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On Im/Pure Rhymes in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*

Abstract

The pronunciation of Early New English, a period of the language when William Shakespeare lived and worked, still hides many puzzles. Although linguists have worked out a model of pronunciation of at c1600, there still remain controversies concerning the speech of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, such as *u*-centralization (*cup*), contrast of [æ:] : [a:] (*last, dance*) with sociolinguistic factors involved, etc. The conflicting views on Shakespeare's pronunciation emerge when it comes to the interpretation of vowels in the rhymes of his poetic texts. The present brief study which is confined to the rhymes in his poem *Venus and Adonis* aims at offering a relatively uniform interpretation of the value of vowels in such rhymes. The main goal is determining whether they are pure rhymes, eye rhymes, or quasi rhymes, the last ones based neither on phonological nor spelling similarities. The solutions suggested are of course not final so that modifications and amendments are welcome.

In order to identify the pronunciation of Early New English around the year 1600, i.e. the type of speech used by William Shakespeare, a linguist has at his/her disposal several sources of evidence. First of all, unlike in the case of Old and Middle English, s/he has access to the accounts of the orthoepists, sometimes referred to as "early grammarians," i.e. educators who attempted to describe and/or instruct how certain sounds should be articulated. For Shakespeare's language the grammarians chronologically closest would be, e.g. William Bullokar (1580) or Alexander Gill, whose *Logonomia Anglica* (1619) was published shortly after the poet's death in 1616. It should be emphasized that their grammars were written in the period of very rapid phonological developments in English (cf. Mincoff 1972, 296–297).

As the early grammarians were eye- or rather ear-witnesses of the speech of around 1600 it may seem that their reports would solve all problems connected with the reconstruction of pronunciation. But the study of their scholarly achievements may bring rather disappointing results, especially because the early grammarians' accounts quite frequently contradict each other. As some critics emphasize, the

orthoepists were not trained phoneticians and, in addition, their conservatism led in many cases to promoting the use of archaizing or non-standard pronunciations (cf. Dobson 1968).

Other sources of the evidence of the language spoken around 1600 include spelling errors, puns, and rhymes in poetic texts. But data from all the three must be approached with utmost care, as puns and rhymes were often treated as poetic devices which were sometimes considered by poets more important than their phonetic accuracy. Consequently, the so-called “impure,” or imperfect, rhymes are quite often found in the earlier poetry of Chaucer (14th century), who rhymed, for instance, *deede* ‘deed’ with long close [e:] with *drede* ‘dread,’ with long open [ɛ:] (Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, 659–660). In Shakespeare’s compositions similar imperfect rhymes appear in large numbers, thus generating serious interpretative problems.

The validity of rhymes as a reliable source of reconstructing phonological phenomena in Shakespeare’s language has been questioned by various linguists. For instance, Kökeritz, a Swedish-American scholar, considered the poetic rhymes in the 16–17th centuries as “not so dependable as the reliable phonetic spelling or the homonymic pun” (1953, 31). Another handicap was the poetic tradition; cf.:

- (1) Each new generation of poets preferred to use more or less the same rhymes as the preceding one and continued to do so long after some of the syllables they coupled in rhyme had ceased to be pronounced alike; in such cases the conventional spelling preserved an illusory, purely graphic or visual identity which had no counterpart in the pronunciation of the rhyming syllables (Kökeritz 1953, 31).

Rhymes which reflect historical rather than contemporary phonological representation are frequently referred to as “eye rhymes.” In other words, they had functioned as full fledged rhymes in the past (here: before Shakespeare) but they fail to help identify real pronunciations in the Renaissance poets. Sometimes, claims Kökeritz, rhymes involved dialectal, non-standard forms or pronunciation borrowed from the non-polite language of the lower classes.

It should be duly noted that Kökeritz’s approach to Shakespeare’s language was too optimistic as he believed that the poet’s pronunciation was very close to that of Modern English, which makes his statements concerning Shakespeare’s phonology not too reliable. His views led to a major controversy with Dobson, resulting in Kökeritz’s violent criticism of the latter’s (1968) monograph on the language of the Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan period as based only on the evidence of the early grammarians describing 16–17th century English pronunciation at the cost of rejecting other sources of evidence, like internal ones (puns, rhymes, etc.). As regards Kökeritz’s monograph on Shakespeare’s pronunciation, it received both favorable (Hill 1953) and rather cool evaluations (Cercignani 1981, 4–21).

