Essay on Man" as well.), TF to "The Temple of Fame," EA to "Eloisa to Abelard," Elegy to "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," EM to

"Essay on Man," and Dun to "The Dunciad."

<sup>35</sup>Robertson and Cassidy, pp. 99-108.

<sup>36</sup>Alexander J. Ellis, Early English Pronunciation 5 vols. (Early English Text Society [London, 1869-1889]).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., I, 67.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., IV, 1083.

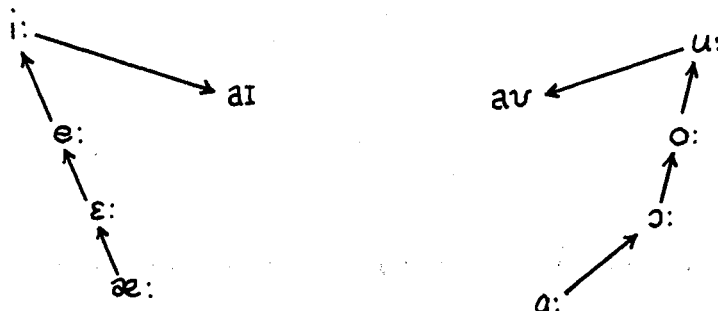
## CHAPTER II

### RAISED VOWEL SOUNDS

The most convenient method of categorizing changes in pronunciation of vowel sounds appears to be distinguishing them as having raised or lowered. In general, the tense vowels have raised or broken while the lax vowels have remained stable or lowered. Tenseness is a rather vague distinction, however, particularly as applied to the lower vowels. The tongue is higher and more flexed for a tense vowel than a lax one; often the sound is more heavily stressed and longer; sometimes the sound is higher in pitch. The tense and lax vowels are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

	Tense	Lax
a	calm	calm
æ	paths	path
ɔ	law	long
o	note	obey
i I	seat	sit
e ε	gate	get
u v	boot	book

The Great Vowel Shift applies to the tense vowels, and accounts for most of the vowels that have raised since Pope wrote. This diagram roughly illustrates the vowel shift:<sup>2</sup>



Robertson and Cassidy omit  $[\bar{\varepsilon}]$ , probably because it is not a tense vowel in Modern English. Bryant, who includes it, appends a list of examples of Old English words with their Modern English equivalents. She shows  $[\bar{\varepsilon}]$  shifting to both  $[\bar{e}]$  and  $[\bar{e}]$ , but does not include any word which originally involved the  $[\bar{\varepsilon}]$  sound. Baugh also includes five vowels in the left-hand pattern, but has only four on the right, where  $[\bar{a}]$  is omitted.<sup>3</sup> His examples are taken from Chaucer and Shakespeare; he includes a word in which the vowel has changed from  $[\bar{\varepsilon}]$  to  $[\bar{e}]$  (and on to  $[\bar{i}]$  in Modern English).

The rhymes which seem inaccurate in Pope because one vowel has apparently raised while the other has not include these vowel sounds:

$[\bar{e}] \rightarrow [\bar{i}]$

$[\bar{\varepsilon}] \rightarrow [\bar{i}]$

$[\bar{\varepsilon}] \rightarrow [\bar{i}]$

$[\bar{\varepsilon}] \rightarrow [\bar{e}]$

Those where one of a pair has lowered include:

$[\bar{\varepsilon}] \rightarrow [\bar{a}]$

$[\bar{i}] \rightarrow [\bar{e}]$

$[\bar{e}] \rightarrow [\bar{\varepsilon}]$   
 $[\bar{i}] \rightarrow [\bar{e}]$   
 $[\bar{i}] \rightarrow [\bar{I}]$   
 $[\bar{I}] \rightarrow [\bar{\varepsilon}]$   
 $[\bar{e}] \rightarrow [\bar{\alpha}]$   
 $[\bar{u}] \rightarrow [\bar{o}]$

Consonant omission, changes involving  $\underline{r}$ , and those involving diphthongs include:

loss of  $[\bar{l}]$   
 $[\bar{ar}] \rightarrow [\bar{\alpha}]$   
 $[\bar{ir}] \rightarrow [\bar{\alpha}]$   
 $[\bar{or}] = [\bar{\alpha}]$   
 $[\bar{a}\eta] = [\bar{\alpha}\eta]$   
 $[\bar{ai}] \rightarrow [\bar{oi}]$   
 $[\bar{ai}] \rightarrow [\bar{I}]$

The change from  $[\bar{e}]$  to  $[\bar{I}]$  is illustrated by the tea-  
obey-away rhyme-set already discussed in Chapter One.

A shift from  $[\bar{e}]$  or  $[\bar{\varepsilon}]$  to  $[\bar{I}]$  may be seen in

Or swims along the fluid atmosphere,  
 Once brightest shin'd this child of Heat and Air.  
 (Dun IV 423-424)

The words are now generally pronounced  $[\bar{\alpha}tm\bar{\alpha}s\bar{f}i\bar{r}]$  and  $[\bar{\varepsilon}r]$ , but rhymed for Pope with the  $[\bar{e}]$  or  $[\bar{\varepsilon}]$  vowel. Since atmosphere is not used elsewhere in the poems under consideration, rhymes with sphere must be traced in its place.

