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SENSIBLE NONSENSE OR NONSENSICAL SENSE. LIMERICKS  
(ОСМЫСЛЕННЫЕ БЕССМЫСЛИЦЫ  
ИЛИ БЕССМЫСЛЕННЫЙ СМЫСЛ. ЛИМЕРИКИ)

Лимерики - особая стихотворная форма, состоящая из 5 строк и имеющая жёсткую схему рифмовки (ААББА), размера и сюжета. Сюжетно лимерики выстроены следующим образом: в первой строке указывается имя героя и его происхождение, во второй описывается, что с ним произошло, а далее - чем всё закончилось. Несмотря на огромное количество версий об истории возникновения этого вида поэзии, точное происхождение лимериков до сих пор неизвестно. Впервые лимерики были опубликованы в 1820-1821 гг., а позднее эта стихотворная форма была популяризована английским поэтом Э.Лиром. Многих русских поэтов и переводчиков, среди которых С. Маршак, И. Бурова, О. Астафьева, особенно привлекал этот жанр своей внешней простотой, скрывающей, однако, неограниченные возможности. Лимерики позволяли воплощать самые безумные идеи, давая возможность от души посмеяться над собой и окружающим миром.

Limericks are humorous, light, nonsensical verses mainly of five lines in which the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme with each other and the third and fourth lines, shorter in form, make up a rhymed couplet. A good limerick must have some element of the absurd. For example:

<i>A dinner while dining at Crewe</i>	<i>Во время обеда у 'Крюде'</i>
<i>Found a rather large mouse in his stew.</i>	<i>Гостем мышь была найдена в блюде;</i>
<i>Said the waiter, "Don't shout</i>	<i>Официант умолял</i>
<i>And wave it about,</i>	<i>Не кричать на весь зал,</i>
<i>Or the rest will be wanting one, too".</i>	<i>Ведь не хватит мышат на всех в 'Крюде'.</i>

The history of limericks is very poorly documented – nobody even seems to know how or where the name "limericks" originated. The verse form is exclusively comic and can be found at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Mother Goose Melodies for Children, 1719) and later (The History of Sixteen Wonderful, Old Women, 1821). One theory is that the name comes from a group of poets who wrote in Limerick, Ireland in the 18th century. Another attributes the name to a party game of making up a nonsense verse and following it with a chorus of "Will you come up to Limerick". The rest suppose that an example of the random, fortuitous limerick was written as far back as in the thirteenth century in the Breviary of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

The first limericks appeared in books published in 1820 and 1821, and the form was popularised by Edward Lear(1812-1888) in a collection published in 1846. Lear, then, contrary to what is generally supposed, was neither the inventor of the limerick nor the first to publish a book containing only limericks. Among people identified by the ingenious as authors of prelimericks are Aristophanes, Robert Herrick, and Shakespeare. Such grandees of poetry as L. Carroll, W.S. Gilbert, R.L. Stevenson, R. Kipling, E. Field also took part in the creation of limericks. Limericks were translated into Russian by S. Marshak, I. Burova, M. Redkina and others. For example:

<i>There was an old Person of Ewell,</i>	<i>Жил старик по фамилии Белл.</i>
<i>Who chiefly subsisted on gruel;</i>	<i>Только кашу на завтрак он ел.</i>
<i>But to make it more nice</i>	<i>А чтоб было вкусней,</i>
<i>He inserted some mice,</i>	<i>В кашу пару мышей</i>
<i>Which refreshed that Old Person of Ewell.</i>	<i>Добавлял старый лакомка Белл.</i>

О. Астафьева

Lear also emphasised the structural closure of the form by drastically reducing variations. Most of his limericks follow a strict scheme. Each line has a fixed narrative function: the first line introduces the protagonist describing him in relation to a geographic location or, sometimes, a physical feature; the second qualifies him or her, usually introducing some peculiar habit; the third line is generally strictly narrative, often in dialogic form, and the final line either closes the story or further qualifies the character according to what has been told. Thanks to this strict organisation Lear's limerick provides a "closed field", a conventional frame which allows for unlimited variation. Sometimes Lear was known to create a nonsense word if he couldn't come up with a rhyme. It might be place-names, such as the great Gromboolian plain, the Hills of the Chankly Bores, or a hero's name, for instance, Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos.

In that way, Lear simply refined and brought to perfection a form that had already had a brief fad in the 1820s; his limericks, based on a perfect balance of text and picture, remain the best-known and loved, a masterpiece of children's literature. Lear's Nonsense Verse is inseparable from his own drawings. After him, the limerick has become the typical epigrammatic stanza in English and the vehicle of much contemporary popular poetry. It has been put to several uses: Joyce's limericks, for instance, almost form an anecdotic autobiography, others have used the rhyme for political satire or for literary parody. Very little remains of Lear's subtle humour, but limericks, though often silly, are still often fun to read. The limerick betrays our human neuroses, obsessions and foibles in a manner that, most importantly, makes us laugh at ourselves and the often crazy world that we live in.

*There was an old man from Peru  
Who dreamt he was eating his shoe  
He awoke in a fright  
In the middle of night  
And found it was perfectly true.*

*Пожилый джентльмен из Перу  
Видел сон, будто ест он туфлю;  
И, проснувшись в испуге  
Почти в полнолуние,  
Он туфлю обнаружил во рту.*