

***Thou'rt a strange Fillee:*
a possible source for 'y-tensing'
in seventeenth-century Lancashire dialect?***

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss and illustrate a possible source for word-final [i] in seventeenth-century Lancashire *fillee* – PdE *fellow* – drawing from the orthographical representation of dialectal speech made by Thomas Shadwell in *The Lancashire Witches and Tegue O Divelly the Irish Priest: a Comedy* (1682). Although this sample of study does not exactly fit into Wells' (1982) 'y-tensing' categories, it seems to evidence a tense pronunciation of unstressed /ɪ/. I will examine, therefore, the phonological reasons that attest [i] in this particular example, as well as the deviant spelling that apparently points at such a regionalism. Also, a general survey of the use of dialect in Early Modern English literature and its potential for linguistic research is made.

KEYWORDS: 'y-tensing,' Early Modern English dialectology, Lancashire, literary dialect, Thomas Shadwell

1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that 'y-tensing' is a widespread phonetic feature among many native speakers of English nowadays. The concept of 'happY-tensing' appeared in Wells (1982) for the first time as a means to categorize a set of words containing word-final /ɪ/. He suggested that words such as *coffee* or *happy* revealed an ongoing tendency by means of which final /ɪ/ and /i:/ were identified in certain phonetic contexts.¹ This phonetic interchange of the vowel

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quality has effectively been a current aspect in contemporary Standard English for years, but restricting it to Present-day English (PdE) would be, at least, erroneous since a tense pronunciation of weak /ɪ/ seems to have been present in provincial speech for centuries (Wells 1982: 258).² A great deal of synchronic linguistic research has been devoted to the study and recognition of this feature.³ However, the literature of RP has not paid much attention to the historical phonological grounds which gave way to the emergence of this regional variant. Actually, it is an arduous task to pin them down and even more so as the phonetic character of this vowel is of varying degrees in the different English dialects.

2. Literary dialect and Early Modern English dialectology

The neglect which has traditionally accompanied the study of provincial speech in Early Modern England has posed serious troubles for linguists (Görlach 1988). Any attempt to sketch an insight into the dialectal phonology, morphology, lexis or syntax of the period encounters risky perils which must be seriously considered (García-Bermejo 1999b: 252). Shorrocks (2000) describes in thorough detail some of the most prominent problems surrounding Early Modern English dialectology sources. Gill's (1619) remarks about the six markedly different dialect areas in England, for example, only provide general ideas about northern speech which cannot obviously be regarded as comprehensive in any case. Also, prescriptive comments – Puttenham (1589), Verstegan (1605), etc. – that warned speakers against linguistic corruption and uneducated forms of language disapproved of certain provincialisms

¹ For further information about this phonetic variation in modern Received Pronunciation – RP hereinafter –, see Fabricius (2002); for exceptions to word-final tense [i], see Fabricius (2002: n3). According to Wells (1982ff.) and Roach (2000), the closer or intermediate phonetic quality of the weak high front vowel /ɪ/ is represented by [i]. This phonetic notation will be followed when referring to 'y-tensing.'

² See also Beal (2005) who finds evidence from eighteenth-century sources.

³ Remarkable comments, apart from Wells (1982: 165-166, 257-258; 1997), are those provided by Gimson (1962: §7.10), Hughes & Trudgill (1979: 30-31), Windsor Lewis (1990: 159-167), Ramsaran (1990: 178-190), Fabricius (2002) and Durand (2005), among others. Likewise, Ellis (1969 [1869-1889]: 344) gathers some instances suggestive of [i] in different northern areas. On the other hand, it is surprising that Wright's *English Dialect Grammar* (1905) – EDG or EDG-Index from now on – does neither include any specific comment on this common regionalism nor on its possible origin and development in English dialects.

that should not be taken as valuable records because they are usually too general and stereotype-oriented. Recent research has proved literary dialects worthy tools in obtaining reliable linguistic data.⁴