Rose or Carnation was below my care;  
 I meddle, Goddess! only in my sphere.  
 (Dun IV 431-432)

If to be perfect in a certain sphere,  
 What matter, soon or late, or here or there?  
 (EM I 73-74)

Submit--In this or any other sphere,  
 Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:  
 (EM I 285-286)

Go, soar with Plato to th' empyreal sphere,  
 Since all things lost on Earth, are treasur'd there.  
 (RL V 113-114)

Whether thou chuse Cervantes' serious air,  
 Or laugh and shake in Rab'lais' easy chair,  
 (Dun I 21-22)

All as a partridge plump, ful-fed, and fair,  
 She form'd this image of well-body'd air;  
 (Dun II 41-42)

"The Dunciad" includes another rhyme of air with fair, one with care, and two with there; rhymes with these rhyme words include stare, repair, despair, pray'r, square, declare, rare, e'er, and prepare. Air is rhymed twice with fair in "January and May," with fair and hair in "The Temple of Fame," and once each with care, chair, star, fair, glare, and wear, twice with pray'r, and three times with repair and hair in "The Rape of the Lock." Other words, such as bear, swear, where, inshare, ear, and hair, rhyme with these rhyme-words. Since the rhymes of both sphere and air are rhymed with the same words, we may assume that the rhyme was accurate for Pope. It is difficult to tell, however, whether the rhyme-vowel was [ē] or [ɛ]. Robertson and Cassidy list [ɛ] → [i] as a lax vowel shift, but also point out a nineteenth and twentieth century variation of the Great Vowel shift, the tendency to substitute [i] for [ɪ], which would

also account for the pronunciation of the last syllable of atmosphere as [fir] rather than the expected [fir]. Ellis gives pronunciations for chair, heir, and wear as a sound between [e] and [ɛ]. He describes it as the vowel in mare or Mary, distinct from that in met or ailing. In any case, there has certainly been a raising of the vowel either from [ɛ] to [i] or from [e] to [i]. Either can be accounted for by a known vowel shift.

As has been mentioned, Robertson and Cassidy list a lax vowel shift which involves raising [ɛ] to [i]. In the rhyme

And Monumental Brass this record bears,  
 "These are, --ah no! these were, the Gazetteers!"  
 (Dun II 313-314)

it is possible that Pope's final vowel was approximately [ɛ]. Ellis indicates that the Orthographist's, Buchanan's, and Dyche's pronunciations of bear involved the vowel sound of mare. If bears and gazetteers rhymed for Pope, the final vowel in gazetteers has since shifted to [i].

The same type of change has apparently taken place in pierce, although it has been raised from [ɛ] to [i]. According to Ellis, the Orthographist gives [pirs] as the pronunciation, Buchanan gives the alternate forms of [pirs] or [pers], and Sheridan gives [pers]. If Pope used the [ɛ], the rhyme in

He, who thro' vast immensity can pierce,  
 See worlds on worlds compose one universe,  
 (EM I 23-24)

may have been accurate. Swift uses the same rhyme-sound



with pierce in

Went at such times each heart to pierce,  
Attend the progress of his herse.  
(A Satirical Elegy 19-20)<sup>4</sup>

We would pronounce the last syllable of universe [vərs] to rhyme with herse [hərs], but would rhyme neither with pierce. Still, since Ellis' eighteenth century sources allow the pronunciation as [pərs], and since both Swift and Pope use the same rhyme sound, we may assume that this was once an accurate rhyme which has since become inaccurate through the raising of one of the vowel sounds.

It is possible that both least and beast were pronounced with a final [-ɛst], although the evidence from Pope is not entirely conclusive. He rhymes the two words together just as we would,

Connects each being, greatest with the least;  
Made Beast in aid of Man, and Man of Beast;  
(EM III 23-24)

but also rhymes each of them with rest:

And therefore, Sir, as you regard your Rest,  
First learn your Lady's Qualities at least:  
(JM 184-185)

He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,  
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;  
(EM II 7-8)

Rest is rhymed only with words ending in [-ɛst], as protest, best, possest, breast, supprest, quest, prest, blest, and confest. Rhymes with these words also invariably end in [-ɛst]. Either the two couplets have the identical bad rhyme-sound or least and beast were pronounced [lɛst] and [bɛst] to rhyme with rest.

The change appearing in the Great Vowel Shift from [æ] to [e] is a possible explanation for Pope's rhymes

Thee shall the Patriot, thee the Courtier taste  
And ev'ry year be duller than the last.  
(Dun III 297-298)

To future ages may thy dulness last,  
As thou preserv'st the dulness of the past!  
(Dun III 189-190)

Coach'd, carted, trod upon, now loose, now fast,  
And carry'd off in some Dog's tail at last.  
(Dun III 291-292)

Thro' School and College, thy kind cloud o'ercast,  
Safe and unseen the young Aeneas past:  
(Dun IV 289-290)

At once they gratify their Scent and Taste,  
And frequent Cups prolong the rich Repast.  
(RL III 111-112)

Taste is used only twice; both times it is rhymed with [æst], and those rhymes are consistently rhymed only with words ending in [æst]. This rhyme is also used by Swift:

So methought, he resolv'd no Liquor to taste,  
For fear the First Drop might as well be his Last:  
(A Serious Poem 111-112)

Philosophy, as it before us lyes,  
Seems to have borrow'd some ungrateful tast  
Of Doubts, Impertinence, and Niceties,  
From ev'ry Age through which it pass't  
But always with a stronger relish of the Last.  
(Ode to the Athenian Society 211-215)

Since both Pope and Swift are consistent with this rhyme, and since [æ] to [e] is a raised vowel in accordance with the Great Vowel Shift, it is reasonable to accept [tæst] as Pope's pronunciation of taste and the vowel shift as the explanation of the change.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Bryant, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language (2nd ed., New York, 1957), p. 288.