The present brief study will be confined to the examination of rhyme evidence in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, a poem which contains a large number of imperfect rhymes. Confronting these rhymes with the rhymes in Chaucer's language (ME) and with contemporary pronunciation (MoE) may help us understand to what degree rhymes in Shakespeare can be evaluated as either perfect rhymes, eye rhymes or quasi-rhymes. Taking into consideration numerous controversies surrounding each of the rhymes under discussion one of the aims of the present author will be to suggest a most acceptable, based on logic, interpretation of the rhyme. My solutions as to the validity or non-validity of rhymes in *Venus and Adonis* are only attempts, more or less successful, at finding some compromise between the statements in the two most important studies (Kökeritz's and Cercignani's) on Shakespeare's pronunciation. Special attention is given to pairs of words which did not rhyme in Middle and do not rhyme in Present-day English, but were used in the rhyming position in Shakespeare's poem.

The composition under scrutiny, *Venus and Adonis*, consists of 1194 lines and contains more than thirty types of rhyming pairs whose correctness may raise doubts. In what follows they are classified into two groups: (a) rhymes of words containing syllables with front vowels and diphthongs and (b) rhymes of words containing syllables with back vowels and diphthongs, 79 rhymes altogether. Because of frequent references, the abbreviations K and C will respectively stand for Kökeritz (1953) and Cercignani (1981).

1. Rhymes of Syllables Containing Front Vowels

Three words with original long [i:] seem not to pose major problems ('+' stands for a phonologically pure rhyme, '-' for an impure rhyme):

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| (2) | (a) | unkind 187 : wind 189 n. | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| | | wind 338 n. : mind 340 | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| | (b) | swine 1115 : groin 1116 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [əɪ]? |

The rhyme of the noun *wind* with words like *kind*, *mind*, etc. in Middle English was normal as all such words contained long [i:] inherited from later Old English after short vowels lengthening before voiced homorganic clusters, like [mb, ld, nd]. That the diphthong [aɪ] survived at least two hundred years after Shakespeare is confirmed by a quotation from another English poet, Shelley (1792–1822), who created the following final rhyme in his famous *Ode to the West Wind*:

- | | | | |
|-----|--|--|----|
| (3) | | O Wind , | 69 |
| | | If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ? | 70 |

As it is highly unlikely that *behind* contained short [ɪ] in the stressed syllable it is evident that it was *wind* which retained its long, later diphthongal, pronunciation. Shortly speaking, Shakespeare's rhyme is pure and the pairs of words in (2a) contain the diphthong [əɪ] (see also K 218). The quotation from Shelley does not support C's claim (58–59) of the presence of a short vowel in the noun *wind*, although the 16–17th century grammarians offer mutually exclusive evidence as to the pronunciation of the word. It should also be remembered that Shakespeare's (and Shelley's) sounds may have been different from the sounds used by the lower class speakers.

The peculiar rhyme type [i:] : [oɪ] (2b) (*swine* : *groin*) found in neither Middle nor Modern English reflects the specific development of the source form *grynde* with long [i:] which at the stage of [əɪ], like in some other words, have become confused with [oɪ/oɪ]. Early New English was the only period when this pair could create a correct rhyme in [əɪ] (see also (18c) below). Therefore, contemporary [oɪ] in *groin* must be interpreted as a spelling pronunciation. For details cf. Luick (565–566) where other similar forms are debated.

- | | | |
|---------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| (4) (a) | sentinel 650 : Kill, kill 652 | ME — MoE — / Sh. ? [ɪ] |
| (b) | yet 1007 : wit 1008 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [ɪ] |
| (c) | together 902 : not whither 904 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [ɪ] |

The rhyme (4a) reflects, according to K 186, the narrowing [e > ɪ], as reflected in the rhyme *-nel* : *kill* and the same tendency is seen in (4bc). There is ample evidence of such a change in high frequency words like *yet*, *yes*, etc. articulated with [ɪ] even in polite speech until the 18th century. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* both *yet* and *zit* occur, the latter rhyming with *quyt* and *smyt*. C's (295) hypothesis runs counter to that of K as he admits the possibility of the reverse change, i.e. [ɪ > e] in *kill*, which seems unlikely. It should be duly noted that the spelling *together* is occasionally found in Shakespeare's dramas, so the rhyme with *whither* is not controversial.