It is well known that the ascendancy of a written standard, together with the social consciousness that London English was more refined than other linguistic varieties, namely regional, favoured their use in Renaissance literature. They were primarily conceived as a means of creating stereotypical characters distinguished by rude and vulgar speech. The first recorded instance of a literary portrayal of dialect dates back to the end of the fourteenth century in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Reeve's Tale* and in *The Second Shepherds Play* (c.1430) by The Master of Wakefield. They were soon imitated by poets like Skelton, Spenser or Lydgate. Non-standard language – slang, cant and colloquialisms – became also a frequent object of representation in sixteenth and seventeenth-century prose, in jest-books, broadside ballads, chapbooks and in the fiction of Thomas Deloney. Obviously, dialectalisms were not absent from them. However, it was within the realm of drama that regional speech was optimally exploited not only in literary terms, but also from a linguistic point of view.

South-western archaetypal dialect traits were seldom represented in drama and poetry probably because they were easily recognizable by London audiences.⁵ Northern English and Scots were also present in literary works; nevertheless, they were not usually imbued with hilarious connotations. On the contrary, they furnished dialect passages with local colour and truthfulness owing

⁴ Blank (1989), De la Cruz (1999), García-Bermejo (1997, 1999a, 2002) and Shorrocks (2003, 2004), among others, lend support to the valuable information supplied by the use of dialect in literary texts.

⁵ Eckhardt (1910: §17-§18) comments that "Warum überhaupt die südlichen Dialekte im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert in London als plebejisch galten, ist leicht begreiflich. Im Frühe. hatte die Londoner Mundart einen wesentlich südlichen Charakter. (...) Gegen Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts hatte das Mittelländischen in der Londoner Mundart schon völlig das Uebergewicht erlangt. (...) Ungebildete Personen werden als solche im englischen Drama nicht nur durch ihre südwestliche Mundart, sondern oft auch durch Wortverdrehungen gekennzeichnet." Among the most salient features of south-western speech, playwrights would resort to the voicing of voiceless initial fricatives – /v/ and /z/ instead of /f/ and /s/: *vlinch* or *zhrinke* in *Bartholomew Fayre* (1614), for example –, the use of *ich* instead of *I* and the proclitic forms *cham*, *chad*, *chill*, *chould* and *chall*, or the reflex of the OE past participle prefix *ge-* as *i-*. See Eckhardt (1910: §6-§174), Blake (1981: 70-92) and Blank (1996: 69-99) for further information about the plays which include representations of south-western regionalisms.

to their linguistic purity and the close relationship they kept with earlier stages of the English language.⁶

The second half of the seventeenth century was, as regards drama, characterized by a considerably smaller amount of literary examples where dialect traits are attested. The change in the dramatic parameters of Restoration comedy entailed a new object of mockery which no longer needed to be necessarily distinguished by provincial language. Thus, fops, for example, were usually presented with idiolects representative of London fashionable speech.⁷ Nonetheless, there are a few noteworthy examples which have always been tackled in passing, if ever considered. Blake (1981:104-107) only mentions Howard's *The Committee* (1665), together with Thomas Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches* and Tegue O Dively's *The Irish Priest: a Comedy* (1682), and Vanbrugh's *A Journey to London*, later completed by Cibber under the title *The Provok'd Husband* (1728), as the unique literary instances relying on dialectalisms for specific literary aims. To my knowledge, no linguistic mention has ever been made of important dialect portrayals such as the southwestern speech in Thomas Randolph's *Hey for honesty, down with knavery* (1651), or the northern / Scottish traits in John Tatham's *The Scots Figgaries* (1652) and *The Rump* (1660), in Thomas Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1677) or in John Lacy's *Sauny the Scot, or the Taming of the Shrew* (1698).⁸ They contain interesting representations of dialectalisms, especially Tatham's and Lacy's.

With regard to poetry in the latter part of the seventeenth century, broadside ballads represent the most outstanding specimens of literary dialect where regionalisms may be retrieved.

