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**Being and Naughtiness**

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I

Lear records an incident on a train in October 1866, in which a fellow passenger explained to the carriage that the author of *A* *Book of Nonsense* (1846) does not exist:

‘… *There is no such person* as Edward Lear.’ ‘But’ says I, ‘there *is*---and I am the man---and I wrote the book!’ Whereon all the party burst out laughing and evidently thought me mad or telling fibs. So I took off my hat and showed it all round, with Edward Lear and the address in large letters---also one of my cards, and a marked handkerchief: on which amazement devoured those benighted individuals and I left them to gnash their teeth in trouble and tumult. (*LL*, 78-79)

Lear recounts the episode in a letter to his friend Lady Waldegrave, where he also depicts it in an unusual line drawing. The passenger accuses ‘Lear’ of being an anagram of ‘Earl,’ arguing that the real author of *A* *Book of Nonsense* is the thirteenth earl of Derby, Edward Stanley, Lear’s employer during the time he wrote much of this work, his first nonsense collection. Lear defends his name against the charge of being mere word-play, by demonstrating its palpable existence, written in his hat and on his handkerchief and visiting card. Material inscription trumps verbal protestations of identity here, much as it does in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where Algernon Moncrieff remarks to Jack Worthing that ‘It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn’t Ernest. It’s on your cards. Here is one of them.’[[1]](#footnote-1) Finding his name has become public property, vivisected by strangers and denounced as an anagram, so that he is laughed at when he claims it as his own, Lear’s identity is recognised by his fellow passengers only once the name is presented to them reified in the props of gentlemanly self-possession, as a marker of private property rights. ‘No entity without identity,’[[2]](#footnote-2) Lear’s being is accordingly vindicated and vivified, while in his account the verisimilitude of the stranger and onlookers in the carriage is correspondingly diminished by their being caricatured, depicted hyperbolically as consumed by incredulity, and relegated to a private hell: ‘amazement devoured those benighted individuals and I left them to gnash their teeth in trouble and tumult.’

 Lear’s letter records his amused recognition of, and play with, the verisimilitude accorded to different verbal registers, not only stylistically in the closing description of the other passengers, but more radically in the treacherous contingency of the letters that form his name, as they allow themselves to be rearranged by strangers, and the ineffectual nature of its utterance here, the assertion of mere breath, next to its manifest expression in the material fabric of his social being. It brings forward his knowing and self-conscious play with representation and being, the power of words and line drawing to confer and refuse the attribute of being to objects both concrete and imaginary. This essay traces the ways in which Lear’s limericks and other nonsense texts proceed from word sounds and arbitrary forms to generate effects of verisimilitude, giving them an ontological poise that precludes their being dismissed as mere unmeaning nonsense. It argues that his nonsense works mark a modest linguistic turn, an ontology that is preposterous to Parmenides, as it names that which is not, but plausible to Samuel Beckett’s Unnamable, who concludes that being is ‘all words, there’s nothing else.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

The drawing that Lear makes to memorialise his *coup* *de grâce*, the triumphant moment of his hat trick, similarly displays and plays with the ontological registers of the pictorial line, the expressive medium he twins with words in his limericks and other nonsense works.



Insert Fig. 7.1 here

Like its accompanying text, it brings the focus of this essay, Lear’s play with representation and being, with form and verisimilitude, clearly into relief. The summary title that he gives to his illustration reduces the incident to an absurd metaphysical crux: ‘Lear showing a doubting stranger his name in his hat to prove that Edward Lear was a man and not merely a name. *Drawn by himself*.’ By being written inside the hat, the arbitrary name becomes a literally fitting and encompassing caption for the man. As forms that give material being to his name, Lear’s card, labelled hat and monogrammed handkerchief are suggestive emblems for the letters and words that, this essay argues, are reified as shapes and sounds in his nonsense writings, often with the collusion of their illustrations. A further material manifestation of his identity, Lear’s drawing reiterates his proprietorial claim to being himself. He emerges from the incident on the train not only amused by the stranger’s scepticism and the proof of identity that quells it, but also delighted by the opportunity it yields for playful self-portraiture. ‘*Drawn by himself*,’ at once the expression and likeness of the man, Lear’s drawing literally depicts gradations of being, allocating verisimilitude arbitrarily and unevenly amongst the various players in the railway carriage.

The ontological validation that the name in his hat gives to Lear is clear from the realist idiom in which he renders his self-portrait in the drawing. Well known as an accomplished and versatile draughtsman and painter, through the scrupulous scientific records of parrots and other animal species in his early natural history work, the fanciful play of the nonsense work, and the romantic range of his landscapes, Lear was also an innovative print-maker. He pioneered not only the use of lithography for scientific illustration, but also wood-engraving, through his contributions to E. T. Turner’s *The Gardens and Menagerie of the Zoological Society Delineated* (1831), William Buckland’s *Geology and Mineralogy Considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (1836), and Thomas Bell’s *A History of the British Quadrupeds, including the Cetacea* (1837). ‘Lear showing a doubting stranger’ depicts him and the onlookers in the style of such engravings.

Established by Thomas Bewick in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, modern wood engraving uses a metal engraver’s burin to carve fine lines on hard end-grain wood. This process furnishes easily legible images of clear outline and even tonal values that allowed them to be reproduced in vast numbers for new mass markets across the nineteenth century. Refined and developed by the Pre-Raphaelites, the technique was used by the Dalziel brothers for Lear’s illustrations to Tennyson’s poems, as well as for a new cheaper edition of his *Book of Nonsense* in 1862. Along with book illustration and specialist scientific applications, the versatile and accurate technique found its most pervasive use in such popular newspapers and periodicals as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge’s *Penny Magazine*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Good Words* and the *London Illustrated News*. In documenting the public assertion and proof of his being, Lear accordingly deploys the age’s great positivist and encyclopaedic idiom of wood engraving to represent himself in his drawing. The fine lines, and the hatching and cross-hatching of Lear’s clothes and the figures of the onlookers, attributes them all with an ontological depth and facticity that is missing from the sceptical line-drawing of the caricatured stranger. Shocked and surprised by the proof of Lear’s authenticity, the stranger appears pale and flat, as if from another dimension, like Wilde’s Canterville Ghost. He is permitted only a probationary being.

