

English 4190, Milton

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Supplementary Readings: shocking news about the English pronunciation of **wind** prior to 1800.

“Lycidas” reads “We drove afield, and both together heard / What time the Gray-fly **winds** her sultry horn”

Since about 1800 the word has been pronounced with a short “i,” but in Milton’s time both the noun and the verb were pronounced with a long ī : wīnd, partly because of the greater abundance of rhymes, for example:

from Shakespeare, “Sonnet XIV” (1609)

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck;
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons’ quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and **wīnd**,
Or say with princes if it shall go well,
By oft predict that I in heaven find:

from Shakespeare, “Sonnet LI” (1609)

Thus can my love excuse the slow offence
Of my dull bearer when from thee I speed:
From where thou art why should I haste me thence?
Till I return, of posting is no need.
O, what excuse will my poor beast then find,
When swift extremity can seem but slow?
Then should I spur, though mounted on the **wīnd**;
In winged speed no motion shall I know:

from Donne, “Song” (1633)

GO and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil’s foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy’s stinging,
And find
What **wīnd**
Serves to advance an honest mind.

from Thomas Carew, “A Prayer to the Wind” (1640)

GO, thou gentle whispering **wīnd**,
Bear this sigh, and if thou find
Where my cruel fair doth rest
Cast it in her snowy breast,
So, inflamed by my desire,
It may set her heart afire.

from Henry Vaughan: “The Storm” (1650)

But when his waters billow thus,
Dark storms, and **wīnd**
Incite them to that fierce discuss,
Else not inclin’d,
Thus the enlarg’d, enraged air
Uncalms these to a flood ;
But still the weather that’s most fair
Breeds tempests in my blood.
Lord, then round me with weeping clouds,
And let my mind
In quick blasts sigh beneath those shrouds,
A spirit-**wīnd**;

Even as late as...

from William Collins: “Epistle to Hanmer” (1744)

Those Sibyl-leaves, the sport of every **wīnd**,
(For Poets ever were a careless kind)
By thee dispos’d, no farther toil demand,
But, just to Nature, own thy forming hand.

These are not “eye-rhymes” but real aural ones. The *OED* explains it thus:

The normal pronunciation would be (waīnd), as in *behind*, *bind*, *find*, *grind*, *hind*, *mind*, *rind*, etc., and this pronunciation remains both in dialect and in ordinary poetical usage. The pronunciation (wīnd) became current in polite speech during the 18th c.; it has been used occas. by poets, but the paucity of appropriate rhyming words (such as *sinned*, *thinned*, *dinned*) and the ‘thinness’ of the sound have been against its general use in verse. The short vowel of (wīnd) is presumably due to the influence of the derivatives *windmill*, *windy*, in which (ī) is normal.

1747 JOHNSON *Plan of Engl. Dict.* 12 “To fix the pronunciation of monosyllables, by placing with them words of correspondent sound...so that the words *wound* and *wind*, as they are now frequently pronounced, will not rhyme to *sound*, and *mind*.”