- | | | |
|---------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (5) (a) | jealousy 649: mutiny 651 | ME + MoE + / Sh + [əɪ] or [i:] |
| | -breeding spy 655 : jealousy 657 | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| | prophesy v. 1135 : jealousy 1137 n. | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| | tyranny 737 : misery 738 | ME + MoE + / Sh + [əɪ] or [i:] |
| | up on high 854 : majesty 856 | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| (b) | destinies 733 : infirmities 735 | ME + MoE + / Sh + [əɪ] or [i:] |
| | maladies 745 : qualities 747 | ME + MoE + / Sh + [əɪ] or [i:] |
| | parasites 848 : wits 850 | ME 0 MoE — / Sh + [ɪ] |
| (c) | lustily 869 : to the cry 870 | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| | steadfastly 1063 : mangling eye 1065 | ME + MoE — / Sh + [əɪ] |
| (d) | ruled by me 673 : subtlety 675 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [i:] |

The common feature of the set of rhymes in (5) is the occurrence of the underlying long vowel [i:] in the word-final position. In Chaucer, all the final segments in words on the left side formed correct rhymes with analogous segments in words on the right side in (5abc). In item (5d), long [i:] must be retained if it is expected to form a rhyme with long [i:] in *me*. Curiously, K ignores words like *jealousy*, *tyranny*, *majesty*, *destinies*, *maladies*, *lustily*, *steadfastly* and *subtlety* and their partners in rhyme, offering instead an overall explanation for the above cases; cf.:

- (6) Double pronunciations [əɪ] and [i:] (of variable quantity in all likelihood) were used for the substantival ending *-y* and the adverbial ending *-ly*, as may be seen from rhymes like *eye* : *chastity* : *silently* : *me* : *be* : *amity* : *solemnly* : *triumphantly* : *prosperity* : *be* : *jollity*. This is the commonest type of rhyme in Shakespeare (...) (K 1953, 219–220)

The idea of the rhymes of stressed [i:] and the vowel in the suffix *-ly* did not find support in Viëtor's (1906) early study on Shakespeare's pronunciation, but K (220) adduces examples of rhymes in both [i:] and [əɪ], which would make the rhyme in (5d) pure, i.e. *subtlety* ['sʊtləti:] : *me* [mi:]. As regards words ending in *-y*, C (1981) promotes the idea of two pronunciations, the one with long [i:] and the other with the diphthong [əɪ]. The problem is especially complex as in Early Modern English the third syllable of trisyllabic words containing [i:], originally accented, was losing its stress, which ultimately led to the reduced pronunciation [ɪ] instead of diphthongized forms [i: > əɪ > aɪ]. Only verbs in *-y* (*purify*) and a few nouns like *lullaby* contain the diphthong in Present-day English.

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------|---------|------|-----------|
| (7) (a) intends 587: friends 588 | ME — | MoE + / | Sh + | [e] |
| ends 716 v. : friends 718 | ME — | MoE + / | Sh + | [e] |
| friend 818 : contend 820 | ME — | MoE + / | Sh + | [e] |
| (b) fiends 638 : friends 640 | ME + | MoE — / | Sh + | [e] |
| (c) teeth 269 : with 270 | ME — | MoE — / | Sh + | [ɪ] or —? |

In Middle English, *friend* did not rhyme with words like *contend*, *intend*, but could potentially rhyme with the noun/verb *end* which retained for some time long [e:], a result of the lengthening before voiced homorganic clusters, although Chaucer lacks rhymes of *end* with *friend*. Shakespeare's rhymes in (7a) indicate the completion of the shortening of [e:] to [e] in *friend* (OE *frēond*, ME *frēnd*).

Much more interesting is the rhyme in (7b). The nouns *friend* and *fiend* both originally contained ME [e:] (< OE *ēo*), as is confirmed by Chaucer's rhymes on long close long [e:]

(8) *Nun's Priest's Tale* 3285–3286

Be ye affrayed of me that am youre **freend**?

Now, certes, I were worse than a **feend**,

(cf. also identical rhymes in *The Manciple's Tale* 319–320 and *The Wife of Bath's Tale* 243–244)

In current English these two nouns do not form rhymes since they contain vowels differing in both quantity and quality. K (192) is convinced that in Shakespeare these words could rhyme on [i:], [ɪ] and [e], with much fluctuation. As regards *friend*, its numerous rhymes with words like *comprehend*, *extend*, or *lend* indicate short [e]. The controversial value [ɪ] suggested by both K (192) and C (82) may be a reflection of the shortening [e: > ɪ]. It seems that if *friend* and *fiend* created a pure rhyme the most neutral variant would have been that with [e].

