

### Nonsense Poetry & Flash Fiction Writing Competition – a few handy hints

#### What do we mean by “nonsense writing”?

It is usually a poem, or piece of prose, that doesn't make normal sense, but makes its own enjoyable little world of nonsense. In his introduction to *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, Holbrook Jackson talks about "the wholehearted abandonment of sense". In nonsense writing some things have been changed, but it is still recognisable as a world of its own. It isn't "anything goes", and is usually grammatically correct, and doesn't just mish-mash any old thing together, but keeps some strongly consistent elements within its strangeness.

A few nonsense techniques – though you may invent your own –

- \* a formal structure (limerick or other) with absurd elements
- \* nonsensical cause and effect (many Edward Lear limericks, for example)
- \* portmanteau words (one word created out of two words: "mimsy" is "flimsy and miserable")
- \* neologisms (made-up new words), backwards words, arbitrary new things, repetition

But it's probably best just to read a few nonsense pieces, and then go with the flow, and have a go.

#### Nonsense Flash Fiction

Flash Fiction is just a term for describing a very short story. Flash fiction ranges from 500 word limits down to 50 word limits, and is an excellent way to practice the economy of story writing. You must take the reader immediately into the scene, and exit just as fast. We are using a 100 word limit. You have to create a world very fast – including character, storyline, conflict and resolution. Dan Rhodes is probably the best known writer of flash fiction – see his book *Anthropology*, for example.

In celebration of Edward Lear's bicentenary, we decided to have a nonsense competition that included poetry and prose. Nonsense flash fiction is a rare kind of writing (except Ivor Cutler, some John Lennon, and maybe one or two others), but lots of fun, and in entering this competition you are helping to spread the word about this form! In nonsense flash fiction, you would usually still create something that has the elements of a story, even if it is nonsensical. There will need to be some sort of storyline, and quite possibly some dialogue. One way to set the right mood could be to start your story with the word "Curiously...", or "Strangely...". Have fun!

#### Some folk to read if you want to...

Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Spike Milligan, Ivor Cutler, John Lennon, Flann O'Brien, Mervyn Peake, Michael Rosen, Laura E. Richards, Dave Eggers and his brother Christopher writing as Dr. And Mr. Doris Haggis-on-Whey, James Thurber, Dr. Seuss and others.

### Nonsense Poems and Prose – a few examples

#### Jabberwocky (opening verse)

Twas brillig and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe  
All mimsy were the borogroves  
And the mome raths outrabe

**Lewis Carroll**

#### On the Ning Nang Nong (1<sup>st</sup> 4 lines)

On the Ning Nang Nong  
Where the cows go Bong!  
and the monkeys all say BOO!  
There's a Nong Nang Ning

**Spike Milligan**

#### Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz

Oh freddled gruntbuggly,  
Thy micturations are to me  
As plurdled gabbleblotchits on a lurgid bee.  
Groop I implore thee, my foonting turlingdromes

**(a creation of Douglas Adams)**

#### Curiously

Curiously, I dived into the blue crystal lake, and explored under the surface. There was a crystal town, talking to itself. No wonder the lake shone so brightly. I swam down to the town, and found that it was protected by a giant bubble made out of jelly. "How do you get through a bubble of jelly?" I wondered. An idea came into my head. Why don't I just swim through it? It worked! One moment I was gasping for breath, and the next I had all the air I needed. There was plenty of food, so I decided to live there forever.

**Sam Tucker, aged 9**

#### A slight curve

An insecure man decided to live below a mountain, so he dug a tunnel till he came to the middle, but his ruler had a slight curve and he came out a quarter of the way round. However, all the healthy exercise inside the mountain cured his insecurity so he just laughed and went back to his wife and children and grandchildren and in-laws.

**Ivor Cutler**

#### Her part

When called to account, she admitted the offence of unwittingly killing a dozen insects a day under her stilettos, mostly when running for buses, which tended to arrive slightly ahead of time in her part of the country.

**Ivor Cutler**