Speculation about the authorship of *A Book of Nonsense*, which as Lear notes was still a talking point twenty years after it first appeared, was originally prompted by its anonymous publication. Much as he does in the later letter to Lady Waldegrave, Lear addresses the question of his authorial identity in the early editions of the book with a quaint self-portrait in words and line drawing. The boards and title page of the first and second editions of *A Book of Nonsense* include a riddling limerick and illustration in lieu of its author’s name, a modest manifesto in which Lear identifies himself with this form of verse and describes its purpose:



Insert Fig. 7.2 here [The image from the 1st edition, which does not give the author’s name, will be used in the published chapter]

There was an Old Derry down Derry, who loved to see little folks merry;

So he made them a Book, and with laughter they shook, at the fun of that

 Derry down Derry![[4]](#footnote-4)

Naming the author of the *Book of Nonsense* as ‘an Old Derry down Derry,’[[5]](#footnote-5) the first of the limericks in the collection implicitly presents Lear as the prototype for their protagonists, whose defining activity of writing these verses parallels their various distinctive behaviours. Composing such limericks is accordingly likened to dancing ‘a quadrille with a Raven,’ or playing jigs to an ‘uncle’s white pigs’, another example of an ‘Old’ person’s ‘ways’ that are ‘perplexing and odd.’ (*CN*, 172, 73, 355)

Like those that follow it, the drawing for the ‘Derry down Derry’ limerick, which occupies the title page and front and back boards of most editions issued during Lear’s lifetime, depicts its protagonist’s peculiar *raison d’être*, as he presents the *Book of Nonsense* to many active and excited ‘little folks merry.’ This presentation accordingly furnishes a representation of ‘A Book of Nonsense’ on the covers of the book itself, a *mise-en-abyme* conceit to parallel that of the limerick it accompanies: the teasing predicament indicated earlier, in which the author introduces himself as a fictitious character in a limerick, ‘an Old Derry down Derry,’ who is nevertheless also responsible for creating the other protagonists of the limericks, each of whom is defined by an odd behaviour parallel to that of writing the limericks, of making the Book that contains them all. Such recursivity anticipates the protagonist of *The Unnamable*, who through his writing brings into being himself and other Beckettian characters, such as Molloy and Malone.

The self-contained form of Lear’s limerick and its peculiar deployment of word-sounds can be introduced and explained in relation to contemporary children’s literature, a popular strain of which conspired to shape the emerging middle-class conception and experience of childhood with strict and often arbitrary rules. The limericks offer a carnivalesque retort to such popular moralistic children’s literature as Mrs Turner’s chapbooks *The Daisy, or Cautionary Stories in Verse* (1808) and *The Cowslip, or More Cautionary Stories* (1811), where short verses describe children being punished, often with grotesque severity, for wilful behaviour; ‘Such naughty things to do’[[6]](#footnote-6) as truancy, making noises, not dressing, using ‘Improper Words’[[7]](#footnote-7) and killing cats. Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues that nonsense literature arises partly as a reaction to early mass-schooling in Britain, with its ‘maxims of good behaviour, linguistic and otherwise.’[[8]](#footnote-8) The early nineteenth century chapbook is adjunct to such schooling, as another example of the form serves to illustrate. *Mrs Lovechild’s Golden Present for All Good Little Boys and Girls* (c. 1820) clearly outlines the moral mission and the format of the chapbook genre, with a preliminary wood-cut of a Dame school class, with rows of children on benches being read to by a stern Mrs Lovechild, ‘Who,’ as the verse beneath it explains, ‘places here before your view, | The boon of vice and virtue too.’ She is seated at a table holding the aforementioned boons, her pavlovian instruments of instruction, in each hand: ‘All who are good the Orange share, | The rod no naughty boy shall spare.’[[9]](#footnote-9) While broadly corresponding to the page format of the chapbooks, the limericks contradict their paternalistic premise, that children can and should look to their elders for moral guidance and sober examples of good conduct. Instead they present, with documentary frankness, a delirium of aberrant and wilful behaviours, each of which indicates the peculiar character of an adult, usually an old person who is native to a particular place in Britain, or indeed the greater world: ‘There was an Old Man of Moldavia, | Who had the most curious behaviour’ (*CN*, 82). The limericks furnish localized, pseudo-factual reports of naughtiness amongst grown-up people, which build cumulatively to yield inductive generalizations about their arbitrary mores and absurd nature.

Much reprinted across a period notorious for prescribing that children should be seen and not heard, *The Daisy* and *The Cowslip* are preoccupied with childish sounds: ‘There was a naughty boy; | Who talk’d and play’d, | And noises made.’ Crying (‘those tears and this noise’) is excusable for babies ‘not yet able to speak with their tongue,’[[10]](#footnote-10) but when perpetrated by children, is always met with whipping in these verses. Doctors and nurses attending a sick mother warn that childish ‘noise would make her worse,’ while the secret of ‘The Good Scholar’ is that ‘he made it a rule, | To be silent at school.’[[11]](#footnote-11) In harsh and telling contrast to Lear’s ‘Derry Down Derry’ limerick, childish laughter is the crude sound of *schadenfreude* in ‘The Hoyden,’ where ‘A very large stone, when it fell on her toe: | […] Set up a loud laugh’ from the boys. The original sin of ‘a faulty tongue,’[[12]](#footnote-12) the noises that children make are regarded as the expression of a primitive wilfulness that needs to be subdued, superseded by habits of silence and deferential politesse.

 Judged by Mrs Turner’s code of juvenile behaviour, the ‘Derry down Derry’ limerick and illustration, the urtext for *The Book of Nonsense*, is both a testament and incitement to naughtiness. In the drawing, the lines of the limbs and sight-lines of the children and the Old Derry down Derry converge upon the focal point of the ‘Book.’ Several children are pictured dancing around it, with one doing a head-stand, while in a balancing group on the other side of the protagonist, the open mouth of one child and the vertical lines of the children’s leaping limbs, like a series of exclamation marks, echo and emphasise this excitement. Compensating for the silence of its medium, the drawing translates sound vibrations into the sketchy, almost abstract, dynamics of its lines, propagating and amplifying the bodily expression of merriment that the verses ascribe to the children, as ‘with laughter they shook.’ Their limbs akimbo reiterating those of the ‘Derry down Derry,’ the children’s laughter responds directly and in kind to the expressive sounds of the protagonist, which are intrinsic not only to his art but also to his name.