The last example (7c) contains a rhyme less controversial as one can accept variation in *teeth* only, not in *with*, which must have contained [ɪ]. As one is left with little choice, the presence of a pure rhyme on [ɪ] is postulated basing on the assumption of a curious shortening of long [i:] in *teeth* (K 191, C 149). However, a simpler explanation would be to postulate a quantitatively impure rhyme with some degree of qualitative similarity [i:] : [ɪ].

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| (9) (a) chat 422 : gate 424 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [æ]? or impure |
| grapes 601 : mishaps 603 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [æ]? or impure |
| (b) slave 101 : have 102 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [ɛ:] |
| grave 757 : have 759 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [ɛ:] |
| (c) fast 55 : haste 57 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [æ:/ɛ:] impure |
| fast 527 : taste 528 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [æ:/ɛ:] impure |
| taste 445 : last 447 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [ɛ:/æ:] impure |
| (d) neck 593 : back 594 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [e/æ] impure |
| wretch 703 : scratch 705 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [æ]? (cf. <i>wratch</i>) |
| (e) adder 878 : shudder 880 | ME — MoE — / Sh + [æ/ʊ~ʌ] impure |

Shakespeare's vowels in (9a) are expected to reveal the quantity and quality contrast [æ] (*chat, mishaps*) : [ɛ:] (*gate/grapes*), which corresponded to the Middle English length opposition [a] : [a:]. Also Present-day English maintains the contrast [æ] : [eɪ]. In spite of what K (165) and C (174) suggest, it is hardly acceptable that vowels with such a double contrast of quality and quantity merged as short [æ], so that the treatment of these two pairs as an imperfect rhyme seems a much better solution.

The pronunciation of the verb *have* (9b) has always depended on whether it had a function of an auxiliary or rendered the sense 'possess.' Because in the above the verb *have* is used as a non-auxiliary (*thou unask'd shalt have* 102, *needs must have* 759), an assumption of its containing a long vowel permits us to treat the rhymes of *have* with *slave* and *grave* as perfectly acceptable.

Much more problematic are cases listed under (9c), like the pair *fast* : *haste*, the vowels of which neither in Middle nor in Present-day English coalesced producing pure rhymes in Shakespeare. It is speculated, and with good reason, that words like *fast*, *last* had two principal variants whose use was determined by the social class to which a speaker belonged, i.e. [æ:] used by the educated and [a:] by common people. Whichever form was used it failed to create good rhymes with words like *haste*, *taste*, whose original long [a:] in Middle English was raised to [æ:] in the 15th century during the Great Vowel Shift and subsequently underwent another raising, to [ɛ:], a century later. Being aware of this difficulty, K (167, 176) hypothesizes that Shakespeare made use of variants with a short vowel, like *tast* (of *taste*), with [æ] which could rhyme with *fast*-words. Although C (177) also believes in this peculiar selection of variants, it again seems better to suggest here imperfect rhymes, or perhaps purely spelling-based eye-rhymes than choosing variants which were not part of the standard speech.

Also the hypothesis of the confusion between [æ] and [ɛ] to account for the “rhyme” *back* : *neck* seems highly unreliable (K 164), especially when one remembers that the latter vowel showed a tendency towards narrowing to [i] rather than lowering. Of the two solutions more convincing seems that postulating [æ]-raising in *back* to create a rhyme with *neck* (C 100), although an impure rhyme is possible. As regards the other pair in (9d) the form *wretch* may have taken its vowel from a reflection of a surviving form of OE *wræcca* (C 67; *wratch*), although this explanation seems to be a long shot.

The last rhyme/no rhyme of *adder* and *shudder* is a real puzzle (9e). The verb *shudder* contains <u> consistently interpreted by K as corresponding to the central vowel [ʌ]. K (241) offers a far-fetched explanation of “an instance of inexact linking of [ʌ] and [æ],” although it is evident that the two vowels could hardly be confused considering their completely different articulations. One must agree with C’s (120) “postulation of [a] rather than [æ]” in *adder*, although one ought to assume here the case of a very imperfect eye-rhyme where the sequence *-dder* is repeated in both words.

