

death of “la belle Aude” has not nineteen but eighteen end words, and these do not include all five of those Adams mentions.

His first example from this source, “Il pleut [sic] des yeux” (literally, “It rains from his eyes”) is presumably meant to be “Il pleure des yeux” (“He cries from his eyes”), since the Old French is “Pluret des oilz” (l. 3,712 in Bédier’s edition). However, neither the modern French nor the Old French expression actually assonates. First, *pleure* has an open *æ*, *yeux* a close *æ* (“subassonance,” if we will). Second, the likely phonetic transcription of the ca. 1100 Old French, based on study of the epic’s endwords (e.g., *oilz* in l. 3,629), is [plúræ des wǣwts]—so no assonance at all!

Other examples, though, could be used to demonstrate the point that internal assonance is significant in the *Chanson de Roland*. Just seven verses later, we find:

Après Rollant que jo vive remaigne! (l. 3,719),

with assonance between the caesura word and end word (*ai* and *ā* assonate in *Roland*, as in the end words of this very *laisse*).

Adams’ other example is “le *grand Roland*.” This phrase, however, must be taken from a modern translation, since it does not occur in any line or variant of this *laisse*.

In the four lines quoted from Heine, it might be more exact to see examples of “subassonance” in *Brust* and *Glut* (open and close *u*, respectively), *Wo* and *holde* (close and open *o*), and *Lampe* and *Lager* (front and back *a*); still, even these incomplete “vowel echoes” certainly deserve comment. (A host of examples from other German poets will be found in Robert P. Newton’s subtle and methodical article “The First Voice: Vowel Configuration in the German Lyric,” *JEGP*, 68, Oct. 1969, 565–92.)

Despite these few imprecisions—doubtless hard to avoid in crossing the bounds of our traditional “fields”—this was a fine and stimulating article, and I hope an advance sample of the cross-disciplinary studies that *PMLA*’s “new editorial policy” may bring us.

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To the Editor:

Percy G. Adams’ recent article, “The Historical Importance of Assonance to Poets,” contains far too many errors and questionable assumptions. His definition of assonance, “the repetition of a stressed vowel, but not of a following consonant . . .” (p. 8), doesn’t

mention “diphthongs,” which differ significantly from simple vowels, and yet he finds assonance (p. 10) in line 248 of *Beowulf*: “*eorla ofer eorþan, thonne is ēower sum.*” Also, he makes no distinction here between *eo*, [εo], or [εə], and *ēo*, [e:ɔ], or [e:ə], diphthongs which differ both quantitatively and qualitatively. When (p. 11) he quotes line 459 from *Beowulf*, “*Geslōh thīn fæder fæthe mæste,*” he equates the vowels *ǣ* [æ] and *ē* [æ:], making no quantitative distinction, even though such a distinction in the earlier periods of the language was phonemic. (*Fæthe*, according to the Klaeber edition, should read *fæhthe*.) Adams also finds assonance (p. 11) in the phrase “*forgytheth ond forgymeth*” (*forgymeth*, in Klaeber), thus equating *ȳ*[i] and *ȳ*[i:].

Adams errs (p. 11) when he states that stressed “[o]” occurs six times in the lines from *Sir Gawain*, “*The bores hed watz borne before the burnes selven / That him forferde in the forthe thurz forse of his honde so stronge.*” The *o*’s italicized are either long open *ō* [ɔ:], *bores*, *borne* (perhaps [ɔ]), or short *ǒ*[ɔ], before, *forferde*, *forthe*, *forse*. (Although the *o*’s are not italicized in *honde* and *stronge*, they also represent stressed [ɔ] and could be used to strengthen the thesis of the article.) The fact that Adams cites [ɔ] elsewhere in reference to Shakespeare (p. 14) would indicate that he considers [ɔ] and [o] to be different sounds (as indeed they are), so that the error here is underscored. I am also puzzled about why he italicizes the *r*’s after the *o*’s in these lines, since his definition of assonance specifically rules out the repetition of a following consonant. Similar instances occur later (p. 15) when Chaucer’s “*yerde smerte*” and “*poudre-marchant tart*” and Shakespeare’s “*porportion’d course*” are cited. These examples are confusing also in light of the statement immediately preceding which apparently refers to them as examples of “single phoneme echoes.” Surely the *r* is a separate phoneme. Other examples occur when James Thomson’s “*cheartful error*” (p. 13) and the *Beowulf* poet’s “*worda ond worca*” (p. 11) are cited. (Incidentally, both Day-Serjeantson and Davis give *worch* instead of Adams’ *worche*, p. 11, in line 2,096 of *Sir Gawain*.)

Nor is Adams out of trouble when he considers the Early Modern English poets. The diphthong in words like *I* and *die*, continually referred to as [ai], should probably be something more like [əi]. At any rate, in the three lines quoted from Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* (p. 12) I count only *eight* stressed [əi]’s, and look in vain for the *nine* referred to. Again, when the author quotes the lines from Spenser (p. 12), “*And fayre Philotime she rightly hight, / The fairest wight that wonneth under skye,*” he (the printer?) neglects to point out the most outstanding use of assonance, namely “*fayre / fairest,*” the stressed vowels being [ɛ:]. Adams’ treatment, or lack of treatment, of the