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Opening extract from

The Owl and the Pussycat and Other Nonsense

Written by

Edward Lear

Published by

Templar Publishing

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This illustrated edition celebrating Edward Lear's bicentenary is dedicated to a friend, the Honourable Tony Street, who is the great great grandson of Edward Lear's sister, Sarah, who was also it seems a talented artist and writer.

Robert Ingpen

A TEMPLAR BOOK

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The Extraordinary Edward Lear

EDWARD LEAR was born in 1812, the twentieth child of a London stockbroker. When Lear was four his father's business collapsed and the family was pitched into poverty. As a young child he developed epilepsy, a condition regarded with much superstition in those days, and as a result, he always saw himself as somewhat of an outsider.

Neglected by his mother, Lear was primarily raised by his devoted sister, Ann, who did much to compensate for the unhappiness of his early years. She taught him to read and write, to play the piano and, most significantly, to draw and paint. As a young man, he began to earn his living as an artist, first selling small drawings and later working as a draughtsman for the Zoological Society.

In 1832 Lear was engaged by Lord Stanley, the president of the Zoological Society, to make drawings of the rare birds and animals in the menagerie at his home, Knowsley Hall. Lear lived on the Knowsley estate for five years, and many of his beautiful drawings from this period are still in the library there. Lear would entertain Lord Stanley's children with his drawings and with limericks and nonsense rhymes that he made up for them – he noted that they responded with 'uproarious delight and welcome at the appearance of every new absurdity.'

By the mid 1830s, Lear decided to become a landscape painter and departed for Rome. He spent much of the rest of his life travelling throughout Europe, painting and writing a number of travel guides. His reputation as a painter grew

and his works began to sell for considerable sums. In 1846 he was appointed drawing master to Queen Victoria, who had admired his illustrations in one of his travel books. But it was his nonsense verse – and the publication in 1867 of his most famous poem, The Owl and the Pussycat – that made him a household name. 'Nonsense is the breath of my nostrils,' he wrote. He saw it as a perfect medium to comment on the world around him – or, as he put it, 'this ludicrously whirligig life which one suffers from first and laughs at afterwards.'

Not long before Lear died in 1888, his friend Emily Tennyson wrote to him, 'However solitary your life has, for many years been, you must not forget that to you is given the most precious gift of peopling the lives of many, not only of this generation but of generations to come, with good and beautiful things and thoughts.'

Illustrator's Note

What is nonsense? As an introduction for the ninth edition of Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs and Stories*, Sir Edward Strachey declared that 'Nonsense has shown itself to be true work of the imagination, a child of genius, and its writing one of the fine arts... Nonsense has found its highest expression of itself in music, painting, sculpture and every form of poetry and prose... But as far as I know Edward Lear first openly gave nonsense its due place and honour when he wrote pure and absolute nonsense.'

Lear began a tradition that influenced many writers and performers in his lifetime and beyond, including Gilbert and Sullivan, A. A. Milne, Spike Milligan and The Goons, Dr Seuss and Monty Python. To celebrate Lear and his contribution to our literature, I have revealed some botanical 'nonsense' that underlies his concept of a Bong Tree. A notion that recurs in many of his *Nonsense Songs and Stories*.

Overleaf: After he published his *Book of Nonsense* and just before one of his journeys from England to search abroad for what he titled 'the picturesque', Edward Lear wrote this letter to his close friend, Chichester Fortescue. It neatly sets out his biography written as if he thought he might not return.

Robert Ingpen

A Letter from Edward Lear

My Dear F.,

I want to send you, before leaving England, a note or two as to the various publications I have uttered,– bad and good, and of all sorts, – also their dates, that so you might be able to screw them into a beautiful memoir of me in case I leave my bones at Palmyra or elsewhere. Leastwise, if a man does anything all through life with a deal of bother, and likewise of some benefit to others, the details of such bother and benefit may as well be known accurately as the contrary.

Born in 1812 (12th May), I began to draw, for bread and cheese, about 1827, but only did uncommon queer shop-sketches -selling them for prices varying from ninepence to four shillings: colouring prints, screens; fans; awhile making morbid disease drawings, for hospitals and certain doctors of physic. In 1831, through Mrs. Wentworth, I became employed at the Zoological Society, and in 1832, published "The Family of the Psittacidae," the first complete· volume of coloured drawings of birds on so large a scale published in England, as far as I know-unless Audubon's were previously engraved. J. Gould's "Indian Pheasants" were commenced at the same time, and after a little while he employed me to draw many of his birds of Europe, while I assisted Mrs. Gould in all her drawings of foreground, as may be seen in a moment by anyone who will glance at my drawingsin G.'s European birds and the Toucans. From 1832 to 1836 when my health failed a good deal, I drew much at the Earl of Derby's; and a series of my drawings was published by Dr. Gray of the British Museum – a book now rare. I also lithographed many various detached subjects, and a large series of Testudinata for Mr. (now Professor) Bell; and I made drawings for Bell's "British Mammalia," and for two or more volumes of the "Naturalist's Library" for the editor, Sir W. Jardine, those volumes being the Parrot's, and, I think, the Monkeys, and some Cats. In 1835 or '36, being in Ireland and the Lakes, I leaned more and more to landscape, and when in 1837 it was found that my health was more affected by the climate month by month, I went abroad, wintering in Rome till 1841, when I came to England and published a volume of lithographs called "Rome and its Environs." Returning to Rome, I visited Sicily and much of the South of Italy and continued to make chalk drawings, though in 1840 I had painted my two first oil-paintings. I also gave lessons in drawing at Rome, and was able to make a very comfortable living. In 1845 I came again to England, and in 1846 gave Queen Victoria some lessons, through Her Majesty's having seen a work I published in that year on the Abruzzi, and another on the Roman States. In 1847 I went through all Southern Calabria, and went again round

