A FOUL GHOUL SOUL LOVES GOOD BLOOD FOOD

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What’s unusual about these limericks?

Don’t look back. With your hand to the plough,
Don’t stop tilling until you are through—
   Till the seeds have been sown
   And it’s time to chow down—
For the life of a farmer is tough.

A passion to eat licorice
Was Algernon’s principal vice.
   So he pilfered a gross,
   But his gain proved his loss.
(He was caught in the act by police.)

Tomorrow Gil goes to the gallows,
So today, in self-pity, he wallows.
   But tonight he will dine
   On the best food—a sine qua non even Texas allows.

The answer is that each line ends with a word that looks like it rhymes with another word or other words in the poem but when sounded out, they don’t. Such words are called eye rhymes, or sight rhymes. They look like rhymes but they don’t sound like rhymes. The conceit here is that the viewer of these eye-dentities must focus on the replication of letters that appear in the final syllable in each of two or more words and ignore the placement of stress.

Eye rhymes provide dramatic testimony to the phoneme-grapheme chasm that stretches across our glorious, notorious, uproarious, outrageous, courageous, contagious, stupendous, tremendous, end-over-endous English language. The most cheerfully democratic and hospitable language in history, English has welcomed into its vocabulary words ancient and modern, far and near, including their divergent spellings. The result is a delightfully chaotic spelling system that Mario Pei calls “the world’s most awesome mess.” J. Donald Adams adds, “It is wildly erratic and almost wholly without logic. One needs the eye of a hawk, the ear of a dog, and the memory of an elephant to make headway against its confusions and inconsistencies.”
Much of that mess has accumulated from the fact that one set of letters can represent a number of sounds. That’s why George Bernard Shaw was able to spell fish as ghoti – gh as it is sounded in enough, o as in women, and ti as in nation. That’s why a foreign student when asked what word the letters m-a-n-s-l-a-u-g-h-t-e-r spelled, responded, “man’s laughter.” That’s why, it is said, anger is just one letter away from danger.

The intrepid hunter-gatherer logologist experiences a tingling sensation when such a promising category of words comes into view, but capturing double eye rhymes presents no challenge. There are hundreds of them – star-war, foot-boot, harm-warm, wolf-golf, owl-bowl, pint-mint, pooh-brooch, breast-feast, earth-hearth, hoof-roof, hook-kook, sown-down, fool-wool, gross-boss, dog-hog, geese-cheese, wash-cash, keen-been, break-peak, height-weight, patch-watch, death-heath, choose-goose, mouse-rouse, paste-caste, hive-give, most-cost, friend-fiend, taunt-aunt, bought-drought, broad-toad, salve-valve, does-hoes, strict-indict, sieve-believe, pain-again, sea-rhea, these-obese, bond-almond, need-pureed, wait-parfait, shout-ragout, devil-evil, writer-liter, bury-fury, starry-marly, beady-ready, bully-gully, power-mower, finger-ginger, hover-over, folder-solder, model-yodel, valor-squalor, prayer-layer, laughter-daughter, binder-tinder, mother-bother, wallop-gallop, lumber-dumber, marble-warble, even-seven, duet-suet, stringy-stingy, saddle-waddle, battle-wattle, ether-nether, weather-breather, vestige-prestige, ponder-wonder, pander-wander, sea-idea, loin-heroin, bee-mattine, pony-colony, tremble-ensemble, diva-saliva, unit-whodunit, gala-koala, praises-daises, patio-ratio, alliance-dalliance, joke-karaoke, saga-rutabaga, deity spontaneity, and on and on and on. So we’ll focus on triple plays, quadruple plays, and even more pyrotechnic plays that consist of familiar words.

But before we parade our lists, we elucidate our taxonomy by explaining our criteria for what constitutes an genuine, authentic, certified eye rhyme:

(1) In each cluster, the eye-rhymed vowel and all succeeding letters must be identical, but, in each example, the consonant that comes right before that vowel must be different. Thus, the likes of rice-licorice, dual-individual, limb-climb, liar-familiar, dial-medial, rosy-leprosy, and cough-hiccough do not qualify as eye rhymes.

(2) We exclude proper nouns because the unorthodox sounding of many names artificially inflates the category, as in hoe-shoe-Chloe, vague-ague-Prague, save-have-Mojave, poise-tortoise-Boise, ache-cache-Apache, pace-terrace-Liberace, pipe-recipe-Filipe, file-mobile-Chile, rose-dose-Jose, wrote-coyote-Quixote, bite-petite-Aphrodite, vary-secretary-Cary, halo-buffalo-Palo Alto, was-has-Madras-Degas, sweets-caveats-Keats-Yeats, and bead-head-Gilead-Sinead.