<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Swift, Swift's Poems I, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford, 1937). This edition is used for all quotations from Swift's poems; titles and line numbers will be listed parenthetically in the text.

### CHAPTER III

#### LOWERED VOWEL SOUNDS

Only one word, star, listed in Chapter Two as a secondary rhyme of air-sphere fails to support the pronunciation of both as  $\bar{[er]}$ . This indicates the possibility that star has changed in pronunciation. It is rhymed only twice, once with air,  $\bar{[er]}$ , and once with are,  $\bar{[ar]}$ , the sound it has today:

Late, as I rang'd the Crystal Wilds of Air,  
In the clear Mirror of thy ruling Star  
(RL I 107-108)

What vary'd being peoples ev'ry star,  
May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are.  
(EM I 27-28)

Rhymes with air have already been given; the two rhymes with are include

The wiser wits of later Times declare  
How constant, chaste, and virtuous, Women are.  
(JM 671-672)

The good must merit God's peculiar care;  
But who, but God, can tell us who they are?  
(EM IV 135-136)

Care rhymes with air in "The Rape of the Lock," and declare is rhymed with care in "January and May." Air is rhymed with  $\bar{[ar]}$  only in the couplet given above, where it is rhymed with star. This indicates that both star and are rhymed with air, and that they were pronounced  $\bar{[ster]}$  and

[ $\bar{\epsilon}$ r]. This conclusion is supported by G. Sharp's comment (1786) that are is spoken "as if spelled air"<sup>1</sup> and by Cooper's list of "words like and unlike" (late seventeenth century, but no date given) which includes "are sunt, air aer, heir hares, ere long statim."<sup>2</sup> Air and are, then, were apparently pronounced alike, and star rhymed with them as [ $\bar{\epsilon}$ st $\bar{\epsilon}$ r]. If this is the case, the change involved in are and star since the eighteenth century is a lowering of the vowel sound from [ $\bar{\epsilon}$ ] to [ $\bar{a}$ ].

The ea digraph was in a state of transition in the eighteenth century. This may be illustrated by tea, already discussed in Chapter One, and by such rhymes with great as

The champions in distorted Postures threat,  
And all appear'd Irregularly great.  
(TF 220-221)

But grant that those can conquer, these can cheat,  
'Tis phrase absurd to call a Villain Great:  
(EM IV 229-230)

There, in the rich, the honour'd, fam'd and great,  
See the false scale of Happiness complete!  
(EM IV 287-288)

Here swells the shelf with Ogilby the great;  
There, stamp'd with arms, Newcastle shines complete:  
(Dun I 141-142)

Full in the midst, proud Fame's Imperial Seat  
With Jewels blaz'd, magnificently great;  
(TF 248-249)

Now shou'd the Nuptial Pleasures prove so great,  
To match the Blessings of the future State,  
(JM 272-273)

Nor absent they, no members of her state,  
Who pay her homage in her sons, the Great:  
(Dun 14 91-92)

Bold Scipio, Savior of the Roman State,

Great in his Triumphs, in Retirement great.  
(TF 163-164)

Of Turns of Fortune, Changes in the State,  
The Falls of Fav'rites, Projects of the Great,  
(TF 454-455)

Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
(EM II 3-4)

But by your father's worth if yours you rate,  
Count me those only who were good and great.  
(EM IV 209-210)

Both rate and state are rhymed throughout the poems only with  $\left[ \bar{e}t \right]$ ; threat, seat, and complete can be traced no farther and must therefore be disregarded for lack of evidence on pronunciation. With no rhymes other than those with great, one cannot tell whether threat, seat, and complete are accurately rhymed as  $\left[ \bar{e}t \right]$ , or inaccurately rhymed with their present pronunciations of  $\left[ \bar{e}t \right]$  or  $\left[ \bar{i}t \right]$ . Cheat, however, is rhymed in two other places with deceit,

Grant, gracious Goddess! grant me still to cheat,  
O may thy cloud still cover the deceit!  
(Dun IV 355-356)

O painted Monster form'd Mankind to cheat  
With pleasing Poison, and with soft Deceit!  
(JM 479-480)

a rhyme Swift also uses:

But find some new address, some fresh deceit,  
Nor practice such an antiquated cheat;  
(To Mr. Congreve 17-18)

According to Ellis, the Orthographist, Buchanan, and Sheridan all pronounced deceit  $\left[ \bar{d}isit \right]$ . This indicates that cheat was probably pronounced  $\left[ \bar{t}sit \right]$ , as it is today.

Swift's poems also have the same confusion as Pope's

with the vowel sound in great. He rhymes

Happy beyond a private muse's fate,  
In pleasing all that's good among the great,  
(To Mr. Congreve 179-180)

Mild Dorothea, peaceful, wise and great,  
Trembling beheld the doubtful hand of fate;  
(Sir W.T.'s late illness 41-42)

Such were thy rules to be poetically great,  
"stoop not to int'rest, flattery, or deceit;  
(Sir W.T.'s late illness 138-139)

Despis'd luxurious Wines, and costly Meat;  
Yet, still was at the Tables of the Great.  
(The Author upon Himself 15-16)

"My Lord and he are grown so great,  
"Always together, tete a tete;  
(Horace, Lib. 2. Sat. 6. 85-86)

"You, Mr. Dean frequent the Great;  
"Inform us, will the Emp'ror treat?  
(Horace, Lib. 2. Sat. 6. 93-94)