(10) (a) <i>beast</i> 326 : <i>blest</i> 328	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	—	[ɛ:/e] impure
<i>jest</i> 997 : <i>beast</i> 999	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	—	[e:/ɛ:] impure
<i>entreats</i> 73 : <i>frets</i> 75	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	+	[ɛ:]? (ME fr̥ete [ɛ:])
<i>guest</i> 449: <i>feast</i> 450	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	—	[e:/ɛ:] impure
<i>steps</i> 277 : <i>leaps</i> 279	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	—	[e:/ɛ:] impure
<i>confess</i> 1001 : <i>decease</i> 1002	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	—	[e:/ɛ:] impure
<i>heat</i> 91 : <i>get</i> 93	ME	—	MoE	— /	Sh	—	[ɛ:/e] impure
(b) <i>sweat</i> 175 : <i>heat</i> 177	ME	+	MoE	— /	Sh	+	[ɛ:]
<i>dread</i> 634 : <i>mead</i> 635	ME	+	MoE	— /	Sh	+	[ɛ:]
(c) <i>protest</i> 581 : <i>breast</i> 582	ME	—/+	MoE	+ /	Sh	+	[e]

breast 812 : distress'd 814	ME —/+	MoE + /	Sh +	[e]
breast 782 : rest 784, 647 : 648	ME —/+	MoE + /	Sh +	[e]
(d) fiends 638 : friends 640	ME —/+	MoE — /	Sh —	[e]?

Rhymes in this group of words is a nightmare of phonologists. K and C assume that words, usually spelt with <ea>, which should correspond to long open [ɛ:], contain now [ɛ:], now its shortened form [e], in the rhyme position. This fluctuation has its roots in Middle English, as the following rhymes from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* containing the nouns *beast* and *feast* demonstrate:

(11) *The Knight's Tale* 1975–1976

First on the wal was peynted a forest, [e]
 In which ther dwelleth neither man ne best [...] [ɛ:]

The Wife of Bath's Tale 1033–1034

What thyng that worldly wommen loven best. [e]
 This knyght ne stood nat stille as doth a best [...] [ɛ:]

The Franklin's Tale 1369–1370

Hadde slayn Phidon in Atthenes atte feste, [ɛ:]
 They comanded his doghtres for t' areste. [e]

The Second Nun's Tale 239–241

The angel seyde, "God liketh thy requeste, [e]
 And bothe with the palm of martyrdom
 Ye shullen come unto his blisful feste." [ɛ:]

Let us return to Shakespeare's language. The explanations suggested in the phonologies are far from convincing. C (168) speculates on the rise of LME [e] by shortening of long open [ɛ:] "before a single final consonant," as in *heat* (: *get*) etc. But while shortenings before consonantal clusters were a norm, a reduction of length before single final consonants seems highly unlikely. Postulating pure rhymes in cases when evidence indicates imperfect rhymes is extremely risky. Consequently in cases like those in (10a) it is safer to assume the presence of an imperfect rhyme so frequently found in traditional English poets instead of inventing pure rhymes on the basis of sounds produced through occasional changes usually occurring in non-standard varieties. Thus the rhyme *entreats* : *frets* (11a) can be considered pure if we assume a long, not short, vowel in the verb *fret* which reflects the medieval form *frete* with long open [ɛ:] (OE *fretan*).

In Middle English, the two pairs in (11b), *heat* : *sweat* and *mead* : *dread*, formed pure rhymes on [ɛ:] and, although long vowels in *sweat* and *dread* were affected by the Early New English shortening before dental consonants, they still retained the long vowel in Shakespeare. In spite of such clear evidence,

K (201–202) makes reference to the short variant in *heat*, while C (78), who does not reject this interpretation, rather supports the version of a rhyme on long [ɛ:].

The subgroup (11c) differs from the former in that the vowel in *breast* which, as the <ea> spellings indicate, should have been [ɛ:], not rhyming with words like *distress'd*, *protest*, *rest*. However the spelling <ea> is a reflection of [e] lengthened in an open syllable in inflected forms (*bre-ste*), while the short variant is due to the reduction of length in *brest* (uninflected; cf. Berndt 1960, 23 and C 75). Consequently, Chaucer's language could feature both a short and a long vowel in the rhyme. In Shakespeare's language rhymes with *rest* etc. should rather involve short variants so in the table above short [e] is suggested in *breast* as the rhyme vowel. As a conclusion, let me quote C who writes: "None of these rhymes is, however, unambiguous, for at least some of the words involved retain a variant with ē [i.e. ɛ:; JW] into early Modern English." (73)

The rhyme of *friend* and *fiend* (11d) had a long tradition as both words contained the same diphthong <ēo> in West Saxon. Their Middle English forms could also rhyme before the shortening took place in *frēnd*. In Shakespeare the situation is unclear and C (82) proposes a rhyme on either [i:] or [ɪ], the latter allegedly reflecting the shortening of [i:] in both words. But an explanation in terms of "eye rhymes" seems to be closer to facts.

