

The phonology of early 19th century Tyneside English as revealed in Thomas Wilson's *The Pitman's Pay*

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Tyneside Dialect Literature

A very large body of poems, songs, short prose texts, etc. from the start of the 19th century

- dozens of different authors, from both WC and MC backgrounds
- published as broadsheets, pamphlets, chapbooks, author's editions, collected editions (e.g. *Allan's Tyneside Songs*), in newspapers, etc.

Written mostly or entirely in non-standard orthography to represent many aspects of traditional 19th century Tyneside dialect

There is evidence of orthographic normalisation in the second half of the 19th century, especially in the collected editions (Brunner 1925, Harker 1972, Shorrocks 1996)

- and 20th century Tyneside sources (e.g. *Larn Yersel' Geordie*) often includes features which were probably extinct but which have become part of an orthographic tradition

Thomas Wilson

Born in 1773, Low Fell, Gateshead to poor parents

Worked in the pits from age 8 to 19 as a 'trapper boy' and then a hewer

Educated in evening classes and became a teacher in 1791-2

In 1798, he became a clerk, ultimately becoming a partner in a counting-house in 1807

Elected as a councillor on Gateshead Town Council in 1835

Retired in 1853, dying in 1858, a respected philanthropist and poet

One of the first generation of Tyneside dialect writers (Hermeston 2009), along with John Shield (1768), Thomas Thompson (1773), John Selkirk (1783), William Midford (1788), Robert Emery (1794), and Robert Gilchrist (1797)



The Pitman's Pay

First published 1826-1830 (in three parts)

Definitive author's edition (with other poems by Wilson) published in 1843 (and again, with further additions, in 1872)

- this is important given the considerable changes made to content and spelling by editors of collected editions of Tyneside poems and songs, such as *Allan's Tyneside Songs*

TPP is a long poem about the domestic and working life of the pit families of Gateshead, focussing on their lives on 'pay night'

The poem consists of a narrative frame in Standard English orthography and dialogue (actually lengthy monologues) in dialect orthography

One of the earliest substantial pieces of 19th century Tyneside dialect literature

<i>Thou knaws for weeks aw've gyen away</i>	Thou knows for weeks I've gone away
<i>At twee o'clock o' Monday mornin',</i>	At two o'clock on Monday morning,
<i>And niver seen the leet o' day</i>	And never seen the light of day
<i>Until the Sabbath day's returnin'.</i>	Until the Sabbath day's returning.
(B.168)	

<i>For if the human frame te spare</i>	For if the human frame to spare
<i>Frae toil and pain ayont conceivin',</i>	From toil and pain beyond conceiving,
<i>Ha'e ought te de wi' gettin' there,</i>	Have ought to do with getting there,
<i>Aw think he mun gan strite to heeven.</i>	I think he must go straight to heaven.
(B.176)	

<i>This myed me maister for mysel',</i>	This made me master for myself,
<i>Wi' shorter wark and better pays;</i>	With shorter work and better pays;
<i>And at maw awn hand didn't fyel</i>	And at my own hand didn't fail
<i>Te suin get bits o' canny claes.</i>	To soon get bits of canny clothes.
(B.179)	

Facts and figures

Narrative frame in StE orthography (17%), direct speech in dialect orthography (83%)

- 9203 (7675) words
- 1376 (1135) lines
- 344 (283.75) 4-line stanzas
- In 3 parts ('A', 'B', 'C')

Strict (often rather forced) iambic tetrameter with occasional line-initial trochaic substitutions and fairly common weak endings

Very regular A-B-A-B rhyme scheme

Rhymes

568 rhymes in the dialect part of TPP

Only 10 of these cannot be interpreted as exact rhymes

- five wrenched rhymes (e.g. *free-slavery*, B.169.673/5)
- three near or eye rhymes (e.g. *on-son*, B.151.601/3)
- one rhyme due to etymological confusion (*here-bear* (n.), B.164.654/6; *bear* (v.), not *bear* (n.), traditionally rhymes with *here*)
- one non-rhyme (*fand-need* 'found-need', C.275.1097)

Occasional rhymes mixing traditional and non-traditional pronunciations

- e.g. *best-breast* (B.129.513/5), suggesting /e/ in both words when we would expect /e/ in *best* and /i:/ in *breast* traditionally
- cf. Smith (2007) on Robert Burns' mixing of Scots and English rhymes

Spelling

"The classic work in the se.Nb. [southeast Northumbrian] or Pitman's dialect is Thomas Wilson's *Pitman's Pay* ... It has set the norm for spelling, which, however, is rather confusing to a Southerner" (Ellis 1889: 639)

c. 30.5% of words in non-standard spelling (in addition to morphological and lexical differences)