Ellis gives the pronunciation of the Expert Orthograph-  
ist (1704) as approximately  $\overline{grit}$ , but that of Lediard (1725)  
and of both Buchanan and Sheridan in the later eighteenth  
century (1776 and 1780) as approximately  $\overline{gret}$ . Johnson  
mentions both pronunciations:

. . . when I published the Plan for my Dictionary,  
Lord Chesterfield told me that the word great  
should be pronounced so as to rhyme to state; and  
Sir William Yonge sent me word that it should be  
pronounced so as to rhyme to seat, and that none  
but an Irishman would pronounce it grait. Now  
here were two men of the highest rank, the one,  
the best speaker in the House of Lords, the other,  
the best speaker in the House of Commons, differing  
entirely.<sup>3</sup>

It is apparent, then, that in the early eighteenth century  
great was pronounced both ways. Pope's poetry reflects this  
dual pronunciation.

Although the shift was undoubtedly from [ē] to [i] first, the change is categorized in this chapter instead of the preceding one because the change from Pope to the present is the reversal from [i] to [ē]. Great apparently began to shift with such words as tea from [ē] to [i], but for some reason the newer pronunciation did not become standard.

A word that apparently had a double pronunciation similar to that of today is again. The Orthographist, Buchanan, and Sheridan agree in pronouncing it [ægen],<sup>4</sup> with the pronunciation it usually has today. Pope rhymes it consistently with [-en], the current British pronunciation:

We leave them here in this Heroick Strain,  
And to the Knight our Story turns again,  
(JM 710-711)

When still he read, and laugh'd, and read again,  
And half the Night was thus consum'd in vain;  
(WB 413-414)

Fate urg'd the Sheers, and cut the Sylph in twain,  
(But Airy Substance soon unites again)  
(RL III 151-152)

It grieves me much (reply'd the Peer again)  
Who speaks so well shou'd ever speak in vain.  
(RLIV 131-132)

She smil'd to see the doughty Hero slain,  
But at her smile, the Beau reviv'd again.  
(RL V 69-70)

Perch'd on his crown, "All hail! and hail again,  
My son! the promis'd land expects thy reign.  
(Dun I 291-292)

Heav'n rings with laughter; Of the laughter vain,  
Dulness, good Queen, repeats the jest again.  
(Dun II 121-122)

See dying vegetables life sustain,



See life dissolving vegetate again:  
(EM III 15-16)

In addition, "The Dunciad" rhymes again with strain (II 259-260), swain (III 57-58), reign (III 125-126, IV 175-176), vain (IV 213-214), and pain (IV 427-428). However, Swift, who is considered by Sherburn to be an excellent rhymers, rhymes it with chain, contain, and maintain and (here spelled variously again, agen, and ag'en) with ten and pen. Both pronunciations may have been current in the early eighteenth century, but Pope apparently used the [ē] exclusively, as every word with which he rhymes again is itself rhymed only with [-en]. This difference, then, involves a very slight lowering. In essence, it is a change from tense [e] to lax [ɛ].

Another word that presents the same evidence of change ([ē] lowered to [ɛ]) as again is said. Pope rhymes it with [ɛ], as we would today:

Fierce as a startled Adder, swell'd and said,  
Rattling an ancient Sistrum at his head.  
(Dun IV 373-374)

There goes a Saying, and 'twas shrewdly said,  
Old Fish at Table, but young Flesh in Bed.  
(JM 101-102)

Who took it patiently, and wip'd his Head;  
Rain follows Thunder, that was all he said.  
(WB 391-392)

On her heav'd Bosom hung her drooping Head,  
Which, with a Sigh, she rais'd; and thus she said.  
(RL IV 145-146)

but also rhymes it with [e]:

Excuse me, Dear, if ought amiss was said,  
For, on my Soul, amends shall soon be made:  
(JM 791-792)

But grant the worst; shall Women then be weigh'd  
By every Word that Solomon has said?

(JM 682-683)

How oft', when press'd to marriage, have I said,  
Curse on all laws but those which love has made!

(EA 73-74)

The secondary rhymes are not cross-rhymed: made rhymes with trade, delay'd, shade, obey'd, and o'er-shade; bed and head rhyme with wed, led, read, shed, dead, spread, and lead (the metal). The lack of cross-rhyming indicates that said was pronounced differently in the two groups of couplets listed above. While it is possible to take this as evidence of inaccuracy in one of the groups, an alternate explanation, equally reasonable, is that the word was pronounced both ways. In support of this explanation, it should be noted that Swift also regularly rhymes said in the same two ways:

No Creature valu'd what they se'd:  
One Family was gone to bed;

(Baucis and Philemon 25-26)

The Strangers overheard, and said,  
You're in the right, but be'n't afraid

(Baucis and Philemon 83-84)

He cock't his Hat, you would have said  
Mambrino's Helm adorn'd his Head.

(The Fable of Midas 13-14)

Dick, we agree--all's true, thou'st said,  
As that my Muse is yet a Maid,

(Horace, Book II, Ode I 99-100)

Another lowered vowel in Pope is from [ī] to [ɛ̄].