(3) We exclude rhymes that depend on absorbed anterior vowels, such as cat-swat-heat, pint-mint-taint, pen-often-been, and on-won-moon. Independent anterior vowels, those that do not directly affect the eye-rhymed vowels, are allowed, as in on-won-neon, heat-caveat-whereat, and skein-stein-wherein.

(4) We exclude words with accent and other diacritical marks, such as ache-cache-(papier) mache, quiche-niche (itch)-cliché, and role-hyperbole-ole.
(5) We exclude contractions with apostrophes, such as front-font-don’t, vent-talent-haven’t, full-dull-you’ll, and led-diced-we’d.

(6) After some debate, we decided to include words in which the accent does not fall on the “rhyming” syllable, as in racy-diplomacy, icy-policy, vary-binary, and acre-massacre. We permit such examples because the convention for eye rhymes is that the viewer pretends to be deaf and focuses only on the identity of the crucial vowel and all succeeding letters.

Long, long ago, in 1833 to be exact, one Thomas Haynes Bayly (1797-1839) wrote the song "Long Long Ago." The first, and best-known, verse goes this way:

Tell me the tales that to me were so dear,
Long, long ago, long, long ago.
Sing me the songs I delighted to hear,
Long, long ago, long ago.
Now you are come, all my grief is removed.
Let me forget that so long you have roved.
Let me believe that you love as you loved,
Long, long ago, long ago.

Bayly’s path-breaking triple eye rhyme -- removed-roved-loved -- inspires our lists of triple eye-dentities and beyond:

TRIPLE EYE RHYMES:

foul-ghoul-soul
good-blood-food
love-move-stove
there-were-mere
baked-kayaked-naked
beater-sweater-theater
maid-said-plaid
come-home-epitome
fear-bear-linear
cater-water-mater (as in alma mater)
hot-parrot-depot
dial-marsupial-facial
fruit-circuit-intuit
rose-dose-lose
hoed-shoed-coed
poise-tortoise-vichysoise
bean-ocean-protean
eyed-keyed-surveyed
father-gather-bather
pant-restaurant-infant
cat-swat-what
bet-closet-ballet
copy-dopy-canopy
his-sis-debris
page-postage-mirage
hive-give-naive
mature-nature-stature
eyed-keyed-surveyed
touch-pouch-saramouch
pant-restaurant-infant
famous-bayous-rendezvous
bet-closet-ballet
card-ward-standard
ave-shaver-cadaver
touch-pouch-saramouch
buses-fuses-focuses
scion-accordion-nation
decie-gesundheit-albeit
sorry-worry-lorry
zany-many-company (ih-nee)
cat-wart-braggart (ert)
gross-loss-albatross (ahss)
south-uncouth-mouth (oute, as a verb)
bus-focus-jus (oo, as in au jus)
ache-cache-panache (ahsh)
swan-pan-sultan (in)
die-anomie-lingerie (ay)
pays-says-cays (eez)
prior-superior-behavior (yer)
call-shall-pall-mall (pell-mell)
ringed-tinged-winged (ing-id)
dance-nuance-brilliance (inse)
change-flange-orange (inj)
anal-canal-banal (uh-nahl)
case-phrase-vase (ahz)
front-font-wont (uhnt)
pal-local (uhl)-mal (ahl, as in grand mal)

QUADRUPLE EYE RHYMES:

skein-protein stein-herein
hour-four-tour-glamour
pale-locale-finale-tamale
comb-bomb-tomb-aplomb (uhm)
precise-demise-reprise-anise (iss)
nice-police-office-licorice (ish)
fallow-swallow-allow-marshmallow (ell-oh)
pine-marine-famine-cine (in-e)
pant-want (unt)-restaurant (ahnt)-flippant (int)
cave-have-suave-grave (ah-vay)
dual-sexual-equal-victual (vit‘l)

QUINTUPLE EYE RHYMES

beat-great-sweat-caveat-whereat
bone-done-gone-abelone (oh-nee)-anemone (uh-nee)
cloth-both-doth-betroth (othe)-behemoth (ith)

SEXTUPLE EYE RHYME:

ton-on-don-common (in)-iron (ern)-bon (oh, as in bon mot)

SEPTUPLE EYE RHYMES:

frontier-flier-luckier-dossier-soldier (jurr)-premier (yer)-papier (er, as in papier mache)
was-has-gas (ass)-canvas (iss)-dogmas (ihz)-gravitas (ahs)-pas (ah, as in faux pas)

AND THE CHAMPION (nine soundings!):

bough-dough-enough-hiccough (up)-lough (ock, och)-through-trough (off, awth)

Although there are never enough eye rhymes, we’re through. Hone your skills. Article’s done. We’re gone.