- i.e. far more than representing stereotypes and well-known patterns
- Wilson's orthographic practices are somewhat different than those used by other authors in the same period and after, probably due to their early date, slightly more southerly location, and lack of fixed ways of representing Tyneside dialect in writing at the time
- Consistent non-standard spellings for particular words and phonemes

Respellings represent phonemic differences (e.g. <neet> for 'night'), not phonetic realisations (e.g. pronunciation of /r/ as uvular), though some spellings and rhymes suggest particular pronunciations (cf. <ye>)

heaven (< OE heofon)

The spelling <heeven> is not used by other writers (usually <hiv(v)en>)

Word	Spelling	Rhyme	Spelling	Part	Stanza	Line
heaven	heeven	believing	believin'	A	99	396
heaven	heeven	conceiving	conceivin'	B	176	704
heaven	heeven	living	leevin'	B	202	808
heaven	heeven	living	leevin'	C	309	1236
heaven	heeven			C	335	1339
heavenly	heevenly			B	175	700

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We tük wi' thänks what héeven sént

heaven (< OE heofon)

Rydland (1998)

heaven n. ALH hivøn || BAM hevŋ³ || BLF hiv(ə)n || BLH hevŋ² || CNW hivøn || COX ivøn || CUL hivøn^{1,2}, hivŋ² || GLN hivŋ || HBT hevŋ^{2,3} || MTF hivŋ || NBI hivŋ^{2,7,9}, hevŋ^{2,6,9} || NBR hivŋ¹ || NBU hiv(ə)n || OVH hivŋ || STH hivŋ, hevŋ || WLR (h)ivŋ²

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live v. ALH liv || BAM liv^{1,5,7} || BLH liv¹, liv¹ || CNW liv || COX liv¹, livd² p.t. || CUL liv || HBT liv^{2,4}, liv^{2,3} || HTL liv^{1,2} p.p., livd¹ p.p. || NBI liv^{2,7,9} || NBU liv || STH *livd p.p. || WLR liv^{1-2,4}

heaven (< OE heofon)

< OE *seofon*

seven num. ALH siv(ə)n || BAM siv(ə)n^{1,3} || BLF siv(ə)n, siv(ə)n¹ || BLH siv(ə)n¹, siv(ə)n¹ || BRW sev(ə)n || CAP siv(ə)n^{1,2} || CNW siv(ə)n || COX siv(ə)n || CUL siv(ə)n, siv(ə)n², siv(ə)n || GLN siv(ə)n || HBT siv(ə)n^{2,4,6}, siv(ə)n^{1,2,6} || HTL siv(ə)n^{1,2} || MTF siv(ə)n || NBI siv(ə)n^{1,3,7,9}, siv(ə)n^{2,6,8,9} || NBR siv(ə)n^{1,2}, siv(ə)n^{1,2} (*rare*) || NBU siv(ə)n || NCL siv(ə)n¹ || OVH siv(ə)n^{0,6}, sev(ə)n⁶ || RTH siv(ə)n^{1,3,6} || STD siv(ə)n || STH siv(ə)n || WLR siv(ə)n^{1,3,5}, siv(ə)n^{1,2}

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heaven	heeven			C	335	1339
heavenly	heevenly			B	175	700
seven	seeven	receiving	receivin'	C	235	937

heaven (< OE heofon)

/hi:vən/ Wright (1905)

hivn Sh.I.
hivn em. & wm.Sc. sm.Sc., but s.Ayr. *hevn*.
hivn Uls., but Ant. *hevn*.
ivvn snw. & se.Yks.
ivn Dur. ne.Nrf.

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The FACE vowel in TE

Well known, stereotyped traditional Geordie [iə] in FACE (Watt & Milroy 1999)

Beal (2000: 350) assumes that it is this pronunciation that is being represented in 19th century Tyneside DL as <ye>

- e.g. *agyen*, *myed*, *tyeble* = 'again', 'made', 'table'

FACE has its origin in two main vowels

- nME /a:/ (= 'MATE') and /ai/ (= 'BAIT')
- our oldest linguistic data (Ellis 1889, Rydland 1998) show that MATE typically has [jɛ] (or [iɛ])
- BAIT had [e:] (this later became [eə] > [iə] and replaced [jɛ] in MATE, as evidenced in Rydland 1998 and the *Survey of English Dialects*)

FACE in The Pitman's Pay

The usual range of spellings of the FACE vowel spellings are present in TPP

- <ai> (*tail*), <ay> (*pay*), <ey> (*obey*), <aCe> (*place*)
- <eigh> (*eight*) also occurs, but it rhymes with PRICE words (e.g. *quite*), as also evidenced in the rhymes and later linguistic descriptions
- <aigh> (*straight*) is absent, being replaced by <eigh> or <iCe>, indicating identity with PRICE as expected