Needless to say, literary dialect can never aspire to absolute accuracy and linguistic transparency. The suggestion of regional pronunciations by means of deviant spellings, for instance, does very

⁶ Just to name a few, in *Cupid's Revenge* (1615) Leucippus comments on Urania's linguistic background: "She was brought up/ l'th' Countrey, as her tongue will let you know" (IV, l: 27). Vxor, in *Fever Pestilence* (1564), answers to Mendiculus' information about his Northumberland provenance that "Me thinke thou art a Scot by thy tonge" (6). And in *The Northern Lasse* (1632), Mistress Fitchow lets us know that "shee [Constance] is Northern, and speaks so: for/ she has ever liv'd in the Countrey, till this last weeke, her/ Uncle sent for her up to make her his child, cut of the Bishoprick of *Durham*" (II, l: 15).

⁷ Blake (1981: 100-101) refers to Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) and Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696).

⁸ These ignored specimens of linguistic analysis have been included in the corpus of my doctoral thesis.

often rely on phonetic conventions commonly associated with southern or northern English. As a matter of fact, Blank (1996: 70) mentions that “Literary authors of the period provide a simpler and more schematic map of the regional “difference of English,” recreating dialects that are broadly southern or broadly northern in character.” In spite of this, a thorough analysis of these anomalous spellings so as to gain access to the phonetic realization of such an anomaly lends aid to the reconstruction of the main differences between northern and southern Early Modern English. Furthermore, as it has already been proved, a linguistic comparison between dialect spellings and the accepted orthography of the time does actually give us relevant information about the phonological regional traits intended.⁹

Although it is very seldom assumed that literary dialect belongs to an artistic convention, this imitated or stage dialect provides us with real provincialisms in current use at the time they were represented. Hence, the domain of Early Modern dialectology should undoubtedly benefit from the wealthy corpus of literary works containing such “imitations” in order to give shape to the linguistic reality of the different English counties during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰

3. Thomas Shadwell and *The Lancashire Witches and Tegue O Divelly the Irish Priest: a Comedy* (1682)¹¹

Born around 1642 at either Broomhill or Stanton Hall, Norfolk, Thomas Shadwell received his early education at home and at the King Edward VI Grammar School, Bury St. Edmunds.¹² He entered Caius College, Cambridge, later became a member of the Middle Temple and studied law. He seems to have travelled on the Continent; he spent some months in Ireland, where his father was

⁹ See García-Bermejo (1999b: 252). Also, consult Blake (1989) about the important role played by editors and printers in the several reprints of Renaissance literary works and the possible emendations made of dialect spellings.

¹⁰ See Kytö & Walker (2003) about the linguistic damage caused by bad data in the study of Early Modern English. Apart from the literary representations of provincial speech, the information contained in glossaries, diaries and private letters is also extremely valuable for evaluating and studying dialects at this time.

¹¹ *LWTD* hereinafter.

¹² Both places were county seats of his father; however, there has been no consensus as to his exact birthplace. John Shadwell, his son, informed that he was born in Stanton Hall, Norfolk.

Recorder of Galway and Attorney General for Connaught between 1665 and 1670.

Not much is known about his early life or family relationships so as to assess with certainty his reasons to use northern dialect forms in two of his comedies or how he learnt about them. A detailed linguistic analysis of his dialect representation in both *LWTD* and *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) supports the assumption that the playwright had a sound knowledge of northern varieties. Blake (1981: 105) suggests a possible familiarity with the Lancashire dialect since the author presumably kept strong links with the south-eastern city of Chadderton, in the present-day new Metropolitan Borough of Oldham. It is understandable, therefore, that Shadwell managed both northern and north-west Midland traits in these plays with linguistic accuracy. For example, common Midland features as the rounding of OE /a/ due to the phonetic influence exerted by a nasal sound is present in *LWTD* in words like *bonk*, *con*, *conno*, *condle*, *hont*, *Loncashire*, *mon*, *on*, *onny*. The characteristic [i:] sound for words containing PdE RP /aɪ/ is shown by the development of ME /i+çt/ and ME /ɛ:/ in *flee*, *freeghtend*, *leeghts*, *meeghty*, *neegh*, *neeght*, *reeght*, *theegh*. Thirdly, the /-vocalisation process is revealed by *aw*, *awd*, *aw's*, *becaw'd*, *cawd*, *caw'n*, *haud*, *hawd*, *ow* suggestive of an [ɔ:]-sound. Typical from Lancashire are also regionalisms like *whoame* and *yead* representative of the /w/- and /j/-formations. Equally typifying northernisms are *warck*, *warks* which point at an [a], etc.