Judging from the evidence of his rhymes, confirmed by Swift's, the Thames was called the [timz] in the early eighteenth century. Pope rhymes it

Than issuing forth, the Rival of his Beams  
Lanch'd on the Bosom of the Silver Thames.  
(RL II 3-4)

To where the Fleet-ditch with disemboguing streams  
Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,  
(Dun II 271-272)

He bears no token of the sabler streams,  
And mounts far off among the Swans of Thames.  
(Dun II 297-298)

The secondary rhymes include

Grace shines around her with serenest beams,  
And whisp'ring Angels prompt her golden dreams.  
(EA 215-216)

That tinctur'd as it runs with Lethe's streams,  
And wafting Vapours from the Land of dreams,  
(Dun II 339-340)

Her tresses staring from Poetic dreams,  
And never wash'd, but in Castalia's streams,  
(Dun III 17-18)

Swift rhymes

Wake from thy wanton Dreams,  
Come from thy dear-lov'd Streams,  
The crooked Paths of wandering Thames.  
(Ode to Sir William Temple 149-150)

Unless all these rhymes are inaccurate, one must conclude that Thames is pronounced either  $\left[\theta imz\right]$  or  $\left[ti mz\right]$ . Lediard states that Thames, like Theobald, is pronounced with a  $\left[t\right]$ ,<sup>5</sup> so the pronunciation would probably be  $\left[ti mz\right]$ .

There has apparently been a slight lowering from  $\left[i\right]$  to  $\left[\bar{i}\right]$  in been since the eighteenth century. Pope usually rhymes it  $\left[\bar{b}in\right]$ , but rhymes it once with sin:

And one, whose Faith has ever sacred been,  
And so has mine, (she said)--I am a Queen!  
(JM 704-705)

As the Stars order'd, such my Life has been:

Alas, alas, that ever Love was Sin!  
(WB 323-324)

Happy! ah ten times happy, had I been,  
If Hampton-Court these Eyes had never seen!  
(RL IV 149-150)

Secondary rhymes include green, screen, unseen, spleen, and mein. This would indicate that been is regularly pronounced [bin] in Pope. Sin is not used again in the works considered, so there is no way to know with certainty how it was pronounced or how it would usually have been rhymed. If the rhyme is correct, and if sin had the present pronunciation, then been also was pronounced as it is now in that rhyme. If this is the case, then been was already in a state of transition. Whether or not been was pronounced [brn] at that time, there has since come the change from tense [i] to lax [ɪ].

Several words which are now generally pronounced with a final [ɛt] were rhymed by Pope with words ending in [rt]. These include

I've had, my self, full many a merry fit,  
And trust in Heav'n I may have many yet.  
(WB 23-24)

All that on Folly Frenzy could beget,  
Fruits of dull Heat, and Sooterkins of Wit.  
(Dun I 125-126)

Where as he fish'd her nether realms for wit,  
She oft had favour'd him, and favours yet.  
(Dun II 101-102)

Rhymes with these words, with the exception of

Of all affliction taught a lover yet,  
'Tis sure the hardest science to forget!  
(EA 189-190)

invariably are with [i]. Fit and wit are rhymed in (RL IV 59-60) and (Dun IV 325-326); sit and wit rhyme in (Dun I 203-204, II 15-16, II 375-376, and IV 131-132); hit and wit rhyme in (Dun II 47-48); writ and wit rhyme in (Dun IV 99-100); and bit and wit rhyme in (Dun IV 233-234). Ellis quotes G. Sharp as saying that "e is like i short in England, pretty, yes, and yet."<sup>6</sup> This, with Pope's rhymes, makes it seem probable that [i] was the vowel sound used, and that it has lowered since the eighteenth century.

A lowering from [e] to [æ] must be assumed if Pope's rhyme

"Wou'd I vouchsafe to sell what Nature gave,  
"You little think what Custom I cou'd have!  
(WB 201-202)

is accurate. Have is rhymed only one other time in the poems used for this paper, and is there rhymed again as [hev]:

But still this world (so fitted for the knave)  
Contents us not. A better shall we have?  
(EM IV 131-132)

Both gave and knave are rhymed elsewhere with [ev]:

Fate in their dotage this fair Ideot gave,  
Gross as her sire, and as her mother grave,  
(Dun I 13-14)

As erst Medea (cruel, so to save!)  
A new Edition of old AEsop gave,  
(Dun IV 121-122)

Say, was it Virtue, more tho' Heav'n ne'er gave,  
Lamented Digby! sunk thee to the grave?  
(EM IV 103-104)

The same ambition can destroy or save,  
And make a patriot as it makes a knave.  
(EM II 201-202)

Who wickedly is wise, or madly brave,  
 Is but the more a fool, the more a knave.  
 (EM IV 231-232)

In addition, grave is rhymed with wave in (Dun I 85-86) and (Dun II 343-344), and with save in (EM IV 249-250); and brave is rhymed with slave in (EM II 191-192). Since all these words end in  $\bar{[-ev]}$ , have must either be incorrectly rhymed or pronounced  $\bar{[hev]}$ .

The word Rome is used only twice, and is both times rhymed as  $\bar{[rum]}$ :

And hence th' Egregious Wizard shall foredoom  
 The Fate of Louis, and the Fall of Rome.  
 (RL V 139-140)

A Gothic Library! of Greece and Rome  
 Well purg'd, and worthy Settle, Banks, and Broome.  
 (Dun I 145-146)

It is not possible to reach more than tentative conclusions on the accuracy of this rhyme, however, since Broome is not used again and the only other rhymes with doom do not clearly establish its pronunciation:

Here Britain's Statesmen oft the Fall foredoom  
 Of Foreign Tyrants, and of Nymphs at home;  
 (RL III 5-6)

At Ombre singly to decide their Doom;  
 And swells her Breast with Conquests yet to come.  
 (RL III 27-28)

Home is never used with  $\bar{[-um]}$ , but come is rhymed with tomb once (EM III 161-162). Home and come rhyme once (EM I 97-98), and home and o'ercome rhyme once (Dun II 165-166). With these exceptions, home has an  $\bar{[o]}$  vowel (rhyming with roam and dome) and come has an  $\bar{[ʌ]}$  vowel, (rhyming with sum and dumb). Since these rhymes with home and come are not

cross-rhymed, it is probable that come-home is only a visual rhyme.

