The joy of English pronunciation

George Nolst Trenité (1870–1946)

1 The text

Dearest creature in creation
Studying English pronunciation,
I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like corpse, corps, horse and worse.

I will keep you, Susy, busy,
Make your head with heat grow dizzy;
Tear in eye, your dress you’ll tear;
Queer, fair seer, hear my prayer.

Pray, console your loving poet,
Make my coat look new, dear, sew it!
Just compare heart, hear and heard,
Dies and diet, lord and word.

Sword and sward, retain and Britain
(Mind the latter how it’s written).
Made has not the sound of bade,
Say—said, pay—paid, laid but plaid.

Now I surely will not plague you
With such words as vague and ague,
But be careful how you speak,
Say: gush, bush, steak, streak, break, bleak,

Previous, precious, fuchsia, via,
Recipe, pipe, studding-sail, choir;
Woven, oven, how and low,
Script, receipt, shoe, poem, toe.

Say, expecting fraud and trickery:
Daughter, laughter and Terpsichore,
Branch, ranch, measles, topsails, aisles,
Missiles, similes, reviles.
Wholly, holly, signal, signing,
Same, examining, but mining,
Scholar, vicar, and cigar,
Solar, mica, war and far.

From ‘desire’: desirable—admirable from ‘admire’,
Lumber, plumber, bier, but brier,
Topsham, brougham, renown, but known,
Knowledge, done, lone, gone, none, tone,

One, anemone, Balmoral,
Kitchen, lichen, laundry, laurel.
Gertrude, German, wind and wind,
Beau, kind, kindred, queue, mankind,
Tortoise, turquoise, chamois-leather,
Reading, Reading, heathen, heather.
This phonetic labyrinth
Gives moss, gross, brook, brooch, ninth, plinth.

Have you ever yet endeavoured
To pronounce revered and severed,
Demon, lemon, ghoul, foul, soul,
Peter, petrol and patrol?

Billet does not end like ballet;
Bouquet, wallet, mallet, chalet.
Blood and flood are not like food,
Nor is mould like should and would.

Banquet is not nearly parquet,
Which exactly rhymes with khaki.
Discount, viscount, load and broad,
Toward, to forward, to reward,
Ricocheted and crocheting, croquet?
Right! Your pronunciation’s OK.
Rounded, wounded, grieve and sieve,
Friend and fiend, alive and live.
Is your R correct in higher?
Keats asserts it rhymes Thalia.
Hugh, but hug, and hood, but hoot,
Buoyant, minute, but minute.
Say abscission with precision,
Now: position and transition;
Would it tally with my rhyme
If I mentioned paradigm?
Twopence, threepence, tease are easy,
But cease, crease, grease and greasy?
Cornice, nice, valise, revise,
Rabies, but lullabies.
Of such puzzling words as nauseous,
Rhyming well with cautious, tortious,
You’ll envelop lists, I hope,
In a linen envelope.
Would you like some more? You’ll have it!
Affidavit, David, davit.
To abjure, to perjure. Sheik
Does not sound like Czech but ache.
Liberty, library, heave and heaven,
Rachel, loch, moustache, eleven.
We say hallowed, but allowed,
People, leopard, towed but vowed.
Mark the difference, moreover,
Between mover, plover, Dover.
Leeches, breeches, wise, precise,
Chalice, but police and lice,
Camel, constable, unstable,
Principle, disciple, label.
Petal, penal, and canal,
Wait, surmise, plait, promise, pal,
Suit, suite, ruin. Circuit, conduit
Rhyme with ‘shirk it’ and ‘beyond it’,
But it is not hard to tell
Why it’s pall, mall, but Pall Mall.
Muscle, muscular, gaol, iron,
Timber, climber, bullion, lion,
Worm and storm, chaise, chaos, chair,
Senator, spectator, mayor,
Ivy, privy, famous; clamour
Has the A of drachm and hammer.
Pussy, hussy and possess,
Desert, but desert, address.
Golf, wolf, countenance, lieutenants
Hoist in lieu of flags left pennants.
Courier, courtier, tomb, bomb, comb,
Cow, but Cowper, some and home.
‘Soldier, soldier! Blood is thicker’,
Quoth he, ‘than liqueur or liquor’,
Making, it is sad but true,
In bravado, much ado.
Stranger does not rhyme with anger,
Neither does devour with clangour.
Pilot, pivot, gaunt, but aunt,
Font, front, wont, want, grand and grant.
Arsenic, specific, scenic,
Relic, rhetoric, hygienic.
Gooseberry, goose, and close, but close,
Paradise, rise, rose, and dose.
Say inveigh, neigh, but inveigle,
Make the latter rhyme with eagle.
Mind! Meandering but mean,
Valentine and magazine.
And I bet you, dear, a penny,
You say mani-(fold) like many,
Which is wrong. Say rapier, pier,
Tier (one who ties), but tier.
Arch, archangel; pray, does erring
Rhyme with herring or with stirring?
Prison, bison, treasure trove,  
Treason, hover, cover, cove,  
Perseverance, severance. Ribald  
Rhymes (but piebald doesn’t) with nibbled.  
Phaeton, paean, gnat, ghat, gnaw,  
Lien, psychic, shone, bone, pshaw.  
Don’t be down, my own, but rough it,  
And distinguish buffet, buffet;  
Brood, stood, roof, rook, school, wool, boon,  
Worcester, Boleyn, to impugn.  
Say in sounds correct and sterling  
Hearse, hear, hearken, year and yearling.  
Evil, devil, mezzotint,  
Mind the Z! (A gentle hint.)  
Now you need not pay attention  
To such sounds as I don’t mention,  
Sounds like pores, pause, pours and paws,  
Rhyming with the pronoun yours;  
Nor are proper names included,  
Though I often heard, as you did,  
Funny rhymes to unicorn,  
Yes, you know them, Vaughan and Strachan.  
No, my maiden, coy and comely,  
I don’t want to speak of Cholmondeley.  
No. Yet Froude compared with proud  Is no better than McLeod.  
But mind trivial and vial,  
Tripod, menial, denial,  
Troll and trolley, realm and ream,  
Schedule, mischief, schism, and scheme.  
Argil, gill, Argyll, gill. Surely  May be made to rhyme with Raleigh,  
But you’re not supposed to say  Piquet rhymes with sobriquet.  
Had this invalid invalid
Worthless documents? How pallid, How uncouth he, couchant, looked, When for Portsmouth I had booked!