In spite of this, Shadwell seems to be sometimes led by his own linguistic impressions and the symbolization of regionalisms far away from Lancashire are present too. The most outstanding instances of this linguistic detachment in *LWTD* are the phonetic development represented by an [i:] in *feel* – PdE *fell* – which more probably seems to have been common in some areas of Yks. and n. Cum. (*EDG*: §196, §425). Likewise, the [i:] indicated by *dee'l* – PdE *devil* – is apparently a feature characteristic of Sc., se. and s.Nhb., n.Dur., Cum., Wm. and some areas of n.Der. (*EDG*: §196), whereas Lancashire's more attested pronunciations are [ɛ], [i] (Orton *et al.* 1963: VIII.8.3) and [ju:] (Brunner 1925: 166). Similarly, the [u] Scottish pronunciation suggested by *ludging* – PdE *lodging*.

Dialect is used for both comic and characterization purposes in the play. Clod, Thomas O George and Thomas Shacklehead reveal their low social status and provenance by means of a series of linguistic features which belong either specifically to Lancashire or to other northern counties. In addition, it moves up the social scale

and dialect is also included in certain passages as a means of stressing Young Hartford's frequent inebriation and clownish behaviour, and in the speech of two minor characters: Mal Spenser and a Clown. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that Shadwell widens the scope of dialect usage in literature. He uses it also as part of his social criticism. Not only are regionalisms portrayed in an attempt to mock provincial language, but also to emphasize the naivety of dialect characters and Lancashire religious spirit as a whole.¹³

Even though it is widely accepted that *LWTD* was first printed in London in 1682, it was probably written a year earlier (Nicoll 1967: 431). Two extant editions have come down to us from 1682. The second contains a brief mention by Shadwell himself to some errata in the first.¹⁴ The play was later reprinted for Robert Clavell, Jonathan Robinson, Awnsham and John Churchill in London in 1691 under the same title. However, it was changed in a second reprint into *The Lancashire Witches, and Tegue O Divelly the Irish Priest. A Comedy Part the first. The Amorous Bigot, with the Second Part of Tegue O Divelly a Comedy* (1691). In 1736 the original manuscript was republished under the supervision of J. & P. Knapton. In the nineteenth century, Halliwell-Phillipps included it in his 1853 edition of *The Poetry of Witchcraft illustrated by copies of the plays on The Lancashire Witches by Heywood and Shadwell*, of which only eight copies were made and distributed.¹⁵

4. *Fillee* as a source for [i] in seventeenth-century Lancashire?

Any attempt at explaining the historical reasons which prove the emergence of weak-final [i] is undoubtedly a matter of linguistic controversy which cannot stay aloof from criticism. Even though

¹³ Hirschfeld (2000: 351) points out that "Lancashire had long had a place in the popular imagination as a remote, unsophisticated, and superstitious area as well as an undisciplined Catholic breeding ground." About Shadwell's ideology, see Marsden (1995), Rigaud (1985) and Slagle (1992), among others.

¹⁴ This is the edition used for this article.

¹⁵ Due to the linguistic importance that original manuscripts have for studies of this kind, and the impossibility of accessing the first version of *LWTD*, a comparison of all deviant spellings in the second 1682 edition has been made with the orthographical alterations in the other two seventeenth-century available copies. In so doing, I have checked that *fillee* underwent no printing emendation and is, thus, a reliable specimen for linguistic analysis.

diachronic dialectology has always trusted textual evidence as conclusive proof for its many assertions, the analysis of this tense pronunciation cannot rely on written records only. It is of relevance to our topic to notice that the acoustic perspective cannot be obviated in the study of this regionalism. So much so that the historical phonological review of [i] should also contain an auditory report in order to characterize it with full phonetic precision.¹⁶ However, the absence of oral records or tapescripts from the end of the seventeenth century restricts the accuracy which might be expected in a study of this kind.