While, as Vivien Noakes observes, ‘Derry down Derry’ is the name of a fool in old English mummers’ plays, it is best known as a refrain in English folk songs, akin to the ‘high diddle diddledy’ Lear uses in his early ‘Ode to the little China Man.’ (*CN*, 485, 44) A lilting phrase that has long since lost its denotations and been used to furnish rhymes and sustain lines of verse and music, ‘Derry down Derry’ is a casually canonical nonsense sound, with which the ‘little folks merry’ resonate in Lear’s limerick. Sounds without particular meaning, both ‘Derry down Derry’ and the children’s laughter he incites find their expression, their visual correlative, in the physical exuberance sketched by the drawing, the sort of sound and fury signifying naughtiness that Mrs Turner campaigns against in her chapbooks.

The phrase ‘Derry down Derry’ is in Lear’s verse not only a pseudonymous signature, but also outlines the signature tune, the basic form, of his limericks. Restated at the start and end of its poem, the phrase encapsulates the larger shape it fills, representing schematically the overarching repetition that contains each of the limericks. In the fuller form of the phrase used in the first line, ‘an Old Derry’ suggests a curtailed version of the formula used for most protagonists of the limericks, which identifies them with a place; ‘an Old [person of] Derry.’ The rest of the phrase, the further ‘down Derry,’ gestures to the answering form below, in the last line of the verse. Each instance of the word that is repeated at the ends of the first and the final lines of a limerick (e.g., ‘Derry’) becomes a rhyme only insofar as both are mediated by a similar word-sound at the close of the second line (e.g., ‘merry’). The limerick’s nicely aligned three trimeter and two dimeter lines carry the respective terms of the *aabba* rhyme scheme, while it ends where it began, with the last line repeating all or much of the first, a neatly ordered and self-enclosed poem of one stanza.

II

Being identified with a place name implies belonging, fitting in with a habitat or social group. Usually native to a particular place, the protagonists of the limericks are presented as peculiar species that each consist of only one member,[[13]](#footnote-13) who while they may each be on friendly terms with certain animals are almost invariably distinguished from groups of people, most notoriously the ‘they’. Also placed in the past (‘There was an Old Person of …’), the protagonists of the limericks are not only definitive but also extinct, like the creatures at the end of Lear’s *The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple*. By the closing chapter of this little natural history the children from the Seven Families of animals have all fallen prey to a nonsensical ‘nature red in tooth and claw’. This leaves only their ‘old’ parents to represent the taxonomical array of the Lake, a role they fulfil conscientiously, as they decide to leave their remains to science, pickling themselves in seven bottles and giving ‘strict orders’ in their wills that they be carefully sealed and labelled and ‘presented to the principal museum of the city of Tosh.’ (*CN*, 205) They effectively offer themselves as name-bearing specimens or holotypes, the preserved remains, usually held in the British Museum, that provide the definitive reference for identifying subsequent examples of the species.[[14]](#footnote-14) As Lear was well aware from producing his *Illustrations of the family of Psittacidae,* *or parrots* (1832), a male and a female specimen, complementary holotypes and allotypes, are often needed to identify bird species, a requirement that is met by the pickled examples from the Seven Families, which include parrots and three other types of birds hitherto indigenous to Lake Pipple-Popple. Of course, these creatures can serve no useful purpose as reference specimens, any more than those singular species, also old and unique, that are hermetically sealed and preserved in the arbitrary verse form of Lear’s limerick. The place to which each of the protagonists of the limericks belongs turns out to be not a society or habitat, but simply a sound, like ‘Pipple-Popple’, a word that establishes the rhyme pattern that creates and contains them.

A quirky class of word-sounds, place names, especially those that Lear chooses, can be peculiarly difficult to rhyme: Cadiz, Putney, Vienna, Carlisle, Russia, Dargle, Hague, Kamschatka, Bohemia, Bangor, Quebec, Smyrna, Vesuvius, Slough, Corfu. While such names each need only one rhyme for their limerick, most offer few choices and so require audacious narrative or descriptive links to facilitate and justify their connection. This *a* rhyme in turn establishes the conditions for the subsidiary *b* rhyme, and hence the further terms of the limerick’s vignette:

There was an Old Man of th’ Abruzzi,

So blind that he couldn’t his foot see;

When they said, ‘That’s your toe,’ he replied, ‘Is it so?’

That doubtful Old Man of th’ Abruzzi. (*CN*, 79)

Arbitrary formal constraints furnish the means of generating a story here, much as they do for texts by the Oulipo writers, while the series of rhyming words that determine this process can be compared to Lewis Carroll’s word-games. In his games of doublets (1879) and syzygies (1891), sequences of chiming letters provide the means by which words are transformed progressively from one into another, to perform a task: ‘*Introduce* Walrus *to* Carpenter,’ ‘Converse Cheerfully,’ ‘*Make* Bullets *of* Lead.’ So, for example, in a simple premonition of Edwin Morgan’s poem ‘Eohippus’,[[15]](#footnote-15) linguistic gradualism emulates biological evolution in the doublet ‘*Change* FISH *to* BIRD,’ as transpositions of single letters generate new words: ‘FISH | fist | gist | girt | gird | BIRD.’ The more complex game of syzygies requires a sequence of at least three letter-sounds to be retained from one word to the next in order to advance to the preordained destination, as, for example, ‘*Reconcile* DOG *to* CAT’: ‘DOG (dog) | endogen (gen) | gentry (ntry) | intricate (cat) | CAT.’[[16]](#footnote-16) The linguistic chromatism of Carroll’s games is, of course, typically baulked in Lear’s limericks, as pivoting upon the *a* rhyme at the end of the second line the initial term of the brief series is pedantically restored in the last. Or rather, outnumbered by the other terms, the variant word sandwiched between them emerges not so much a full rhyme as a half-repetition. Instead of opening outwards, as Carroll’s word games do, to explore possibilities that allow them to reach their promised end, the limericks fold back upon themselves in tautologous reiteration.