The non-standard spelling <ye> commonly occurs in FACE words

- e.g. <fyeye> *face*, <myed> *made*, <nyem> *name*

For well known historical phonological reasons

- some other FACE words have entirely different vowel spellings (e.g. *complain* <compleen>)
- numerous non-FACE words have FACE vowel spellings (e.g. *master* <maister>, *bone* <byen>)

FACE in TPP – rhymes

- All rhymes with these spellings analysed, regardless of etymological vowel
- Unfortunately very few <ai> spellings in rhymes, though they never rhyme with <ye>
- <ay> is only used morpheme finally, other spellings aren't
- <ye> and <e> rhyme frequently (i.e. <ye> = /jɛ/, not /iə/; cf. Ellis, etc.)
- <aCe> is not common but can rhyme with either type

ai	ay	aCe	ye	e	
2	1	4	0	0	ai
	33	0	0	0	ay
		9	1	2	aCe
			18	23	ye
				26	e

FACE in TPP – spellings

Only FACE words with nME /a:/ (MATE) and /ai/ (BAIT) in non-morpheme-final position analysed

59 BAIT tokens, 21 (35.6%) spelt with <ye> (otherwise with <ai>)

- BUT these are confined to 4 lexemes: *again*, *fail*, *tailor*, *waist*

170 MATE tokens, 100 with non-standard spellings (30 lexemes)

- 1 spelt with <ya> (*able*)
- 2 spelt with <y> (*pate* and *laced*; the glossary in TPP gives these as <pyet> and <lyec'd>, so these look like type-setting errors)
- 97 spelt with <ye> (57.1%)
- Otherwise with <aCe>

'BAIT' words with <ye> spellings

waist < OE *wæst*weahst (ME *waast*, i.e. from ME /a:/); its modern <ai> spelling is unetymological

fail (<fyel>) and *tailor* (<tylyer>) had [ʌ] (*L-mouillé*) in nME and Older Scots

- Anglo-Norman *failir*, *tailour*
- [ʌ] 'swallowed' the preceding diphthong glide, causing a change of the vowel from /ai/ to /a:/ (see Aitken & Macafee 2002: 51)
- i.e. these had /a:/ in northern dialects too

again is widely attested with reflexes of /a:/, not /ai/ in northern dialects (e.g. Ellis 1889 gives *iē* = [jɛ]), and appears to have had a nME and Older Scots variant with /a:/, from OE *ongēan* rather than *ongegn* (Aitken & Macafee 2002: 142)

- i.e. not a BAIT word either in northern dialects

<aCe> words

Various factors are involved in Wilson using the <aCe> spelling for some MATE words

- possibly including failure to respell in some cases
- and complex etymological origins in others (e.g. *change*, *danger*, *strange*, which may not historically be MATE words at all)
- later studies suggest that these mostly have /e:/ despite their origin in /a:/

Factor	<aCe> (n = 70)	<ye> (n = 95)
Non-final stressed syllable (e.g. <i>calculator</i>)	48.6%	8.4%
Onset /l/ or /r/ (e.g. <i>place</i> , <i>trade</i>)	41.4%	6.3%
Following voiced fricative (e.g. <i>save</i>)	17.1%	2.1%
Following palatal consonant (e.g. <i>age</i>)	12.9%	0%

Summary

i.e. there are no genuine BAIT words with <ye> spellings

Wilson only ever gives <ye> spellings in TPP for words which had nME /a:/

- and he does so even when the Standard English spelling obscures the etymological vowel (*again*, *fail*, *tailor* and *waist*)

<ye> unambiguously represents /jɛ/ (recorded in later studies), not [iə]

<aCe> words require further study to pick apart the various interacting factors mitigating against <ye> spellings

- but crucially, Thomas Wilson isn't just using <aCe> randomly
- it is heavily preferred when the vowel isn't in stressed final position and when an /l/ or /r/ appears in the preceding onset
- following voiced fricatives and palatal consonants also have an effect
- a detailed analysis of a larger corpus of Wilson's spellings (from all his dialect poems) is needed to clarify these patterns

Conclusions

Detailed linguistic analysis of TPP shows that Thomas Wilson was accurately and consistently representing non-obvious and complex features of early 19th century Tyneside dialect

- features hidden by Standard English orthography, not represented by other authors, and/or not well recorded in later linguistic surveys
- phonological information based on Wilson's spellings and rhymes is retrievable for hundreds of words in the dialect
- TPP is a great start point for trying to understand how the FACE merger proceeded in TE

TPP is an invaluable source of information on the historical and synchronic phonology (from an early 19th century perspective) of Tyneside English

- ultimately aim: to compile a glossary triangulating spelling and rhyme evidence from TPP (and Wilson's other dialect poems) with more recent linguistic data and earlier historical phonological patterns

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