4.1. Phonological analysis

PdE *fellow* originated as the Old Norse compound *félagi* which was introduced in OE as *féolaga*. During the ME period, the unstressed syllable *-we* underwent different phonetic changes. Dobson (1967:§295) accounts for either the development of a back glide-vowel /o/ before the *w*, or a process through which /w/ was vocalized to /u/ after final /e/ became silent in late ME. With regard to the former, /w/ was also vocalized to /u/ and joined the glide-vowel forming the diphthong /-ou/ < /-ow/. As far as the latter is concerned, /-u/ < /-w/ was identified with original ME /u/; thus, /-we/ > /-wə/ > /-u/. Both forms coexisted in ME. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* gathers *felaw(e)*, *felow(e)* from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, and *fala*, *fela* from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Similarly, *The Linguistic Atlas of late Mediaeval English (LALME)* hereinafter records this coexistence in ME texts from the county of Lancashire. On the one hand, *felaw* (III: 200), *fellaw* (III: 201), *felow* (III: 203); on the other, *felo*, *fela* (III: 210). The final <a>-spellings reveal that ME /-u/ was later reduced to /-ə/ as a result of its unstressed position.¹⁷

These alternative pronunciations were recorded by some grammarians and orthoepists in the Early Modern period. For instance, Gill's (1619) remarks about the northern dialectal pronunciation of the verb *to follow* showed how a /-ə/ sound

¹⁶ As regards PdE, Fabricius (2002) and Durand (2005: 92, n4) provide excellent acoustic studies of 'y-tensing.' About a clear definition of vowel tension and an analysis of Tyneside and Bolton accents, see Prescott (2003).

¹⁷ Some scholars, like Gerson (1967: §19.6.1), deny the alternation between /-ou/ and /-u/ in words such as *elbow*, *fellow* and *window* because they are originally compounds. However, the evidence provided by certain ME forms like the above strongly indicates that this coexistence did in fact exist.

prevailed over the London educated /-ou/ form: “fulla *pro* follou” (IV: 15). Indeed, the phonetic reduction was apparently common in renderings of vulgar and regional speech.¹⁸

Already in the seventeenth century, this alternation was further modified since an [i] pronunciation arose alongside the /-ə/ and /-ou/ sounds. Word-pairs such as *hollow* and *holly*, *gallows* and *galleys* in the *Homophone Lists* compiled by Wharton (1654), Fox and Hookes (1670) and Young (1675) highlight not only a phonetic identification, but also the emergence of a high-front vowel. Dobson (1967:§295n2) explains that “the phonetic process might be [u] > [y] > [i], or [u] > [ə] > [i]. (...) the latter process, though at first sight the less direct, is the more likely.” It seems reasonable, therefore, that such pairings were made on contrasts between socially accepted and vulgar or regional speech. As a matter of fact, the *EDG-Index* records an [i] for *gallows* in s.Som. Similarly, the *EDG* (§229) gathers a final [i] pronunciation in words such as *arrow* (in Edb.), *barrow* (in Bch., Abd., Lth., Edb.), *borrow* (in Bch., Abd., Lth. Edb., Dor., s.Som), *follow* (in Lth., Edb, s.Ir., Wxf.), *harrow* (in Lth., Edb.), *swallow* (in Lth., Edb., n.Ir., s.Nhb., n.Dur., Cum., w.Yks., War., Glo., Brks., Sus., I.W., Dor.), *window* (in ne.Sc., W.Frf., Per., Lth., Edb. Brks., Wil.).¹⁹

In the light of some spellings compiled in *LALME*, it is truly probable that this regional pronunciation was present in some areas of Lancashire by the end of the ME period. For instance, *fellichip* (III: 214), *feliship* (III: 215) and *fellishippe* (III: 219). As we can see, there is no recorded evidence of <-i> in Lancashire *fellow* but in some compounds, which is highly indicative of [i]. *LALME* records *feli* in Yks. (IV: 167), and NWYks. (IV: 167); *fely* appears in Yks. (IV: 167).

