

# Dirty Limericks

Anonymous

with an Introduction by  
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## Introduction

British ballads have come and more or less gone. The mark of these common songs and rhymes is that they address someone:

You married men whom Fate has assigned  
To marry with them that are too much kind.

Or they may quote a higher authority:

Says my uncle, I pray you discover  
What hath been the cause of your woes.

Or they may speak out for a group:

Six jolly wee miners, an' miner lads are we.

Mostly these humble poems express dissatisfaction with one aspect or another of life. All rather similar to the blues which superseded them. In general, they are local complaints.

The limerick, that wily serpent, is written by a different kind of person. This person has no time for jolly wee miners and country lasses, unless they can be made to form the subject of a striking moral deficiency. The limerick writer is more

sophisticated, and appears to be well travelled; he knows what is painted on a shutter in Calcutta, or what punishment the Bishop of Birmingham meted out, or the complications in the life of a prostitute in Rangoon, or the uses for clay in Bombay, and so on. He is a worldly person, generally a man, whose geographical knowledge extends throughout the British Empire. Indeed, the heyday of the limerick was very likely the heyday of the Empire, only a generation or two ago.

We imagine a sturdy District Commissioner, sitting on his veranda, *chota peg* by his side, summing up the misfortunes of a young girl from Madras in five succinct lines. No fool he. Immorality and perversions fail to shock him. Indeed, the more surreal they are, the better. They may take place in underground aviaries, in a rather dusty cave outside Belgrave, by a punt-fraught river near Buckingham, or in a crowd at Stroud.

Our connoisseur of the curious has to master an intricate rhyme scheme: AABBA. It is not a format for weaklings.

The first limerick I was told when a juvenile may have been composed by another juvenile. I quote it merely for antiquarian purposes:

## INTRODUCTION

There was a young lady from Riga  
Who had an affair with a tiger.  
The result of the fuck  
Was a paralysed duck,  
Two goats and a circumcised spider.

At the age of five, when I had been so recently the product of a gynaecological event myself, this even more unlikely outcome may have seemed amusing. But the folly of the putative bard went even deeper: the rhyme scheme does not work. “Spider” does not rhyme with either “tiger” or “Riga”. The menagerie as described is impossible. Better perhaps to concentrate on the parturition which followed the affair:

Poor girl! Her long labour  
Was described by a neighbour  
Like Frankenstein climbing the Eiger.

While this is not particularly good, rhyme receives better consideration. The amateur rhymester did not foresee, before setting out, that the only word to rhyme with “tiger”, apart from “Eiger” is “Geiger”, usually linked with “counter”. So he is stuck and, in a desperate attempt to amuse, comes up with a

“circumcised spider” – not at all likely, practical or funny, even to spider lovers.

One more insuperable objection must be raised in connection with this limerick. At the mouth of the Western Dvina in Latvia stands an undistinguished city known as Riga. The city’s name is pronounced *reega*, not *ryger*. I rest my case.

Better in every way to stick to the British Empire. Or at least to what was part of the British Empire, as in the following example, newly to hand:

There was a young man of Mumbai  
Who ravished a sow in her sty.  
He was deeply offended  
To note, when he’d ended,  
She’d been lying there just watching the sky.

Here are two more by my own pen:

There was a young chap from out yonder  
Who buggered a big anaconda,  
He regretted this crime  
For the rest of his time,  
While the reptile grew fonder and fonder.

## INTRODUCTION

Said a whore to the priest of Cahors,  
“You’re the worst lay in all Perigord.  
You smell and you’re drunk  
And I’m covered in spunk  
And – bon Dieu! – there’s the Pope at the door!

As I have demonstrated, a good limerick has many difficulties to surmount. It is a surreal verse form which deserves better recognition, more approbation. This book should help it greatly on its way.

– Brian Aldiss, 2007



## Editor's Note

It has been my aim to introduce the limerick phenomenon at its most playful to as many new readers as possible. To this end, I have collected those I consider the very finest “dirty limericks” for this edition. For those not entirely new to the tradition, some of the classics included will have been encountered before, perhaps at the bar, or around a dining table, or in previous anthologies. Hopefully there will be plenty of new items to grace aficionados’ personal collections among the five categories of recurrent themes into which I’ve divided this distillation of a lifetime’s exchange with fellow enthusiasts. Certainly the sixth and final category entitled “Original” ought to guarantee some novelty, with its revelation that Shakespeare’s use of the occasional dirty limerick drew on a pre-established tradition from at least as far back as the fourteenth Century.

It is a frustrating characteristic of the more modern, largely twentieth-century dirty-limerick tradition that the authorship of these fine literary achievements has become more and more difficult to ascertain with the passing of time. Even where

authorship is suspected, one often finds that the truth is ambiguous because the author – a bishop's wife perhaps, or a headmaster – preferred to remain anonymous. And sometimes a limerick has been told to me as though invented by the teller, only for me to find it was an adapted version of yet another fellow enthusiast's favourite from one of the previous uncredited collections to have appeared in print. Hence no credits appear in these pages. If any reader of this collection feels they have not received due acknowledgement, I hope they will accept both my apologies and my congratulations for their genius. They certainly deserve to be recognized for their role in perpetuating such an insightful strand of the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. In humbled recognition of my own lack of ingenuity, I have chosen to publish this edition under the authorship of the collective Anonymous who are its true authors.

# Dirty Limericks



Geographical



I

There was a young man from Kildare,  
Who was having his girl on the stair;  
On the forty-fourth stroke,  
The banister broke  
And he finished her off in mid-air.

II

There was a young girl of Baroda  
Who built herself a pagoda.  
The walls of its halls  
Were hung with the balls  
And the tools of the fools that bestrode her.

III

There was a young girl of Cape Cod  
Who thought babies were fashioned by God.  
But it was not the Almighty  
Who lifted her nightie –  
It was Roger the lodger, that sod!

IV

There was a young man of Cape Horn  
Who wished he had never been born;  
And he wouldn't have been  
If his father had seen  
That the end of the rubber was torn.

V

There was a young lady of Norway  
Who hung by her toes in a doorway.  
She said to her beau:  
“Just look at me, Joe,  
I think I’ve discovered one more way.”