Zeus, Thebes, Thales, Aphrodite, Paramour, enamoured, flighty, Episodes, antipodes, Acquiesce, and obsequies.

Please don’t monkey with the geyser, Don’t peel ’taters with my razor, Rather say in accents pure: Nature, stature and mature.

Pious, impious, limb, climb, glumly, Worsted, worsted, crumbly, dumbly, Conquer, conquest, vase, phase, fan, Wan, sedan and artisan.

The TH will surely trouble you More than R, CH or W. Say then these phonetic gems: Thomas, thyme, Theresa, Thames.

Thompson, Chatham, Waltham, Streatham, There are more but I forget ’em—Wait! I’ve got it: Anthony, Lighten your anxiety.

The archaic word albeit Does not rhyme with eight—you see it; With and forthwith, one has voice, One has not, you make your choice.

Shoes, goes, does. Now first say: finger; Then say: singer, ginger, linger. Real, zeal, mauve, gauze and gauge, Marriage, foliage, mirage, age,

Hero, heron, query, very, Parry, tarry, fury, bury, Dost, lost, post, and doth, cloth, loth, Job, Job, blossom, bosom, oath.
Faugh, oppugnant, keen oppugners,
Bowing, bowing, banjo-tuners
Holm you know, but noes, canoes,
Puisne, truism, use, to use?

Though the difference seems little,
We say actual, but victual,
Seat, sweat, chaste, caste, Leigh, eight, height,
Put, nut, granite, and unite.

Reefer does not rhyme with deafer,
Feoffer does, and zephyr, heifer.
Dull, bull, Geoffrey, George, ate, late,
Hint, pint, senate, but sedate.

Gaelic, Arabic, pacific,
Science, conscience, scientific;
Tour, but our, dour, succour, four,
Gas, alas, and Arkansas.

Say manoeuvre, yacht and vomit,
Next omit, which differs from it
Bona fide, alibi
Gyrate, dowry and awry.

Sea, idea, guinea, area,
Psalm, Maria, but malaria.
Youth, south, southern, cleanse and clean,
Doctrine, turpentine, marine.

Compare alien with Italian,
Dandelion with battalion,
Rally with ally; yea, ye,
Eye, I, ay, aye, whey, key, quay!

Say aver, but ever, fever,
Neither, leisure, skein, receiver.
Never guess—it is not safe,
We say calves, valves, half, but Ralf.

Starry, granary, canary,
Crevice, but device, and eyrie,
Face, but preface, then grimace,
Phlegm, phlegmatic, ass, glass, bass.

