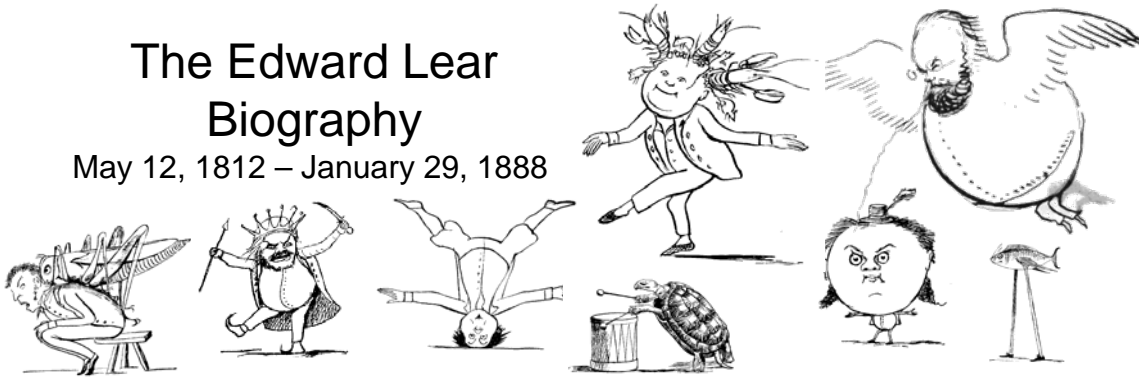




The Edward Lear Biography

May 12, 1812 – January 29, 1888



Edward Lear was a man of many talents: illustrator, landscape painter, author, and poet. Lear is best remembered for writing nonsense poetry for children, known today as limericks. Before the writings of Lear, most children's literature was full of "common sense" instruction. Edward Lear's nonsense poems brought fun and laughter to readers during the strict Victorian era in England. Thanks to Edward Lear's silly sense of humor, limericks are still enjoyed by children and adults more than one hundred years after his death. Edward Lear was the pioneering author of short and silly poetic rhymes. For these reasons, Edward Lear has earned the nickname the "Father of Limericks".

Edward Lear was born in Holloway, England, in the year 1812. Edward was the 20th child out of 21 brothers and sisters. At the age of six, little boy Edward began to suffer from epileptic seizures and other health problems that continued for the rest of his life. This caused Edward to feel sad and lonely and different from the other children. Throughout most of his childhood, Edward was raised and educated by his oldest sister Ann. Ann introduced Edward to the exciting world of classical and modern literature, poetry and drawing. Young Edward quickly discovered his own artistic talents, and at the age of 15, he sold his poems and drawing to earn money.

As a young man, Lear earned his living by drawing birds for science books and painting landscapes for the British Museum. Lear's artistic abilities became so well-known that he was asked to give drawing lessons to Queen Victoria! Edward experienced a few awkward moments with the Queen when he forgot to observe proper court protocol during the art lessons. In 1846, at the age of 34, Lear published *A Book of Nonsense*, a collection of limericks he wrote and illustrated for his friend's grandchildren. These silly verses were Lear's favorite poetic format, which contained five lines and followed an AABBA rhyming pattern. However, they were not actually called limericks yet. Lear simply called them "nonsense, pure and absolute." The term "limerick", as we call it today, was finally used around the time of Lear's death.

Edward Lear's nonsense poems and drawings brought a much needed comic relief for the austere Victorian society. Children living in the Victorian times were raised very strictly, and their education did not include humor or laughter. Can you imagine the sheer delight the children felt reading such literature, where the most ridiculous and absurd situations were brought to life in the form of rhymes? Lear's limericks are truly nonsensical and devoid of any punch line or point. Yet, they were a welcome source of amusement and escapism from the restrictive standards of the Victorian society.

Although Edward Lear was born and raised in England, he spent most of his adult life travelling abroad. During his travels he took great pleasure in drawing landscapes and animals. He had a special fondness for birds. Lear cherished his friends and his beloved cat named Sanreno. He eventually built his dream house in Italy, where he died at the age of 75 in the year 1888.