

	OLD ENGLISH	MIDDLE ENGLISH	MODERN ENGLISH
fisc			fish
fox			fox
henn			hen
hlūd			loud
læce			leech
læfan			leave
pāpa			pope
rīsan			rise
brȳd			bride
sāpe			soap
sōna			soon
standan			stand
sunne			sun
tēþ			teeth
dæg			day
plega			play
græg			gray
rāw			row
glōwan			glow
āgan			owe
spīwan			spew
flēos			fleece
dēaw			dew
māw			mew
clawe			claw
gnagan			gnaw
apa			ape
hræfn			raven
melu			meal
open			open
wicu			week
wudu			wood
yfel			evil
sceadu			shade
sceadwe			shadow

7.9 PRONUNCIATION AND RIME

One kind of evidence which is used in reconstructing the older pronunciation of a language is that afforded by poetry, especially rimes. Rime evidence, however, must be used with some discretion. Poets may deliberately use various kinds of imperfect rimes, like Emily Dickinson's off-rime of *pearl* with *alcohol*, which lends a delicate dryness to her verse; it is unnecessary to assume that an exact rime was intended. Similarly, when Swift writes, in "To Mr. Congreve,"

Thus prostitute my Congreve's name is grown
To ev'ry lewd pretender of the town,

an investigation of the riming words will show that Old English *grōwen* became Middle English [grōwən], Modern English [gron], whereas Old English *tīn* became Middle English [tu:n], Modern English [taun]. The words do not rime today and never have. Swift must have used them as off-rimes or as eye-rimes since the spelling looks like a rime. This couplet tells us very little about Swift's pronunciation.

Nevertheless, with appropriate caution we can use rime as evidence for pronunciation, especially when other evidence supports it. Examine the following rimes from Swift. (1) Decide in each case whether the rimes are probably true or false. (2) Write the riming sounds in phonetic transcription. Be prepared to explain your decision.

- (1) Yet want your criticks no just cause to rail,
Since knaves are ne'er obliged for what they steal.
Other similar rimes used by Swift are *ease/Bays*, *please/bays*, *dreams/names*, and *dream/same*. You may consider these rimes as additional evidence in reaching a decision about the couplet.
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- (2) Contented he—but Fate ordains,
He now shall shine in nobler scenes.
Similarly, *scenes/entertains*, *scene/vein*, *scene/vain*, *scene/dean*.
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- (3) In ready counters never pays,
But pawns her snuff-box, rings, and keys.
Similarly, *key/sway*, *key/day*, *key/tea*.
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- (4) Unhappy ship, thou art returned in vain;
New waves shall drive thee to the deep again.
Similarly, *again/unclean*,
but also, *again/then*, *again/ten*, *agen/pen*.
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- (5) Why, there's my landlord now, the squire, who all in money wallows,
He would not give a groat to save his father from the gallows.
Similarly, *watch/scratch*, *watch/match*, *wand/land*, *wand/hand*, *squabble/rabble*, *want/grant*, *wanting/planting*, *wanting/canting*, *water/matter*, *wander/bystander*, *squat/mat*.
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- (6) In velvet cap his head lies warm;
His hat for show, beneath his arm.
Similarly, *war/far*, *war/star/tar*.
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- (7) A passage may be found, I've heard,
In some old Greek or Latin bard
Similarly, *search/arch*, *learn/darn*, *served/starved*, *unheard/guard*, *clerk/mark*, *herbage/garbage*, *deserve it/starve it*, *verse/farce*, *clergy/charge ye*, *(thou) wert/(Faustus') art*.
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- (8) Would you rise in the church? Be stupid and dull;
Be empty of learning, of insolence full.
Similarly, *skull/full*, *blush/bush*, *thrush/bush*, *cut/put*, *guts/puts*, *touch her/butcher*. In the contemporary Irish dialect, Middle English [u] is still a rounded vowel in all positions. How is this information apposite to Swift's rimes?
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- (9) Corinna in the morning dizen'd,
Who sees will spew; who smells, be poison'd.
Similarly, *wild/spoil'd*, *child/spoil'd*, *malign/join*, *surprise one [ən]/poison*.
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