Carroll’s word-games and the rhyme sequences of Lear’s limericks concur with Kurt Schwitter’s tenet that the letter rather than the word is the original material for poetry.[[17]](#footnote-17) Like these word-games and the limericks, Lear’s Alphabets also have their own rules for generating sequences of word-sounds. They are made to chime with the name of an object, calling out one another in rhyming alignment to describe it:

R was once a little rose,

 Rosy

 Posy

 Nosy

 Rosy

Blows-y grows-y

Little Rose! (296)

The central column of this series corresponds to the pattern of Carroll’s doublets, before shifting into a indicative instance of syzygy with the penultimate line, all the while insisting that homologous forms of words be used to name and describe the nature of their object, the ‘little rose’ that ‘R was once.’

Such sequences from the Alphabets bear comparison with the more exacting linguistic taxonomies and scales that Lear’s young contemporary Gerard Manley Hopkins pursues during the 1860s in the word-lists of his early diaries, where he collects and arranges gradations of word-sounds that correspondingly represent a range of related meanings. He is happiest with those that participate directly in the being they designate through onomatopoeia: ‘*Flick*, *fillip*, *flip*, *fleck*, *flake* … Key to meaning … is that of striking or cutting off the surface of a thing.’[[18]](#footnote-18) Onomatopoeia also contributes to the lightly-worn ontological authority of the word-play in Lear’s Alphabets, with their ‘Twirly-tweely | Little Eel,’ ‘Howly’ owl, and ‘Jumpy-jimpy | Little Shrimp.’ (*CN*, 283, 293, 297). Hopkins is preoccupied with exploring and establishing relations between language and being, concerns that also surface, playfully and anarchically, in Lear’s nonsense works. Some sense of these texts as a mischievous reflection of his own concerns in writing verse may have formed part of Lear’s appeal for Hopkins, who in a letter to his mother of 2 March 1873 recommends the *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871), from which the examples of the eel, owl and shrimp are drawn, saying that he prefers him to Carroll.[[19]](#footnote-19) The chiming lists of Lear’s Alphabets are also heavily weighted with metrical stress, in the manner of the nursery rhymes that Hopkins notes approvingly as a precedent for his practice of Sprung Rhythm,[[20]](#footnote-20) which, integral to his metaphysic of instress and inscape, he sees to activate a language suffused with being.

Both Lear and Hopkins intend their verse to be read aloud. Indeed they each make the spoken word insistent, fundamentally Schopenhauerian, a bodily expression that objectifies, gives representation to, the force of will. In *The World as Will and Representation* (1818, expanded 1844), Schopenhauer follows Kant in affirming that we know the world phenomenally as the object of our perception, but overcomes his proscription of knowledge of *noumena*, of things as they are in-themselves. Schopenhauer does this by arguing that the individual knows himself not only as bodily movements but also from the inside, as the will that impels them: ‘This and this alone gives him the key to his own phenomenon, reveals to him the significance and shows him the inner mechanism of his being, his actions, his movements.’[[21]](#footnote-21) According to Schopenhauer, such experience enables us to understand not only other people and organisms by analogy to ourselves, as having a will, but also such physical forces as gravity, electricity and magnetism. This encompassing principle yields one of several unifying romantic ontologies that during the middle decades of the nineteenth-century furnished a suggestive model for the energy concept in physics. Energy was also known at this time by the mechanical instance and analogy of ‘stress,’ the term that Hopkins appropriates, subsuming metrical stress within it, for his active and informing principle of being.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The wilfulness that Lear finds in words and, akin to Hopkins, focuses in his sequences of word-sounds is, however, of the sort that Mrs Turner chastises; the ebullience of the children depicted on the covers of the *Book of Nonsense*, of sounds uttered and repeated for their own sake, bodily expressions of will akin to dancing and jumping, and shaking with laughter. Both poets like the freshness of word-sounds. Hopkins traces it to the original principle of *pneuma*, of soul or breath that has its giver in God and informs and upholds both persons and words, while Lear explores the childish joy in making noises and reproducing the elementary sounds of language, the Kristevan semiotic. He pays tribute to the developmental moment at which the child tentatively recognises and savours such sounds as purveyors of meaning, as they oscillate between nonsense and sense: ‘Jammy | Mammy | Clammy | Jammy | Sweety-swammy | Jar of Jam!’ (*CN*, 288)

Hopkins formulates his doctrine of stress through his reading in 1868 of the Presocratic philosopher Parmenides, who, as was suggested earlier, also provides a useful point of reference for appreciating Lear. Parmenides is credited with making the first logical argument in the West, which springs from his tautologous premise that ‘Being *is*’. For this to be the case, he reasons, Being cannot come into being (that is, from nothing, or not-being) or conversely cease to be. Nor, similarly, could it be uneven in any way, existing in different degrees or places. Parmenides accordingly likens Being to a sphere, perfectly coherent and unchanging, of uniform consistency throughout.[[23]](#footnote-23) This describes his Way of Truth, while the ostensible principles of variety and change, which are antithetical to Being and hence anathema to Parmenides, indicate the other ‘way’ that mortals name but should not:

the one way, that it *is* and cannot not be, is the path of Persuasion, for it attends upon Truth; the other, that it *is-not* and needs must not-be, that I tell thee is a path altogether unthinkable. For thou couldst not know that which is-not (that is impossible) nor utter it; for the same thing exists for thinking and for being.[[24]](#footnote-24)

An important fragment for Hopkins, as through it he develops the ontological grounds for utterance through his principle of ‘Being’ or ‘stress,’[[25]](#footnote-25) this passage also conversely furnishes what may be the earliest definition of nonsense in European thought, and one that is particularly apt for Lear. Methodical and extravagant in their habits of naming that which is not, Lear’s limericks defy the oracular Parmenides: ‘Nor shall I allow thee to say or to think, “from that which is not”; for it is not to be said or thought that it is not.’[[26]](#footnote-26) Not-being is, for Parmenides, impossible, unthinkable. Nevertheless, he finds it reified in mortal speech, which gives many names to it; ‘Wherefore all these are mere names which mortals laid down believing them to be true—coming into being and perishing, being and not being [i.e., both at once], change of place and variation of bright colour.’[[27]](#footnote-27) Lear habitually and mischievously grounds his nonsense works upon merely linguistic premises, such as letters of the alphabet, the pseudo-Linnaean binomials of the nonsense botanies, and place names in the limericks.

