

From "A Book of Nonsense"

Tekst/illustrasjoner:

Edward Lear/Edward Lear, farvelagt av Anne Schjelderup og Øyvind Olsholt

Filosofiske spørsmål:

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This picture shows what the third edition of Lear's "A Book of Nonsense" looked like. It was published by Routledge, Warne & Routledge in 1861, and was the first edition to bear Lear's name. This was unusual at that time, for children's books were usually published anonymously.

I

There was an Old Derry down Derry,
who loved to see little folks merry;
So he made them a book,
and with laughter they shook
at the fun of that Derry down Derry.

II

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!'

III

There was an Old Man who supposed,
That the street door was partially closed;
But some very large rats,
Ate his coats and his hats,
While that futile old gentleman dozed.

IV

There was a Young Lady whose eyes,
Were unique as to colour and size;
When she opened them wide,
People all turned aside,
And started away in surprise.

V

There was a Young Lady whose nose,
Was so long that it reached to her toes;
So she hired an Old Lady,
Whose conduct was steady,
To carry that wonderful nose.

VI

There was an Old Man of Peru,
Who watched his wife making a stew;
But once by mistake,
In a stove she did bake,
That unfortunate Man of Peru.

VII

There was an Old Man of the Nile,
Who sharpened his nails with a file,
Till he cut out his thumbs,
And said calmly, 'This comes
Of sharpening one's nails with a file!'

VIII

There was an Old Man who said, 'Hush!
I perceive a young bird in this bush!'
When they said, 'Is it small?'
He replied, 'Not at all!
It is four times as big as the bush!'

Suggested topics for philosophical discussion

1. An unusual appearance

Apart from being limericks, three of the poems above have something in common. Here is a clue: look at poems II, IV and V, and discuss what the answer could be (hint: the main characters have an unusual physical appearance). Do you think Lear was being rude or unkind to write about such things? When you see someone with an unusual appearance, for example an unusually long nose, or ears that stick out, does it make you feel like laughing at them? Why?

2. Funny and realistic

Did these limericks make you smile or laugh? Which one was the funniest? Why do you think they made you laugh? Because you know someone just like the main character in the limerick? Most of Lear's limericks are stories that are unlikely to happen in real life. That is why they are called "nonsense rhymes". Does this fact bother you? Would you rather the stories were more realistic so that you could really believe they were possible? Or would this make them less funny?

3. Popularity

Why do you think Lear's limericks were so popular in Victorian England? Why do you think they are still so popular today? What makes things popular? Do all popular things have something in common?