A confusing combination of [-ast] and [-ost] appears in

Not all the Tresses that fair Head can boast  
Shall draw such Envy as the Lock you lost.  
(RL V 143-144)

But few, alas! the casual Blessing boast,  
So hard to gain, so easy to be lost:  
(TF 503-504)

Already see you a degraded Toast,  
And all your Honour in a Whisper lost!  
(RL IV 109-110)

How sweet an Ovid, MURRAY was our boast!  
How many Martials were in PULT'NEY lost!  
(Dun IV 169-170)

Like varying winds, by other passions tost,  
This drives them constant to a certain coast.  
(EM II 167-168)

All look, all sigh, and call on Smedley lost;  
Smedley in vain resounds thro' all the coast.  
(Dun II 293-294)

In other places, however, the rhymes follow the present pronunciation, as in

Hence Miscellanies spring, the weekly boast  
Of Curl's chaste press, and Lintot's rubric post:  
(Dun II 171-172)

First Osborne lean'd against his letter'd post;  
It rose, and labour'd to a curve at most.  
(Dun II 171-172)

But see how oft Ambitious Aims are cross'd,  
And Chiefs contend 'till all the Prize is lost!  
(RL V 107-108)

Say, why are Beauties prais'd and honour'd most,  
The wise Man's Passion, and the vain Man's Toast?  
(RL V 9-10)

The well-sung woes will sooth my pensive ghost;  
He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most.  
(EA 365-366)

Ellis gives lost as pronounced by Buchanan and Sheridan as [lɔst] and [lɑst], respectively; post as pronounced by Buchanan as [pɔst] or [pɑst]; and most as pronounced by Buchanan as [mɔst] or [mɑst].<sup>7</sup> Thus, according to Ellis, lost, post, and most were all pronounced with [ɔst]. If he is correct, it is possible that all these words were rhymes, or at least sufficiently close to pass as rhymes when Pope wrote them.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- <sup>1</sup> Ellis, IV, 1053.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 1029.
- <sup>3</sup> Boswell, p. 404.
- <sup>4</sup> Ellis, IV, 1080.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 1073.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 1053.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 1078-1079.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHANGES OTHER THAN RAISED OR LOWERED VOWELS

There are a number of pronunciation changes which would help to explain apparent inaccuracies in rhyme, but which do not fit into a simple scheme of raised or lowered vowel sounds. Among these are consonant change, changes involving [ē], and changes involving diphthongs.

Perhaps the most interesting of these changes in Pope, in that it is a consonant rather than a vowel change, is that in fault. While we now pronounce it with the l, speakers of the early eighteenth century omitted the letter for a pronunciation of either [fāt] or [fot]. Pope rhymes it

Let him not dare to vent his dang'rous Thought;  
A Noble Fool was never in a Fault.  
(JM 164-165)

I ought to grieve, but cannot what I ought;  
I mourn the lover, not lament the fault;  
(EA 183-184)

Then say not Man's imperfect, Heav'n in fault;  
Say, rather, Man's as perfect as he ought;  
(EM I 69-70)

"O born in sin, and forth in folly brought!  
Works damn'd, or to be damn'd! (your father's fault)  
(Dun I 225-226)

Wrapt up in Self, a God without a Thought,  
Regardless of our merit or default.  
(Dun IV 485-486)

Thought, brought, and ought are rhymed only with taught,

sought, caught, and wrought.

Apparently several different vowel sounds followed by r changed to [ɜ̄]. One of these changes is from [ar̄] to [ɜ̄] in clerk. Pope used clerk as a rhyme-word only twice:

In pure good Will I took this jovial Spark,  
Of Oxford he, a most egregious Clerk:

(WB 263-264)

"Be that my task (replies a gloomy Clerk,  
Sworn foe to Myst'ry, yet divinely dark;

(Dun IV 458-459)

Rhymes with dark and spark are

"There, dim in clouds, the poring Scholiasts mark,  
Wits, who like owls, see only in the dark,

(Dun III 192-193)

Safe from the treach'rous Friend, the daring Spark,  
The Glance by Day, the Whisper in the Dark;

(RL I 73-74)

While there are only four couplets in the set, the rhymes demonstrating this change are confirmed by the prevalent pronunciation of clerk in England today.

Another change of the same type is from [ir̄] to [ɜ̄].

This change occurs in heard, which Pope rhymes both [hird̄] and [hɜ̄d̄] in

Of various Tongues the mingled Sounds were heard;  
In various Garbs promiscuous Throngs appear'd;

(TF 280-281)

One only doubt remains; Full oft I've heard  
By Casuists grave, and deep Divines averr'd;

(JW 268-269)

Swift also uses the pronunciation [hird̄] in

There first the visionary sound was heard,  
When to poetic view the Muse appear'd.

(Sir W.T.'s late Illness 15-16)

Ellis quotes Boswell's Life of Johnson where Boswell

remarks on Johnson's pronunciation of heard: "I perceived that he pronounced the word heard, as if spelled with a double e, heerd, instead of sounding it herd, as is most usually done." It is evident from the rhymes and this comment that heard had variant pronunciations, though it has since become standard as  $\left[ \bar{h} \bar{e} d \right]$ .