The second of Lear’s nonsense recipes, by his alter-ego ‘Professor Bosh,’ is based upon a conceit that can be traced back to Parmenides’ friend and fellow Eleatic philosopher, Zeno. ‘To make Crumbobblious Cutlets’ recalls Zeno’s paradoxes, most of which proceed from the idea that space and time are infinitely divisible. Defending Parmenides’ prohibition on ‘change of place,’ Zeno argues in his Progressive Dichotomy Paradox that motion is impossible, for in order to cover any distance one must first cover half of it, and then half of the remaining portion, and so on, *ad infinitum*, without ever quite reaching the destination.[[28]](#footnote-28) Bosh’s culinary transposition of this conundrum requires the reader to ‘Procure some strips of beef, and having cut them into the smallest possible slices, proceed to cut them still smaller, eight or perhaps nine times.’ (*CN*, 250) With the teasing recursivity of Zeno’s paradoxes of plurality, the recipe demonstrates that the strips of beef can be described logically and linguistically as endlessly divisible. The reference to ‘the smallest possible slices’ focuses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that supports Parmenides’ identification of plurality with not-being.[[29]](#footnote-29)

 Lear strives to name that which is not, writing ‘bosh’ that he intends to be ‘perfectly clear & bright, & incapable of any meaning but one of sheer nonsense.’ (*SL*, 228) His model of nonsense does not have the assured teleology of Carroll’s word-games, the transformative operations of which, informed by mathematical logic, ensure that they are traceable and reversible, cogent. Lear’s nonsense is accordingly more proliferative, vulnerable to dissipation and incoherence:



Insert Fig. 7.3 here

There was an Old Man of Spithead,

Who opened the window, and said,--

‘Fil-jomble, fil-jumble, fil-rumble-come-tumble!’

That doubtful Old Man of Spithead. (353)

In the accompanying drawing, the Old Man of Spithead stands at his window, broadly smiling and nicely dressed, his arms outstretched holding the catches to the windows he has just opened outwards, as he addresses the world with a private language, a series of word-sounds that in tumbling along their muffled onomatopoeic way suggest perhaps a nonsense rhetoric, infantile gurglings, or an incantation. The rhyme on ‘Spithead’ glosses it as a description of a particular type of utterance, a gratuitous ejaculation issuing from the man’s (deranged) head, which he accordingly demonstrates in the following line, nicely quarantined from the rest of the limerick by its *b* rhyme and quotation marks. While, as ‘an old Derry down Derry,’ Lear identifies himself with the similarly unmeaning word sounds of traditional folk refrains, the ‘bosh’ of his limericks is nevertheless coherent and resolute. It is distinct from the fuzzy nursery-rhyme formula for nonsense exemplified by the utterances of the ‘Old Man of Spithead,’ which in the final line that follows them earns him the defining attribute of being ‘doubtful.’ It is not that his words express feelings of uncertainty, indeed the drawing represents him beaming and confident, nor is he sceptical, in the manner of ‘That doubtful Old Man of th’ Abruzzi.’ Rather, the concluding line infers from the language that the old man offers so deliberately to the larger world that he is ontologically doubtful, improbable, like the stranger on the train Lear depicts in his 1866 letter to Lady Waldegrave. The closed form of Lear’s limericks is para-Parmenidean in its self-contained model of not-being, a nonsense that is not simply the random and unmeaning other of sense, mere noise, but intrinsically coherent verbal substance.

III

Lear’s limericks each precipitate their own referents, a set of self-subsisting relations that constitute a curious and discrete little world. As suggested earlier, akin to the *ouroboros* or figure of the snake swallowing its tail, the limerick’s short-circuited rhyme scheme, which is typically established and comes to rest on a particular place name, defines an enclosed space, like the bottles containing the Lake Pipple-Popple pickles. This space is filled and made substantive in the past tense, much as the similarly bounded ‘O [that] was an Orange’[[30]](#footnote-30) is in Lear’s Alphabets. The following early example locates its idiosyncratic space not geographically but almost geometrically, as it starts and ends at a precisely defined -- and progressively honed -- point:



Insert Fig. 7.4 here

There was a Young Lady whose chin,

Resembled the point of a pin;

So she had it made sharp, and purchased a harp,

And played several tunes with her chin. (162)

There is an odd, but not unrepresentative, verisimilitude to this description. The forthrightness of the rhyme scheme and the anapaestic rhythms that undergird Lear’s limericks give to the most preposterous content an even and inevitable measure, an assured commonsensical impetus. More specifically, the short pointy rhymes of ‘There was a Young Lady whose chin’ are brought into close proximity with one another, made jabbing and insistent, by the limerick form. The following reading of the poem looks to the legacy of Lear’s nonsense Alphabets and their models in didactic toy books to clarify the ways in which verisimilitude proceeds from the sounds of his words, and the letters that vary them in the unlikely series of rhymes that the limericks usually pivot upon.

