

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-identities 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*, *beard-heard*, *wolf-golf*, *owl-bowl*, *pint-mint*, *pooch-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-marry*, *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-matinee*, *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*, *sweats-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*, *beat-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 <i>alma mater</i>)
hot-parrot-depot	dial-marsupial-facial
fruit-circuit-intuit	rose-dose-lose
hoed-shoed-coed	poise-tortoise-vichyssoise
bean-ocean-protean	eyed-keyed-surveyed
father-gather-bather	pant-restaurant-infant
cat-swat-what	moth-both-doth
copy-dopy-canopy	bet-closet-ballet
page-postage-mirage	his-sis-debris
mature-nature-stature	hive-give-naive
famous-bayous-rendezvous	buses-fuses-focuses
card-ward-standard	deceit-gesundheit-albeit
touch-pouch-scaramouch	aver-shaver-cadaver
scion-accordion-nation	zany-many-company (<i>ih-nee</i>)
sorry-worry-lorry (<i>aw-ree</i>)	cart-wart-braggart (<i>ert</i>)
gross-loss-albatross (<i>ahss</i>)	south-uncouth-mouth (<i>outhe</i> , as a verb)

bus-focus-jus (<i>oo</i> , as in <i>au jus</i>)	ringed-tinged-winged (<i>ing-id</i>)
ache-cache-panache (<i>ahsh</i>)	dance-nuance-brilliance (<i>inse</i>)
swan-pan-sultan (<i>in</i>)	change-flange-orange (<i>inj</i>)
die-anomie-lingerie (<i>ay</i>)	anal-canal-banal (<i>uh-nahl</i>)
pays-says-cays (<i>eez</i>)	case-phrase-vase (<i>ahz</i>)
prior-superior-behavior (<i>yer</i>)	front-font-wont (<i>uhnt</i>)
call-shall-pall-mall (<i>pell-mell</i>)	pal-local (<i>uhl</i>)-mal (<i>ahl</i> , as in <i>grand mal</i>)

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-ee*)
 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 (*ohthe*)-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.