Though the distinction between  $\left[ \bar{o} r \right]$  and  $\left[ \bar{ɜ} \right]$  may have been recognized in speech, it was not carefully adhered to in rhyme. Words with  $\left[ \bar{o} r n \right]$  and  $\left[ \bar{ɜ} n \right]$  are rhymed several times:

Chast tho' not rich; and tho' not nobly born,  
Of honest Parents, and may serve my Turn.  
(JM 260-261)

Padua, with sighs, beholds her Livy burn,  
And ev'n th' Antipodes Vigilius mourn.  
(Dun III 105-106)

Thee shall each ale-house, thee each gill-house mourn,  
And answ'ring gin-shops sower sighs return.  
(Dun III 147-148)

Soon to that mass of Nonsense to return,  
Where things destroy'd are swept to things unborn.  
(Dun I 241-242)

So from the sun's broad beam, in shallow urns  
Heav'ns twinkling Sparks draw light, and point their  
horns.  
(Dun II 11-12)

As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns,  
As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns;  
(EM I 277-278)

Like bubbles on the sea of Matter born,  
They rise, they break, and to that sea return.  
(EM III 19-20)

Elsewhere, born, adorn, mourn, torn, scorn, and horn are rhymed together, and turn, burn, and urn are rhymed together.

The same vowel sound is confused in [ɔrd] and [ɜrd]:

This Sir affects not you, whose ev'ry Word  
Is weigh'd with judgment, and befits a Lord:  
(JM 166-167)

Try when you list; and you shall find, my Lord,  
It is not in our Sex to break our Word.  
(JM 708-709)

Casps, as they straiten at each end the cord,  
And dies, when Dulness gives her Page the word.  
(Dun IV 29-30)

Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;  
Light dies before thy uncreating word:  
(Dun IV 653-654)

Neither word nor cord is used again. Restor'd is used only once,

So heav'n preserve the Sight it has restor'd,  
As with these Eyes I plainly saw thee whor'd;  
(JM 768-769)

but restore is used with more (Dun IV 329-330) and with before (EM III 285-286), indicating that the rhyme-sound in restor'd is [ɔrd]. Lord is used once with sword (JM 75-76), once with unexplor'd (RL I 9-10), and three times with board (JM 341-342; JM 406-407; RL III 49-50). The evidence for the accuracy of all these rhymes is inconclusive; the number of [ɔr]-[ɜ] rhymes might be taken as evidence that the rhymes are good; however, the lack of cross-rhyming may indicate that the rhymes are bad.

A group of rhymes which seems to me to be probably inaccurate involves [aŋ] and [ɛŋ]. This occurs in

He said; when Shock, who thought she slept too long,  
Leapt up, and wak'd his Mistress with his Tongue.  
(RL I 115-116)

"To cavil, censure, dictate, right or wrong,

"Full and eternal privilege of tongue."  
(Dun II 377-378)

Go! and pretend your family is young;  
Nor own, your fathers have been fools so long.  
(EM IV 213-214)

Young is not used again; tongue is rhymed in "The Temple of Fame" with rung and sprung, in "Eloisa to Abelard" and "Elegy" with sung, and in "Essay on Man" with hung. Other rhymes with wrong and long have as consistently the  $[-\text{a}\eta]$  or  $[-\text{a}\eta]$  ending. Since these rhymes involve word-pairs that almost certainly were distinct and are never cross-rhymed in Pope, such as song-sung and wrong-wrung, the couplets cited above are probably inaccurately rhymed. It is possible, of course, that they were pronounced more nearly alike than they are today, but the lack of cross-rhymes indicates some inaccuracy.

The two diphthongs that show evidence of change are  $[\text{a}\text{i}]$  and  $[\text{o}\text{i}]$ . Rhymes with join show clearly that the oi was pronounced  $[\text{a}\text{i}]$ :

Strait the three Bands prepare in Arms to join,  
Each Band the number of the Sacred Nine.  
(RL III 29-30)

Unaw'd by Precepts, Human or Divine,  
Like Birds and Beasts, promiscuously they join:  
(JM 31-32)

Yet write, oh write me all, that I may join  
Griefs to thy griefs, and eccho sighs to thine.  
(EA 41-42)

And sure if fate some future Bard shall join  
In sad similitude of griefs to mine,  
(EA 359-360)

And Middle natures, how they long to join,  
Yet never pass th' insuperable line!  
(EM I 227-228)

Bring, bring the madding Bay, the drunken Vine;  
The creeping, dirty, courtly Ivy join.

(Dun I 303-304)

Pluto with Cato thou for this shalt join,  
And link the Mourning Bride to Proserpine.

(Dun III 309-310)

Of all these rhymes, only Proserpine is often pronounced with an ending other than  $\left[ \bar{a}i\eta \right]$ . While I have heard it pronounced most often as  $\left[ \bar{p}ras\bar{e}pini \right]$ , Webster gives  $\left[ \bar{p}ras\bar{e}pai\eta \right]$  as an alternate pronunciation. Shrine, divine, thine, mine, line, and vine are rhymed with each other and with design, sign, dine, decline, Caroline, incline, and Cataline. Since all of these words also end in  $\left[ \bar{a}i\eta \right]$ , it is reasonable to assume that join was pronounced  $\left[ \bar{d}zai\eta \right]$  rather than  $\left[ \bar{d}zoi\eta \right]$  in the early eighteenth century.

