

MARY HAD A UNIVOCALIC LAMB

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According to Tony Augarde's Oxford Guide to Word Games, univocalics are writings that make use of only one vowel. This is apparently an old form of word play, as Augarde gives several examples from the nineteenth century, including one that dates back to 1824.

Since the univocalic excludes all vowels but one, this form of word play is closely related to the lipogram (writings which intentionally delete one or more letters). A. Ross Eckler has popularized the lipogram through his rewrites of the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb" (see the August 1969 issue of Word Ways). Inspired by his efforts, I have chosen this same nursery rhyme as the format for my univocalic endeavors, examples of which follow.

But first, let's refresh our memories by taking a look at Sarah Josepha Hale's original verse:

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go;
He followed her to school one day,
That was against the rule;
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb in school.

Since some readers may not have access to older copies of Word Ways, I present also an example of A. Ross Eckler's verse. The following Eckler lipogram deletes the letter E from Hale's original:

Mary had a tiny lamb,
Its wool was pallid as snow,
And any spot that Mary did walk
This lamb would always go;
This lamb did follow Mary to school,
Although against a law;
How girls and boys did laugh and play,
That lamb in class all saw.

Now to turn our attention to the univocalic. It should be obvious that this is a restrictive form of word play, and my efforts are thus a little cumbersome. By way of example, I have been unable to find synonyms for lamb that contain only an I, O, or U. The alternative words for lamb that I have utilized are:

Letter I: "Stripling" (an adolescent)

Letter O: "Cotswold" (a breed of sheep)

Letter U: "Jumbuck" (Australian term for sheep)

Also, I must admit to an instance of improper English usage. I had a lot of difficulty with the univocalic which used U as the only vowel, and I had to resort to use of th'. This definite article is listed in Webster's Third; however, this source states that it is supposed to be used preceding words starting with vowel sounds (I've used it in front of words beginning with consonants).

Here are the five examples of my univocalic verse:

Martha has a small lamb,
 That has shag blanch as sand,
 And all parts that Martha walks
 That lamb, alas, tags aft;
 That lamb nags at Martha's class,
 Alas, that scraps a law;
 'Twas all rapt lads and gals
 As a lamb at class all saw.

Meg kept the wee sheep,
 The sheep's fleece resembled sleet,
 Then wherever Meg went
 The sheep went there next;
 He went where she heeded her texts,
 The precedent he neglected;
 The pre-teens felt deep cheer
 When the sheep entered there.

This is Mitzi's slight stripling,
 Its skin is vivid milk-light,
 In districts which Mitzi visits
 This stripling sticks with Mitzi;
 It visits Mitzi's thinking-inn,
 Its plight is illicit;
 Still, kids' spirits it did lift
 Sighting Mitzi's stripling within.

Moll's short Cotswold, tho not old,
 Sports wool of snow-color,
 Most spots Moll longs to go;
 Moll's Cotswold longs to go, too;
 Moll's Cotswold follows Moll to school,
 Tho not common, not good;
 Most school tots hop for joy
 To look on Moll's short Cotswold.

Murl puts up th' runt jumbuck,
 Th' jumbuck's fluff runs slush-full,
 But just such suburbs Murl struts
 Thus struts Murl's jumbuck;
 Th' jumbuck hunts up Murl's guru,
 Th' guru grunts much fuss;
 But truth: Murl's chums cut fun jumps,
 Such luck th' jumbuck turns up.