(12) tears 49 n. : hairs 51, 191 : 192	ME — MoE — / Sh — [i:/ɛ:] impure
swears 80 : tears 82 n.	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ɛ:/i:] impure
ear 145 : hair 147	ME — MoE — / Sh — [i:/ɛ:] impure
ear 779 : there 780	ME — MoE — / Sh — [i:/ɛ:] impure
spear 1112 : there 1114	ME — MoE — / Sh — [i:/ɛ:] impure
fear 320 : there 322	ME — MoE — / Sh — [i:/ɛ:] impure
wear 1081 : fear 1083	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ɛ:/i:] impure
wear 506 : year 508	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ɛ:/i:] impure
years 524 : forbears 526	ME — MoE — / Sh — [i:/ɛ:] impure

The exact value of vowels before <r> is frequently hard to determine with acceptable accuracy. The spelling <ea> which, as is expected, should represent long open [ɛ:] in Shakespeare, i.e. a vowel preserved from Middle English without being affected by the first stage of the Great Vowel Shift. But K's (178) statement concerning the situation of such words in Shakespeare seems far-fetched when he claims: "It is evident from the rhymes, puns, and spellings that, when followed by r, ME ā, ai, ē, and in some cases ē had been completely leveled in Shakespeare's language." This view reflects K's conviction that rhymes in Shakespeare were pure and based on a single vowel common to both words. If so what could be the vowel under which all these vowels coalesced? In the later study C (148–149 ff.), expresses his doubts whether such pairs were intended rhymes. This would be possible if some rare variants were concealed under the traditional spellings with non-standard pronunciation, as was the case with *year* (ME *yeer*). This noun in

spite of its spelling <ea> comes from a dialectal Anglian variant *zēar* (not WS *zēar*) as one could speculate and, consequently, it contains [i:] not [ɛ:] in Shakespeare, which confirms that the word was affected by the Great Vowel Shift.

Considering the fact that the above pairs did not form pure rhymes in Chaucer, nor do they create rhymes in Present-day English, the most reasonable solution is to assume that the situation must have been the same at the intermediate stage, that of Shakespeare's language, and rhymes like *fear* : *wear*, etc. are in all probability eye rhymes. In most other cases we must accept absence of pure rhymes, which was not a rare feature of the language of the Renaissance poets.

2. Rhymes of Syllables Containing Back Vowels

In the present study the number of controversial rhymes containing a back vowel or a diphthong is significantly lower than that of rhymes containing the front nuclei. The chief difficulties are connected with words containing short [ʊ/ʌ] which appear to be eye rhymes with words containing long *ō*-vowels. The first group of examples discussed below is parallel to those under (2a, *wind*, *kind*):

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (13) round 368 : wound 370 n | ME + MoE — / Sh — [əʊ/u:] impure |
| hound 913 : wound 915 n. | ME + MoE — / Sh — [əʊ/u:] impure |

The seemingly pure rhymes in the above pairs are controversial. A perfect rhyme on [u:] in Middle English is not matched by a contemporary rhyme because the vowel in the noun *wound* does not correspond to a diphthong. In spite of the evidence of the grammarians (Gill 1621, Butler 1634) who suggest [u:] in *wound*, K (246) considers these pairs to form perfect rhymes. But C (195–196) calls attention to numerous spellings (e.g. *woon'd*) which clearly indicate a long vowel, not a diphthong. The latter would be of course correct in the past tense form *wound* (of the verb *wind*), but forms in (13) are nouns, not verbs. If one rejects the influence of the verb *wound* pt. on the pronunciation of the noun, an imperfect rhyme (eye rhyme) must be considered a good solution in (13).

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (14) (a) love 433 : move 435 | ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ/u:] impure |
| love 79 : remove 81 (185 : 186) | ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ/u:] impure |
| love 38 : prove 40, 595 : 597 | ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ/u:] impure |
| reprove 787 : love 789 | ME — MoE — / Sh — [u:/ʊ] impure |
| (b) grove 865 : love 867 | ME — MoE — / Sh — [o:/ʊ] impure |
| over 571 : lover 573 | ME — MoE — / Sh — [o:/ʊ] impure |

Considering the development of the three types of words, i.e. *love*, *move* and *grove* one should obtain regular [u/ʌ] (*love* etc.), [u:] (*move* etc.) and [o:] (*grove* etc.)