 The simplest and most fundamental cases of reifying word sounds that Lear makes are his genealogical accounts of letters in the Alphabets, where for instance ‘O’ was not only an Orange, but on another occasion also filled with the long vowel sound, and (in Lear’s illustration) oval shape, of the Owl (*CN*, 293). Such examples as the encompassing ‘O’, which at yet another time in its obscure past was also an ‘Open-mouth’d Oyster!’,[[31]](#footnote-31) are not original to Lear but generic. They follow a convention of children’s alphabets, found in such books as *Mrs Lovechild’s Golden Present*; ‘O was an Otter, that ne’er could be caught.’[[32]](#footnote-32) Lear’s examples differ from this precedent in their iconic construal of the letter O, which is depicted, mainly through its shape, to be of a piece with the referents it heads up. Other alphabets in such contemporary toy books as *The Home Alphabet Book* (c. 1847), however, regard their constituent letters in similar ways to Lear, presenting them ambiguously as participants in not only their words but also their referents:

The H in Honeysuckle twines

 Around the cottage door;

In Hollyhock it well combines

 The Hue of every flower.[[33]](#footnote-33)

‘H’ embodies active vegetative tendencies, like its close kin, the linear letter that follows it; ‘In Ivy green the I you see, | Which creeps round house apace.’[[34]](#footnote-34) The ‘I’ is also ‘seen in Lime and Lupine tree,’ furnishing the central stem for word and referent alike, as well as the stamen in ‘Lily’s lovely face,’ while ‘H’ also incarnates hues of colour, which are correspondingly enhanced and various through the letter’s multiple occurrence in ‘Hollyhock.’ In teaching the alphabet, such toy books harness the animism that word sounds acquire through early childhood experience of them, and encourage their correspondingly totemic representation in letters. They are seen in such books, as they are by Lear in the examples cited earlier, as contractions of the words that begin with them and fetishes that have the power to realize and enact their referents.

For children who were just beginning to learn to read, to gain access to the century’s principal form of mass entertainment and information, the toy book alphabets presented its magic as within their grasp, inhering within the constituent letters, the building blocks, of stories and books. The *Child’s New Alphabet* (1824) is prefaced with some riddling verses that describe the paradoxical powers of the alphabet (which here includes the ampersand as an additional letter):

Altho’ we are but twenty-seven,

 We change to millions too;

Altho’ we cannot speak a word,

 We tell what others do.

Personified collectively in the prologue, each letter is then introduced as a particular character with its own backstory and woodblock illustration; ‘R was a Robber, | And hung as you see.’[[35]](#footnote-35) In a particularly grand example of its conjuring powers, the alphabet progressively unfurls an entire royal party in *The Royal Alphabet* (c. 1844): ‘A stands for Albert, he’s handsome and tall,’ its illustration punningly showing the First Letter standing to attention for HRH, while ‘B is the Banquet, he gave in the hall,’ and so on.[[36]](#footnote-36)

While the chiming word-series of Lear’s Alphabets participate playfully in the object they refer to, the nonsense of not-being is played more strictly as a word-game in the limericks. Repudiating figurative language, Lear deploys words with a radical literalism, which sees the relations between word-sounds not as contingent and arbitrary, but necessary and significant, systematic, so that in mobilizing them within the overarching rhyme scheme of the limericks, inherent generic meanings are disclosed and defined. The patterns of chiming morphemes in ‘There was a Young Lady whose chin’ can be usefully compared with the word-play around ‘J’ in *The Home Alphabet Book*, where, parallel to the twining habits of its immediate predecessors, the letter is attributed, albeit ambiguously, with its own agency: ‘In Juice of fruit the J is seen, | To make nice Jam to eat.’[[37]](#footnote-37) Like ‘H’ and ‘I’ before it, ‘J’ appears to participate in the referents it enables, as the letter draws from ‘fruit’ its essence, its fluent vowel sound, as ‘Juice,’ which it subsequently congeals as ‘Jam.’ Lear’s limerick functions through a similar reification, as in bringing together the words ‘chin’ and ‘pin’ the rhyme is seen to reveal a substantive affinity between the two, a relation that the lines they yoke together make explicit: ‘There was a Young Lady whose chin, | Resembled the point of a pin.’ The resemblance belongs materially to both words through their shared morpheme and, as the limerick’s drawing further corroborates, their referents also.

Speech is for Schopenhauer the representation of a mental representation of will, the communication of arbitrary signs that betoken ‘concepts, representations that are abstract not perceptive, universal not individual in time and space.’[[38]](#footnote-38) Minimising such mediation, Lear radicalises speech into elementary word-sounds, a more forthright, visceral, embodiment of will. Familiar from the chutzpah of the chiming letters in ‘chin’ and ‘pin,’ the will of Lear’s word-sounds is deployed most overtly in the ‘Ribands and pigs’ series of rhymes (*CN*, 135-148):

Ribands & pigs,

Helmets & Figs,

Set him a jigging & see how he jigs. (*CN*, 135; see also 143)

Such incantations attribute words with an inherent power of causation, which the rhymes isolate in certain morphemes, a latent power that is apparently actualized as they are coupled with other, ostensibly random, words and their referents. In this example, the rhythm and the rhyme pattern established by ‘figs’ following ‘pigs’ then triggers the ‘jigging’ of the third line, the perpetuation and incarnation of the pattern, as the half rhyme of the word’s suffix (‘jigg-ing’) and the final rhyme that closes this double line (‘jigs’) set up a series of echoes that suggest its compulsive, dervish-like, bodily expression, its referent. The shared morphemes furnish the fundamental principle of meaning through sheer force of will, which as in Schopenhauer, becomes manifest in bodily movement. In the following example, a cat is provoked by the combination of certain objects with a morpheme that becomes tinted with broadly religious associations through the rhyming words that host it:

Tea Urns & Pews,

Muscles & Jews,

Set him a mewing and hear how he mews -

(*CN*, 145)

The causal agent is substantive and objective, intrinsic to the chiming word-sounds (there is little room for Humean scepticism here), while its consequences for the signified itself, in this case the cat, are referred to the reader for independent empirical verification.