Sicily, and in 1848 left Rome entirely. I travelled then to Malta, Greece, Constantinople, and the Ionian Islands; and to Mount Sinai and Greece a second time in 1849, returning to England in that year. All 1850 I gave up to improving -myself in figure-drawing, and I continued to paint oil-paintings till 1853, having published in the meantime, in 1849 and 1852, two volumes entitled "Journals of a Landscape Painter," in Albania and Calabria. The first edition of the Book of Nonsense was published in 1846, lithographed by tracing-paper. In 1854 I went to Egypt and Switzerland, and in 1855 to Corfu, where I remained the winters of 1856–57–58, visiting Athos, and, later, Jerusalem and Syria. In the autumn of 1858 I returned to England, and '59 and '60 winters were passed in Rome. 1861, I remained all the winter in England, and .painted the Cedars of Lebanon and Masada, going after my sister's death in March, 1861, to Italy. The two fo1lowing winters –'62 and '63 – were passed at Corfu, and in the end of the latter year I published "Views of the Ionian Islands." In I862 a second edition of the "Book of Nonsense:" much enlarged, was published, and is now in its sixteenth thousand.

O bother!

Yours affectionately, Edward Lear.

Caption rae nulparis lorem ipsum dolor est idunt doluptature odias mod molupisitas re dernatiis.

The Owl and the Pussycat

I

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

II

Pussy said to the Owl, 'You elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?'
They sailed away for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-tree grows,
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood,
With a ring at the end of his nose.
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

III

‘Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?’ Said the Piggy, ‘I will.’
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dinèd on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

A Bong Tree Botany

VOL. I I

CONSISTING OF
ELEGANTLY COLOURED PLATES WITH APPROPRIATE
SCIENTIFIC AND GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS

OF THE MOST CURIOUS, SCARCE AND BEAUTIFUL

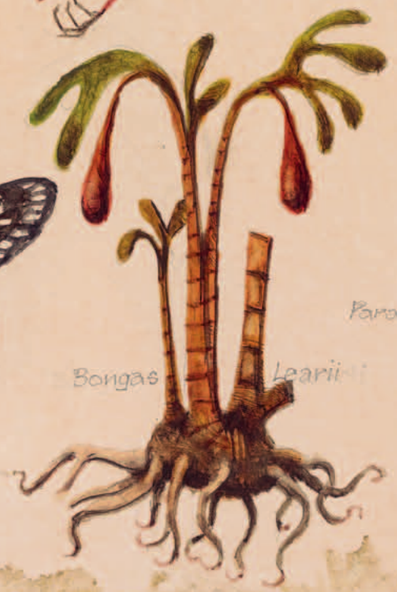
PRODUCTIONS OF NATURE

THAT HAVE RECENTLY BEEN DISCOVERED IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE WORLD
AND DELINEATED BY THE ILLUSTRATOR ROBERT INGPEN

PLATE ONE THE BONG TREE

Number One: THE BONG FRUITING BUDS *Number Two: Unidentified*
Number Three: MATURE BONG FRUIT (As eaten by local insects and moths)
Number Four: IMMATURE BONG FRUIT (As eaten by the Common Bong Bird)

Papilio Belladonna



Bongas Learii

Paracalais gibbonii

1823. AA Street - London

Bong Tree Land

Visitors to Bong Tree Land must be prepared to travel by sea for a year and a day from almost any port in England. The land, which is really an island, is almost completely covered with forests of self-sown Bong Trees (*Bongbusodae mangifera*). Botanists describe rare plants as being related to bamboo grass that has the ability to produce fruit that ripen annually, then fall and rot if left alone. Bong fruit is not unlike the common mango in taste, and can be used to make a delicate chutney that is usually eaten with mince. (see recipe on page 48).

The Land boasts a few unexpected species of fauna and insects. Among these is a turkey who lives on the higher forest reaches, and who is uniquely qualified to perform marriages. The lower forest canopy is inhabited by pigs, some with rings in their noses, and all manner of insects that eat decaying Bong Fruit since humans rarely visit the Land to gather the annual crop.

For those intrepid tourists who do visit Bong Tree Land the cuisine consists mainly of quince and mince combinations which is traditionally eaten with a runcible spoon. Pig nose-rings can be bought for five new pence as souvenirs.