in Shakespeare, which means that no pure rhymes in pairs like those above would be possible around 1600. In the set of rhymes containing *love*, a noun or a verb, with the underlying short vowel [u], concealed under the spelling <o>, is paired with verbs containing long close [o:] (e.g. *move*; 14a) or long open [ɔ:] (e.g. *grove*; 14b). It is common knowledge that short [ʊ] in *love* must have been lowered and centralized to [ʌ]. K (243), a firm believer in the completion of the process of centralizing [ʊ] to [ʌ] in Shakespeare's language, had no doubts that words with that short vowel formed imperfect rhymes with items in (14ab). C (131–132) rejects the hypothesis of eye rhymes in words, calling it “gratuitous” and postulating instead rhymes depending on either LME [ʊ] or [u:]. Of the two values only the former can be accepted as a rhyme vowel in Shakespeare, although the *o*-spelling of *love* can theoretically correspond to either short [ʊ] or to long close [o:] (from open syllable lengthening in dialects) and [u:] on the other.

Curiously, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* has no rhymes of *love* except those with *above* (around 56 such rhymes)! Moreover, numerous inflected forms of *love* (with *-ed*, *-s*, and *-ing*) never stand in the rhyme position. This means that Chaucer was unable to find proper words with which *love* could rhyme, although sequences with <-ove> in other words were available. K's and especially C's optimistic views on the frequent rhymes of the (14a) type in Shakespeare cannot be shared when one considers that rhymes of that kind were missing in both Middle and Modern English.

(15) along 1093 : sung 1095	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [ʊ/ʌ] impure
tongue 217 : wrong 219, 329 : 330	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ/ʌ] : [ʊ] impure
tongues 775 : songs 777	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ/ʌ] : [ʊ] impure
young 419 : strong 420	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ/ʌ] : [ʊ] impure

Under (15) are listed rhymes of words which would nowadays exhibit the contrast [ʊ/ʌ] : [ʊ]. These words formed good rhymes neither in Middle nor in Modern English and therefore it is hard to accept a common rhyme vowel for, e.g. *sung* and *along*, in Shakespeare's language. K assumed that [ʊ] in Shakespeare was fully centralized to [ʌ], a view not shared by other historical linguists who postulate either conservative pronunciation (C 125; *bushes* : *rushes*, with [ʊ]) or a kind of an unrounded mid back vowel matched by rounded [ɔ]. Last but not least the explanation in terms of eye rhymes in the case of *tongue* : *wrong* and *tongues* : *songs* seems more acceptable than suggesting rhymes like [tʊŋg] : [wʀʊŋg] (C 111), [tɔŋg] : [wɔŋg] (C 130) or even assuming that these words had [ʌ], if one believes in the validity of K's fully centralized vowel in the period. Although certain grammarians, like Butler (1634) or Hodges (1643), identified such “rhyming” forms in the pronunciation of some speakers they need not be assumed to have become part of Shakespeare's poetic skill.

(16) (a) flood 824 : wood 826	ME + MoE — / Sh — [u:/ʊ] : [ʊ] impure?
wood 740 : blood 742	ME + MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [u:/ʊ] impure?
good 1181 : blood 1182	ME + MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [u:/ʊ] impure?
stood 1121 : blood 1122	ME + MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [u:/ʊ] impure?
(b) one 293 : bone 294	ME + MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [o:] impure
one 1069 : gone 1071	ME + MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [ɒ] impure
none pron. 389 : gone 390	ME + MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [ɒ] impure
(c) sun 190 : gone 188	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ʊ] : [ɒ] impure

In *The Canterbury Tales* the noun *flood* appears line-finally nine times, always rhyming with *wood*, such rhymes being identical with those in (16a). Chaucer proved to be much more versatile in inventing rhymes in the case of *blood* which in the same poem rhymes 23 times with *wood*, 6 times with *stood* and once with *good*. Curiously, from (16a) it is evident that in his poem Shakespeare made use of exactly the same words as Chaucer to form rhymes.

Whereas Middle English rhymes were perfect and involved the vowel [o:] (close), the same can hardly be said about rhymes in Shakespeare (16a). Referring to these rhymes K (236) states that “His [i.e. Shakespeare’s; JW] rhymes give no clue to his pronunciation.” C (123) suggests that in *blood*, *flood*, following the raising [o:] > [u:] (Great Vowel Shift) we witness the “first shortening” of long [u:] before [d], the chronologically delayed “second shortening” affecting later words like *good*, *stood*, *wood*. This means that the pure character of rhymes of *blood*, *flood* in which long [u:] must have been shortened early could hardly rhyme with *good*, *stood*, *wood* in which shortening occurred at some later stage. Such rhymes could be possible only directly after the Great Vowel Shift when [o:] was raised to [u:].