At this stage, it is possible that also *fellow* had a weak-final [i] sound in seventeenth-century Lancashire speech. Unfortunately, the significance of this cannot be evaluated fully because of the limitations of the lexical pool we count on. Still, the information supplied by nineteenth and twentieth-century studies reasserts our assumptions. Ellis' (1969 [1869-1889]: 344) specimens reveal an [i] pronunciation for the standard *fellow* in Bolton and Wigan (D 22, V ii). Likewise, *EDG-Index* collects “[feli]” in m. & em. Lan., sm., se. &

¹⁸ See Dobson (1967:§302) for further evidence about the vulgar nature of /-ə/ < ME /-u/.

¹⁹ Wright also includes within this group a series of words – *bellows*, *meadow*, *narrow*, etc. – with final [i]; however, they are not of relevance for our analysis since they etymologically differ from our sample.

ms. Lan., and s. Lan. Also, it is a widespread pronunciation in some areas of Scotland and northern England (*EDG*: §229).²⁰

As mentioned above, the lack of audio recordings from the seventeenth century which could give us access to the exact phonetic realization of weak-final [ɪ] in *fillee* renders it difficult to explain with accuracy what triggered the ascendancy of [i]. Contemporary research, Durand (2005) and Prescott (2003), has suggested vowel tension in English dependent on phonetic quality and on advanced or retracted tongue-root [ATR/RTR] features. Tense vowels are usually categorized as long [ATR] or [RTR], whereas lax vowels are those without a tongue-root specification. That is, the phonemic opposition between PdE RP lax and tense vowels may be illustrated, for example, by contrasting the KIT set with both the FLEECE and NEAR sets: “[i] ≈ [ɪ], [ii]” (Prescott 2003: 5-6). As a matter of fact, the literature on ‘y-tensing’ has always trusted vowel quality so as to exemplify the phonetic nature of word-final [i], although recent theories also take into account some vowel-consonantal processes related to the loss of /r/ or those favouring ‘intrusive’ or ‘linking-r’.²¹

It seems quite probable that in the seventeenth century the phonemic contrast between weak-final [ɪ] and [i:] was blurred in some varieties of English. Such a phonemic identity could apparently have emerged as a result of vowel lengthening in unstressed syllables.²² The evidence supplied by poetry reveals that this process was presumably common in the sixteenth century. Spenser, for instance, pairs *chevalree* with *see* and *bee*, *destinee* with *necessitee* and *mee*, or *maiestee* with *knee* and *see* in *The Faerie Queen* (1590). We cannot know for certain whether he introduced them for the sake of rhyming or if word-final [i:] in these words was frequent in non-standard speech by the time he wrote the poem. Orthoepists’ works would support, on the other hand, this vowel lengthening in

²⁰ Although this paper is strictly centred around the [i] pronunciation in the county of Lancashire, it is evident that weak-final vowel tension in PdE *fellow* is also common to other areas in the north of England and Scotland. In fact, Thomas Shadwell also represented such phonetic feature in *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) with the aim of characterizing Lolpoop’s northern speech: “Ods-flesh, what shou’d I do in Company with Gentlewoman; ‘Tis not for such *Fellee*’s as I” [italics mine] (III, I: 37).

²¹ Windsor Lewis (1990: 159-167) gives a full account of the varying quality degrees of the “-y vowel” in different groups of speakers and different contexts. See also Durand (2005: 15) and Prescott (2003) about these vowel-consonantal processes.

²² See Dobson (1967: §350) about lengthening due to reimposition of secondary accent in unstressed syllables.

post-tonic syllables. Coote (1596) mentions *unitee* as a linguistic corruption, Hunt (1661) labels *pietee* as dialectal, Cheke spells *city* and *country* with <ee>, etc. (Dobson 1968: §350).