In ‘There was a Young Lady whose chin,’ the resemblance of the protagonist’s chin to the ‘the point of a pin’ is assumed to be natural, endemic to the language relations, like the causal relations attributed to the chiming morphemes of the ‘Ribands and Pigs’ verses. Its rhyme is seen to disclose a quality, a principle of will, that subsists within each word, and is transposed and literally honed in the next line, ‘made sharp,’ where indeed the rising vowel sound on the second word suggests the musical application of the term. As this further rhyme draws attention to, ‘sharp’ also holds within it the word ‘harp.’ This is treated as a derivation or formal deduction, from which the meanings follow, so that the quality of being ‘sharp’ has its natural application here in relation to the ‘harp.’ Ergo, in the concluding line of the limerick, the word-sounds ‘tunes’ and ‘chin’ modulate one into the other, a similarly sonorous affinity that makes them semi-synonymous, and completes the circuit of rhymes. The limerick recalls Carroll’s word-games, reconciling Chin to Harp in three recursive linguistic moments, a deduction from ‘chin’ in which the word’s implications are extrapolated and then returned to their source, packed up again:

chin-pin

sharp-harp

tunes-chin[[39]](#footnote-39)

Unlike Carroll’s doublets, however, Lear’s limericks insist that the formal relations between words that their rhymes disclose are not contingent, but inherently significant, like the onomatopoeiac series of Hopkins’ word-lists, such as ‘*Grind*, *gride*, *gird*, *grit*, *groat*, *grate*, *greet*,’ which he grounds in etymology: ‘Original meaning to *strike*, *rub*, particularly *together*.’[[40]](#footnote-40) An ostensibly arbitrary rhyme is revealed to be a formal affinity between words that embodies a real relation between their referents:

There was an Old Lady whose folly,

Induced her to sit in a holly;

Whereon by a thorn, her dress being torn,

She quickly became melancholy.[[41]](#footnote-41) (*CN*, 92)

The ‘holly’ mediates the Old Lady’s swift movement from ‘folly’ to ‘melancholy,’ as by sitting in it she triggers a linguistic relation that ensures her change of mood. For just as the actual thorn holds the potential to catch and tear clothing, the rhyme draws attention to the fact that the word that denotes this consequence, ‘torn,’ is intrinsic to ‘thorn.’ A racist assumption emerges from a similar pairing in another limerick, as the Quaker who married ‘an Old Man of Jamaica,’ ‘cried out – “O lack! I have married a black!”’ (*CN*, 98) Lear uses the inclusive rhyme of ‘size’ and ‘eyes,’ in his respective limericks about ‘a Young Lady of Dorking’ and ‘a Young Lady whose eyes, were unique as to colour and size.’ (*CN*, 96, 75) The latter rhyme is figured as an equation that yields its consequence in the final rhyme, as the chiming coincidence of ‘eyes’ and the attribute of ‘size’ yields their expanded form in wide-eyed ‘surprise,’ which is amply represented by the accompanying drawing.

Lear’s word-play builds upon toy book suggestions that significance ultimately resides not in whole words but more radically and magically in letters and morphemes, such as the shared vowel sound in ‘juice’ and ‘fruit,’ or the stem-like ‘I’ that is prominent in ‘Ivy’ and takes a supporting role in ‘Lime and Lupine.’ This idea is also fostered by the practice in early Victorian Alphabets and Readers of distinguishing and emphasising morphemes: ‘U | U-sur-er’; ‘The na-tu-ral po-si-tion of the mouth of the Whale is o-pen.’[[42]](#footnote-42) Such elements, in the form of conventional suffixes, give credence to the fanciful hybrids of Lear’s Nonsense Botany, such as ‘Bottlephorkia Spoonifolia’ and ‘Pollybirdia Singularis’ (*CN*, 251, 253). As Lear was aware from his early natural history work, such suffixes canonize names for particular genuses and their species, types that are defined by sets of physical attributes, which, arrived at by observation and induction, he often selected and illustrated in such works as his lithographs for his *Psittacidae, or Parrots* folio and wood-engravings for *The Transactions of the Zoological Society*. This process is turned on its head for the Nonsense Botany, where Lear produces science in the manner of the illustrated book, with the pictures following upon the words: ‘Phattfacia Stupenda’ and ‘Armchairia Comfortabilis’ (*CN*, 252, 417). The talismanic Linnaean suffixes bring his *Wunderkammer* species of flowers into pseudo-scientific being.

Lear’s portmanteau coinages, such as ‘scroobious’, ‘Dolomphious’, ‘borascible’, ‘slobaciously’, and ‘ombliferous’, similarly draw from common language experience not only conventional suffixes, in the manner of the Botany, but also other morphemes that, rather than embodying meanings by convention, gather around them or evoke certain associations. Rather than simply hybridizing a pair of existing words, as Carroll’s do, Lear’s more capacious portmanteau words invoke morphemes that chime with broader experiences of language use, whether they be conventional, onomatopoeic, or arbitrary and accidental. So, for example, ‘scroobious’ is grounded by its compound suffix, which assures us that the adjective’s referent is full of, or characterized by, *something*, namely ‘scroob.’ This stem sounds vaguely onomatopoeic, however, the main way it acquires meaning is by association, through its echoes with other words, including ‘scrupulous’ and ‘dubious.’ While they are implicit to the portmanteau, such associative echoes are explicit and formal in Lear’s limericks, which, as was observed earlier, promote and indeed propagate, this process of association by yoking together ostensibly disparate words in such rhymes as ‘chin’ and ‘pin.’ Reciprocally, the limericks also disclose and unpack what could be regarded as simple naturally occurring portmanteaus through such encompassing rhymes as ‘sharp’ with ‘harp,’ and ‘black’ with ‘lack.’ Like the rhymes and chimings that they effectively compress into their suggestive neologisms, Lear’s portmanteaus bring into relief and articulate the wilfulness of words, the means by which the characters of the limericks defy classification, not simply by being eccentric, but more radically by being contingent. This function is nicely represented by the similarly unique Scroobious Pip, who on being asked by various creatures ‘“Are you Beast or Insect, Bird or Fish?”,’ displaces the ontic with the nominal as he informs each in turn, ‘My only name is the Scroobious Pip.’ (*CN*, 389, 387-390)

The preferred incipit for the limerick’s rhyme sequences, the place name is an unfamiliar word, like a portmanteau, from which such verses endeavour to coax its inherent significance and indeed character, an obscure but intrinsic will to meaning:

There was an Old Man of Coblenz,

The length of whose legs was immense;

He went with one prance, from Turkey to France,

That surprising Old Man of Coblenz. (71)