The same diphthong change is the only explanation for such rhymes as

"Now turn to diff'rent sports (the Goddess cries)  
And learn, my sons, the wond'rous pow'r of Noise.

(Dun II 221-222)

False as his Gems, and canker'd as his Coins,  
Came, cramm'd with capon, from where Pollio dines.

(Dun IV 349-350)

There are no other rhymes with either noise or coins, but it is reasonable to assume that the oi diphthong was always pronounced  $\left[ \bar{a}i \right]$  since that is the case with join, and since the same vowel sound is used to rhyme here.

In Pope's poetry, the noun wind was always pronounced  $\left[ \bar{w}ai\eta \right]$  instead of  $\left[ \bar{w}i\eta \right]$ :

Swift as a bard the bailiff leaves behind,  
He left a huge Lintot, and out-strip'd the wind.

(Dun II 61-62)

Nor God alone in the still calm we find,  
 He mounts the storm, and walks upon the wind.  
 (EM II 109-110)

O Fortune, fair, like all thy treach'rous Kind,  
 But faithless still, and wav'ring as the Wind!  
 (JM 477-478)

And hears the various vows of fond mankind;  
 Some beg an eastern, some a western wind:  
 (Dun II 87-88)

Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind  
 Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;  
 (EM I 99-100)

That never air or ocean felt the wind;  
 That never passion discomposed the mind:  
 (EM I 167-168)

The darksome pines that o'er yon' rocks reclin'd  
 Wave high, and murmur to the hollow wind,  
 (EA 155-156)

Booth in his cloudy tabernacle shrin'd,  
 On grinning dragons thou shalt mount the wind.  
 (Dun III 267-268)

On which three Wives successively had twin'd  
 A sliding Noose and waver'd in the Wind.  
 (WB 395-396)

The tott'ring China shook without a Wind,  
 Nay, Poll sate mute, and Shock was most unkind!  
 (RL IV 163-164)

Behind, find, kind, mankind, mind, reclin'd, shrin'd, twin'd,  
 and unkind rhyme with each other and with join'd, defin'd,  
inclin'd, blind, womankind, refin'd, resign'd, combin'd,  
din'd, and assign'd. Of these, only join'd is now pro-  
 nounced with an ending other than [̄arnd̄], and evidence has  
 been given above to show that it was pronounced [̄āzarnd̄].

Occasionally Pope deliberately mis-rhymes a word. This  
 is almost certainly the explanation for

'Twas then Belinda! if Report say true,



Thy Eyes first open'd on a Billet-doux;  
(RL I 117-118)

Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,  
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.  
(RL I 137-138)

where billet-doux is rhymed differently only ten couplets apart. This proximity of opposing rhymes indicates that it was a purposeful inaccuracy, probably mocking a common mispronunciation of the word.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

There has been much controversy over Pope's accuracy in rhyming. Unfortunately, much of the discussion has apparently been based on personal approval or disapproval of Pope's poetry, or of Augustan poetry in general, rather than on empirical grounds. While it is impossible to know with certainty how words were pronounced in the past, it is possible to establish pronunciation with a reasonable degree of probability.

This paper is a presentation of an attempt to establish specific criteria for determining the pronunciation of questionable words and, therefore, accuracy of rhyme. In order to determine which words were actually rhymed inaccurately and which only seem wrong to us today because of differences in pronunciation, apparently inaccurate rhymes have been traced. Tracing involved finding all the rhyme-words for each part of a seemingly bad rhyme. Thus, as shown in detail on pages 15-17, in the tea-obey rhyme, all rhymes with tea and with obey were found. These words are away, May, sway, and way. The next step was to find all rhymes with these words. If rhymes of tea rhymed with those of obey, the rhyme was probably accurate to Pope; if the

rhymes were not cross-rhymed, the original couplet was probably inaccurate. Since rhymes of tea and obey are cross-rhymed, the couplet is probably correct. Since all the other rhymes in the set end in [e] today, and since we assume the couplet is accurate, it is probable that tea was pronounced [te]. The more rhymes that could be found for each member of a pair, the more reliable the conclusions as to accuracy or inaccuracy are.

More than twenty-five sets of rhymes have been traced and discussed in this paper. These rhyme-pairs have been categorized in Chapters Two and Three on the basis of whether the vowel sound in the "inaccurate" word has since raised or lowered. Chapter Four includes those rhymes which do not fit into Chapters Two and Three.

The major changes explained by the Great Vowel Shift were coming to an end at about 1700. Since Pope did not begin writing until the early eighteenth century, it is reasonable to assume that most of the vowels raised in accordance with the shift had already changed. The rhymes I have examined support this conclusion. There are only a few words which have almost certainly changed; several others probably changed, but the evidence is inconclusive.

More words appear to have had vowel sounds lowered. Three of these, said, great, and been, are rhymed in two different ways: [sed] and [sed], [grit] and [gret], and [bin] and [bin]. While it is possible that one pronunciation was accurate and one inaccurate, it may be that both pronun-

ciations were then standard.

Perhaps the best-known change in Chapter Four involves the diphthong oi. Pope rhymes it consistently as [ɔɪ], while today it is pronounced [ɔɪ]. Another [ɔɪ] sound was that in the noun wind, now pronounced [wɪnd]. In addition, there are several words where a vowel plus g has changed to [ɛ] or [ɛ̃].

I have found, of course, a number of couplets that almost certainly had inaccurate rhymes. A few of these are noted, although the major concern in this paper is to show which rhymes seem inaccurate but are not. There were also many rhymes which could not be included in the study at all because one word in the pair was used only once.

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