Bass, large, target, gin, give, verging,
Ought, oust, joust, and scour, but scourging;
Ear, but earn; and ere and tear
Do not rhyme with here but heir.

Mind the O of off and often
Which may be pronounced as orphan,
With the sound of saw and sauce;
Also soft, lost, cloth and cross.

Pudding, puddle, putting. Putting?
Yes: at golf it rhymes with shutting,
Respite, spite, consent, resent.
Liable, but Parliament.

Seven is right, but so is even,
Hyphen, roughen, nephew, Stephen,
Monkey, donkey, clerk and jerk,
Asp, grasp, wasp, demesne, cork, work.

A of valour, vapid vapour,
S of news (compare newspaper),
G of gibbet, gibbon, gist,
I of antichrist and grist,

Differ like diverse and divers,
Rivers, strivers, shivers, fivers.
Once, but nonce, toll, doll, but roll,
Polish, Polish, poll and poll.

Pronunciation—think of Psyche!—
Is a paling, stout and spiky.
Won’t it make you lose your wits
Writing groats and saying ‘grits’?

It’s a dark abyss or tunnel
Strewn with stones like rowlock, gunwale,
Islington, and Isle of Wight,
Housewife, verdict and indict.

Don’t you think so, reader, rather,
Saying lather, bather, father?
Finally, which rhymes with enough,
Though, through, bough, cough, hough, sough, tough?
Hiccough has the sound of sup.
My advice is: GIVE IT UP!

2 Phonetic version (British pronunciation)

\[\text{drænst 'kriːfər m kə.'efə}
\text{stæd.ɛn 'ŋlɪʃ prənəns.'ɛfə}
\text{ə u wɪl 'tɪf jʊ juː m mər vəs}
\text{'səʊndz læk 'kɛps 'kəʊ 'həʊs and 'wəʊs}
\text{ə u wɪl 'kɪp juː 'suzə 'bɪzə}
\text{mərk jə: 'hɛd wʊ 'hɪt ɡəʊ 'dɪzə}
\text{'traɪ m ə tʃə 'dɛs wɪl 'tɛə}
\text{'kwəʊ, 'kəʊ ɬə mər 'tɛə}
\text{ˈpær kən'soul jə: ˈlaʊŋ 'pɔəət}
\text{ˈmərk mar 'kəut ɬək 'ɪnju: ɬəʊ 'səʊnt}
\text{ˈdʒæst kəm'prəʊə 'həʊt 'həʊ and 'hɛd}
\text{ˈdəzənd and 'dərət ˈlʊd and 'wəd}
\text{'səd and 'swəd n'təm and 'bəntə}
\text{'mænd də ˈlɛtə hau ɪts 'ntə}
\text{ˈmɛrd həz 'nɔt də 'səʊnd əv 'bəd}
\text{ˈser 'sɛd ˈpər 'ˈpɛd ˈlɛd bət 'plæd}
\text{ˌnɔu at ˈʃəx wɪl nət ˈpleɪg juː}
\text{ˌwʊd səf wədz æz ˈvɛŋ and 'ɛŋjʊjuː}
\text{ˌbæt br ˈkæf hau juː 'spɪk}
\text{ˈser ˈɡæf 'bɒf 'stɛk 'strɪk 'bæk 'bliːk}
\text{ˈpəkɪvəs 'pɛʃəs 'ʃjuːʃə 'vələ}
\text{ˈtɛsəp ˈpæp 'stæns] 'kwərə]
\text{ˈwʊnəŋ 'ləŋ 'hau and 'ləʊ}
\text{ˈskɪpt ərɪst ˈʃuː 'pəʊ.mənˈtəʊ}
\text{ˈsrɪkˈspɛktɪŋ 'fræd and 'trɪkən}
\text{ˈdɔtə ˈlaʊtfər ənd tɛpˈsɪkən}
\text{ˈbrəʊnɪŋ 'ʃʌmʃ] 'tɒpslə 'aɪdʒ}
\text{ˈmɪsəltz 'smaɪləz ənd nˈvældz}
3 Phonetic version (American pronunciation)

Your text here...
givz 'moss 'grow 'book 'break 'nam 'plm
'hæv ju 'eve jet m'devd
to pa'nauns a'vud end 'sev'd
'dimn 'lemon 'gul 'taol 'sod
'pir 'pet 'ænd po'tæd
'bilæt daz 'noct 'end laik bæ'le:
bu'ke: 'walet 'maht fa'le:
'blad 'nd 'flad a'z 'noct laik 'fed
no 'mold laik 'fud 'nd 'wud