

Poetry: Nonsense poems

Anonymous:

Hey, diddle, diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

Anonymous:

I Saw a Peacock, with a fiery tail,
I saw a Blazing Comet, drop down hail,
I saw a Cloud, with Ivy circled round,
I saw a sturdy Oak, creep on the ground,
I saw a Pismire, swallow up a Whale,
I saw a raging Sea, brim full of Ale,
I saw a Venice Glass, Sixteen foot deep,
I saw a well, full of mens tears that weep,
I saw their eyes, all in a flame of fire,
I saw a House, as big as the Moon and higher,
I saw the Sun, even in the midst of night,
I saw the man, that saw this wondrous sight.

(A 'Pismire', by the way, is an old word for an ant.)

Lewis Carroll, 'Jabberwocky'.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!'

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Edward Lear, 'The Owl and the Pussycat'.

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 dined 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.

'The Owl and the Pussycat' was published in Lear's 1871 collection *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets*.

A. E. Housman, 'The Crocodile'.

The Crocodile or, Public Decency
Though some at my aversion smile,
I cannot love the crocodile.
Its conduct does not seem to me
Consistent with sincerity.

Where Nile, with beneficial flood,
Improves the desert sand to mud,
The infant child, its banks upon,
Will run about with nothing on.
The London County Council not
Being adjacent to the spot,
This is the consequence. Meanwhile,
What is that object in the Nile,
Which swallows water, chokes and spits?
It is the crocodile in fits.

'Oh infant! oh my country's shame!
Suppose a European came!
Picture his feelings, on his pure
Personally conducted tour!
The British Peer's averted look,
The mantling blush of Messrs. Cook!
Come, awful infant, come and be
Dressed, if nothing else, in me.'

Then disappears into the Nile
The infant, clad in crocodile,
And meekly yields his youthful breath

To darkness, decency, and death.
His mother, in the local dells,
Deplores him with Egyptian yells:
Her hieroglyphic howls are vain,
Nor will the lost return again.
The crocodile itself no less
Displays, but does not feel, distress,
And with its tears augments the Nile;
The false, amphibious crocodile.

'Is it that winds Etesian blow,
Or melts on Ethiop hills the snow?'
So, midst the inundated scene,
Inquire the floating fellaheen.
From Cairo's ramparts gazing far
The mild Khedive and stern Sirdar
Say, as they scan the watery plain,
'There goes that crocodile again.'
The copious tribute of its lids
Submerges half the pyramids,
And over all the Sphinx it flows,
Except her non-existent nose.



Meryn Peake, 'The Trouble with Geraniums'.

The trouble with geraniums
is that they're much too red!
The trouble with my toast is that
it's far too full of bread.

The trouble with a diamond
is that it's much too bright.
The same applies to fish and stars
and the electric light.

The troubles with the stars I see
lies in the way they fly.
The trouble with myself is all
self-centred in the eye.

The trouble with my looking-glass
is that it shows me, me;
there's trouble in all sorts of things
where it should never be.