As regards (16bc), in *The Canterbury Tales* the high frequency item *one* (*oon*) and its negative partner *none* (*noon*) formed perfect rhymes with *bone* (*boon*), and *gone* (*goon*), the common vowel being long open [ɔ:], while the pair *sun* : *gone* did not form a rhyme; see the following examples:

- (17) a) ones : bones (*The Pardoner’s Tale* 695–696, *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* 3427–3428)
 b) oon : goon (*The Knight’s Tale* 2509–2510)
 c) none : gone (*The General Prologue* 449–450)

The pronunciation of vowels in Shakespeare’s words listed under (17bc) is difficult to identify. The evolution of OE [ɑ:] in *ān* and *nān* led through the stages ME [ɔ:] > [o:] > [u:] (raisings) > [ʊ] (shortening) > [ʌ] (centralization) and the rhymes in Early New English allow for various interpretations (see K 232 and C 121, 130 etc.). Any version of pure rhymes can be abolished due to mutually exclusive potential rhyming contexts with now the short now the long vowel, close or open. Considering these complications perhaps the idea of eye rhymes seems

most reasonable, except, of course, (16c) where the rhyme *sun* : *gone*, according to C (112), depends on [u] (from [o:] < ME [ɔ:]). But did Shakespeare pronounce the latter word as [gun]? Would you believe it?

(18) (a) <i>lost</i> 1075 : <i>boast</i> 1077	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ɔ:] : [o:] impure
(b) <i>forth</i> 416 : <i>worth</i> 418	ME — MoE — / Sh — [ɔ:] : [3:] impure
(c) <i>voice</i> 134 : <i>juice</i> 136	ME + ? MoE — / Sh — [əi] ?
(d) <i>brow</i> 139 n. : <i>grow</i> 141	ME — MoE — / Sh — [əu] : [o:] impure
<i>glow</i> 337 : <i>brow</i> 339 n.	ME — MoE — / Sh — [əu] : [o:] impure

The last set of rhymes illustrates other difficulties encountered while interpreting vocalic nuclei. K (233) finds it impossible to tell whether the rhyme in (18a; *lost* : *boast*) depends upon a short or a long vowel, while C (187) recommends short [o], although the possibility of open [ɔ:] lengthened before a fricative in *lost* cannot be excluded. These discrepancies make either explanation possible, but in such cases one can postulate another impure rhyme whose vowels are phonetically close to each other: this rhyme reflects spelling pronunciation.

The rhyme *forth* : *worth* (18b) was unacceptable in Middle English. In *The Canterbury Tales*, *forth* is used 203 times and *worth* 45 times, but neither of them ever appears in a rhyme position, which not only means that for Chaucer they were not fit for rhyming with each other but also that they lacked rhyming partners in general. Why then Shakespeare constructed such a rhyme will remain his secret. In this case a solution is evidently to postulate another eye rhyme. But considering item (18c) one can agree with K's and C's suggestions of a short-lived rhyme on [əi]. An analogous back diphthong [əu] is postulated by C (224) for (18d), while K (245) calls such rhymes traditional, not reflecting pronunciation current in Shakespeare's time. If so, in *Venus and Adonis* they can be treated as impure rhymes.

Conclusion

This brief review of problems connected with the interpretation of pairs of words in the rhyme position in a Shakespeare poem shows how complicated matter we deal with. Not only early grammarians had problems with the identification of pronunciation in the early 17th century but also contemporary linguists having at their disposal numerous accounts of historical English speech are unable to reconstruct standard pronunciation of the period. Consequently, a reader of Shakespeare's works should approach his texts with much care and remember that rhymes are not reliable and very frequently similarities of spellings do not reflect those of pronunciations. Therefore it should be emphasized that in comparison with Chaucer's rhymes, which were in general pure, a similar purity does not

characterize Shakespeare's rhymes, and efforts at inventing a common vocalic denominator for them frequently lead to nowhere. Therefore a reader of Shakespeare should view with utmost caution especially those pairs of words in the rhyme position which formed no correct rhymes in both Middle and Present-day English. In such cases an assumption of their pure character in the intermediate period (Shakespeare's language) is very often unconvincing. To verify whether his/her ideas of Shakespeare's pronunciation are correct the reader of the present should refer to Crystal (2012) and listen to the CD recordings of the great poet's speech made by the expert on Shakespeare's language.

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