However, acoustic research on the current phonetic status of [i] has demonstrated its actual intermediate quality between RP /ɪ/ and /i:/. It is debatable, therefore, that a closer form of /ɪ/ arose as a consequence of vowel lengthening in unstressed syllables. In fact, it is hardly acceptable that a change in vowel length could have affected weak-final vowels historically, despite their spelling representation. As a result, it seems much more accurate that the reimposition of some degree of secondary accent entailed a modification of the vowel quality leading to the emergence of a vowel similar but not identical to /i:/. Indeed, the contemporary phonetic notation was modified in the second half of the twentieth century, thus neglecting previous assumptions related to a possible [i:].

It should be taken into account that by this time English spelling was not fully normalized yet. As discussed in the ensuing section, by the end of the seventeenth century the digraph <ee> was still used for representing [i:]-sounds regardless of their historical origin. We could assume that both poets like Spenser and orthoepists used <ee> as the best and most specific means of depicting a sound neither as open as [ɪ] nor as close as [i:], albeit nearer to the latter.

Although rhymes and orthoepists' comments do not include any single instance etymologically similar to *fillee*, the vulgar and dialectal [ɪ]-sounds which descended from /-ə/ were also apparently affected on analogy by this process of vowel-quality modification. Hence, it would seem reasonable to presume that it was actually a quite possible origin of vowel tension in words developed from ME /-u/ > /-ə/ – *fellow* – in Lancashire.

4.2. Spelling analysis

As far as diachronic dialectology is concerned, unconventional spellings are reliable indicators of linguistic variety and change in the past. It is well known that the use of dialect in literature does irreversibly entail a series of interesting linguistic manipulations on the part of the artist. Obviously, their appearance is not a matter of chance but the result of an absolutely conscious decision. The imaginative world of any literary work is inhabited by a diversity of characters with clearly different idiolects and linguistic attitudes. The literary creator may try to show visually how a character speaks

or, more exactly, “how a character is meant to sound” (Chapman 1982: 71). Oddities in spelling suggestive of non-standard pronunciations are the most direct means of alerting readers and audiences to dialect phonetic features. Needless to say, such anomalies are never intended to attain the linguistic status of accepted orthography. On the contrary, they are usually conceived as mere visual mediators that help readers have access to a close realization of dialectal speech. In fact, deviant spellings are very often based on accepted and easily recognizable standard sequences which, after continuous usage, also gain in importance over other combinations.²³

The methods of orthographical representation managed by Shadwell in dialect passages of *LWTD* are far from incomprehensible or irregular. The comedy displays a remarkable spelling consistency which is questionable only if we consider the written symbolization of [i:]-sounds by means of <ee> and <ei>.²⁴ However, Shadwell’s use of one or the other relies on either the representation of a dialectal phonetic development – *dee’l, feel, fillee, flee, freeghtend, leeghts, meeghty, neegh, neeght, reeght, theeigh* – or simply an instance of eye-dialect – *beleive, leive, peices, theives, yeild* –. As we can observe, the playwright resorts to intelligible spelling sequences clearly indicative of the sound intended.

At this point, it should be remembered that the full standardization of English orthography was not completed by the time *LWTD* was written. As for /i:/, it has been well proved that the phonetic reflexes of ME /e:/ and ME /ɛ:/ were not kept strictly

²³ Sánchez (1999: 270-271) explains:

The process followed for the devising of the graphical representation of dialects is similar to the one in the formation of the written standard language. It is the continuous and generalised use of a certain sequence which will eventually make it attain a permanent status over other occasional spellings. It can be observed in dialectal orthography how some spelling varieties become traditional in the written representation of dialects, (...) These spelling variants are free, but not whimsical. (...) dialectal spellings have to keep an obvious relation to the standard spelling system of the English language.

See Salmon (1999: 13) about the logographic relationship between the spoken and written word.