While place names have only minimal extension, usually a single referent, Lear’s use of them, as this example demonstrates, is especially arbitrary and formal. The limericks furnish few opportunities for sightseeing, little or no sense of place. Treated primarily as a word-sound, the place name provides the formal premise for the limerick, which then casts around to find an echoing word for it. Denuded of content, of local colour and richness, Lear’s place names are inchoate words, mere word-sounds that appear driven in the limericks, as if by a wilful Larmarckian yearning, to achieve semantic definition and depth. They gain significance in the manner of the portmanteaus, by evoking other words. The term that is found to echo the place name (or indeed any other first term for the *a* rhyme) is effectively presented as a gloss on the original sound, a formal but also enlightening semantic cognate, from which it gathers meaning. A simple example of this occurs in the limerick on the title page of *A Book of Nonsense*, through the rhyme of ‘merry’ with ‘Derry,’ a staple of English folk song. In the limerick cited above, the *a* rhyme established by ‘Coblenz’, with its elongated vowel and sibilant, finds its resonant term in ‘immense,’ which is taken to describe the length of the Old Man’s legs, while the international stretch of their stride is accordingly rendered in the brisker modulated *b* form of this rhyme, a half-rhyme, as ‘He went with one prance, from Turkey to France.’ In this way the little world of the limerick, its peculiar character, is extrapolated, unfurls, from the place name. The limerick describes a round trip, of raw will and recursive movement, from Coblenz to Coblenz, and having explored the world of this arbitrary word-sound, returns from its travels with an enhanced understanding, which is formally registered in the supplementary epithet awarded to the protagonist in the final line; ‘That surprising Old Man of Coblenz.’

The wilfulness of chiming word-sounds brings the protagonists of Lear’s limericks into being. Similarly, if less happily, -- and coupled with a ‘they’ who, in contrast to the ‘they’ of Lear’s limericks, have a porous, and probably synonymous, relation to him, -- Beckett’s Unnamable is brought into being through what he considers to be the distasteful coercive force of utterance: ‘as if it were my own voice, pronouncing my own words, words pronouncing me alive, since that’s how they want me to be, I don’t know why … I too must contribute my little convulsion, mewl, howl, gasp and rattle.’[[43]](#footnote-43) Beckett presents spoken words as unspecific, having a generic denotation and intent, the simple assertion of being that makes them cognate with other bodily noises. Such rude utterance is for the avowed Schopenhaurian Beckett wilful and perverse, as in other ways it is for the moralistic Mrs Turner in her chapbooks, and for Lear also, where it makes preposterous affirmations of being.

Like their ‘perfectly spherical’ (*CN*, 429) author and counterpart, the protagonists of the limericks can each be identified with the form of the circle, the radical instance and emblem of encapsulating form, that comes to nothing here.[[44]](#footnote-44) The being that emerges from wilful utterance into representation through the structure of Lear’s limericks is recursive and hence hermetic, akin to that of *The* *Unnamable*, but dizzy and bright, like the Jumblies in ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’: ‘They danced in circlets all night long.’ (*CN*, 423) Lear’s nonsense works are full of such ostensibly pointless but exuberant recursive iterations, like interpretive dance versions of the foundational Parmenidean tautology, ‘Being *is*.’ A closed form dedicated to naming that which is not, each limerick is like a sphere: not the ontological plenum of Parmenides, but rather a bubble of not-being, the futile figure of O, a naught, their protagonists also being figures of naught. Lear’s true naughtiness lies in his limericks, compulsively and methodically.

1. Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in *Oscar Wilde*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 484. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. W. O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (London: Calder and Boyers, 1975), 132*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense*, 5th edn, (London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1861), 000. See also *CN*, 71, where Noakes prints the poem in five-line form. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Noakes notes that the phrase is included in what Lear called his ‘long nonsense name’ (*CN,* 485). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Elizabeth Turner, *The Daisy, or Cautionary Stories in Verse*, 6th edn. (London: Harris, 1817), 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Elizabeth Turner, *The Cowslip; or, More Cautionary Stories in Verse,* 19th edn*.* (London: Grant and Griffith, c. 1845), 25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Philosophy of Nonsense* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Mrs Lovechild’s Golden Present for All Good Little Boys and Girls* (York: J. Kendrew, c.1820), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Turner, *The* *Cowslip*, 39, 17, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Turner, *The Daisy*, 9, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Turner, *The Cowslip*, 42, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense*, 204, and Brown, *Poetry of Victorian Scientists*, 24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Brown, *Poetry by Victorian Scientists*, 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Edwin Morgan*, Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Lewis Carroll, *The Magic of Lewis Carroll*, ed. John Fisher (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 134, 136, 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cited in Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott, 2nd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘Author’s Preface’, in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (Indian Hills, Colorado: Falcon’s Wing Press, 1958), i, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Daniel Brown, *Hopkins’ Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), esp. 238-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 276, frag. 351. See also 273, frag. 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 269, frag. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hopkins, *Journals and Papers*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 273, frag. 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 277, frag. 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 292-4, frag. 370-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 288-90, frag. 365-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lear, *Nonsense Botany*, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Lear, *Nonsense Botany,* 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Anon., *Mrs Lovechild’s Golden Present for All Good Little Boys and Girls* (York: J. Kendrew, c. 1815), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Anon., *The Home Alphabet Book* (London: Dean, [c. 1847]), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Anon, *Home Alphabet Book*, 10, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Anon., *Child’s New Alphabet* (Edinburgh: James Clarke, c. 1824), 2, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Anon., *The Royal Alphabet* (London: Joseph Cundell, c. 1844). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Home Alphabet Book*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Schopenhauer, *World as Will*, i. 39, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Like the Aristotelian syllogism and the Hegelian dialectic, which it also resembles in its original three-line format, Lear’s limerick returns to the original terms of its premise with an enhanced understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Hopkins, *Journals and Papers*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. While their content is determined formally by the rhyme scheme, the humour of limericks such as this harks back to the fashionable *schadenfreude* of the early part of the century, a verse counterpart to the much reprinted and imitated comic catalogue of trivial woes, *More Miseries!!, by Sir Fretful Murmur* (London: H. D. Symonds, and Mathews and Leigh, 1806). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Anon., *The Child’s Instructor, or Picture Alphabet* (Glasgow: Lumsden and Son, c. 1815); ‘The Common Whale,’ in Anon., *The Ocean and its Inhabitants, with their Uses to Man* (London: Darton and Clark, [1845]), n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (London: Calder and Boyers, 1975), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. A subtle and engaging consideration of relations between form and nothing can be found threaded through Angela Leighton’s *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)