²⁴ <ie> is also used for representing an [i:]-sound in *strieight*. Nevertheless, it seems a printing mistake or carelessness on the part of Shadwell rather than a dialect spelling, since the word was modified in subsequent seventeenth-century reprints to the accepted form *streight*.

apart in spelling until well into the Early Modern period.²⁵ As a matter of fact, many textual instances from the time reveal that <ea>, <ee> and <ie> were seldom used alike. Similarly, Shadwell introduces a standard sequence – <ee> – in an attempt to depict a sound which could be recognized without a close knowledge of the variety represented. Thus, readers and spectators could easily identify the regional pronunciation suggested by *neeght*, *feel* or *fillee*.

Curiously, apart from Shadwell, only Thomas Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1677) resorts to a <-ee>-spelling in order to represent Lancashire's pronunciation of standard *fellow*.²⁶ The *OED* collects a couple of instances possibly indicative of [i] in vulgar or regional speech: nineteenth-century *fally* and *felly*; no citations are presented, though. As it may be deduced, the introduction of <-ee> for the symbolization of a sound not as close as [i:] stands for the literary convention characteristic of the use of dialect in a work of art. It goes without saying that the playwright decided to use this particular digraph as the most suitable means of enabling both readers and audience to identify a sound he might well have known. However, the use of <-ee> in written portrayals of the dialectal development of *fellow* was but occasional, being recorded only four times so far. In the light of modern evidence, it may be concluded that the rarity of this spelling caused it to be eventually superseded by others which could not be somehow misleading: <-ey>, <-y>, for example.²⁷

²⁵ See Scragg (1974: 49) and Ekwall (1980: §51), among others.

²⁶ In parallel with Shadwell, Thomas Otway introduces this deviant sequence so as to characterize the imitation that Scapin makes of a Lancashire rascal speech: "*Yaw Fellee, wi'th Sack there, done yaw knaw whear th'aud Rascatt Graip is? (...) he'll be a pratty swatley Fellee, bawt Lugs and Naes*" [sic.] (III, I: 57). This particular example came into my attention after my presentation at the 17th SEDERI Conference.

²⁷ As a matter of fact, nineteenth and twentieth-century literary symbolizations of Lancashire speech such as John Ackworth's novels rely on the digraph <-ey> as a way of representing this regional phonetic variant. For instance, in *Clog Shop Chronicles* (1896) we find "*Yo' felleys is so feart if owt ails yo'*" [italics mine] (330). Also, in *Beckside Lights* (1897), where Ackworth himself explains that the dialect depicted corresponds to the area of Bolton, Rhoda says "*Th' wik efther th' stooan were put up, a felley cum fro' Duxbury*" [italics mine] (235). *The Mangle House* (1902) includes a few examples where this spelling may be attested to: "*Yung felley...yo're a stranger abaat here*" [italics mine] (190).

5. Conclusions

It will be evident from the above said that the orthographical representation made by Thomas Shadwell of seventeenth-century Lancashire dialect substantiates Well's contention that [i] was already present in regional speech centuries ago. Even though literary symbolizations of provincial language are far from exact, Shadwell's dialect portrayal of standard *fellow* provides an extraordinary source of information about a phonetic feature whose possible origins had not been exemplified so far. Furthermore, his knowledge of the East Lancashire variety together with the consistent representation he makes allows us to conclude that he was quite accurate when Thomas Shacklehead compared his fellow Clod with a filly: "Thou'rt a strange Fillee (Horse I should say)" (IV: 56). The pun he makes between the pronunciation of *filliee* and that of *filly* supports our assumptions since the latter seemed to have a varying pronunciation between [ɪ] and [i:] in the seventeenth century according to the evidence supplied by *OED*.²⁸

The data contained in literary works contribute, thus, to a better knowledge of regional speech in Early Modern England. However, it remains a question for future research as to whether other instances of similar phonetic context show weak-final tense pronunciations both in PdE and in non-standard varieties of the past.

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²⁸ Coming from Icel. **fylja*, *filly* is merely the feminine form of *foal* formed by adding the historical suffix *-*jōn*. *OED* collects sixteenth-century *fely*, *felee*, *felly*, and *fillie* between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century.

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