

ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE - 27
OPTIONAL ENGLISH - III SEMESTER
MID-SEMESTER TEST - AUGUST 2019
OE 313 - OPTIONAL ENGLISH

Time: 1 Hour

Max. Marks: 30

INSTRUCTIONS

This paper consists of **FOUR** printed sides and **TWO** sections

You are allowed to use a dictionary

Stick to the word limit and number your answers correctly.

You **WILL** lose marks for lifting from the passage.

- I. **Read this poem by Edward Lear titled Some Incidents in the Life of My Uncle Arly:**

O my aged Uncle Arly! –
Sitting on a heap of Barley
All the silent hours of night, –
Close beside a leafy thicket: –
On his nose there was a Cricket, –
In his hat a Railway Ticket; –
(But his shoes were far too tight.)

Long ago, in youth, he squander'd
All his goods away, and wander'd
To the Timskoop Hills afar.
There, on golden sunsets blazing
Every evening found him gazing, –
Singing, – 'Orb! You're quite amazing!
How I wonder what you are!

Like the ancient Medes and Persians,
Always by his own exertions
He subsisted on those hills; –
Whiles, – by teaching children spelling, –
Or at times by merely yelling, –
Or at intervals by selling
'Propter's Nicodemus Pills.'

Later, in his morning rambles
He perceived the moving brambles
Something square and white disclose; –
'Twas a First-class Railway Ticket
But in stooping down to pick it
Off the ground, – a pea-green Cricket
Settled on my uncle's Nose.

Never – never more, – Oh! never
Did that Cricket leave him ever, –
Dawn or evening, day or night; –

Clinging as a constant treasure, –
Chirping with a cheerious measure, –
Wholly to my uncle's pleasure, –
(Though his shoes were far too tight.)

So, for three-and-forty winters,
Till his shoes were worn to splinters,
All those hills he wandered o'er, –
Sometimes silent; – sometimes yelling; –
Till he came to Borly-Melling,
Near his old ancestral dwelling; –
– And he wandered thence no more.

On a little heap of Barley
Died my agéd Uncle Arly,
And they buried him one night; –
Close beside the leafy thicket;
There, his hat and Railway Ticket; –
There, – his ever faithful Cricket; –
(But his shoes were far too tight.)

I.A. Answer the following questions in about five sentences each: (3x5=15)

1. Lear wrote this poem while ill in 1887, a year before his own death. Some see the poem as a comment on his own life. If we accept such a reading, then what comment does Lear seem to be making about himself and the life he has lived?
2. Pick two features of this poem that seem to mark it as nonsense poetry and comment on how they work.
3. If you look carefully at the name Uncle Arly, do you see anything that may help in interpreting the poem?

II. Read this excerpt from a biography of Edward Lear.

Born 12 May 1812 in the London suburb of Holloway, Lear was the twentieth of twenty-one children (and youngest to survive) of Ann Skerrett Lear and Jeremiah Lear, a stockbroker. Many of the Lear offspring did not live beyond infancy, so Edward's very survival had something of the fortuitous about it. Even though he lived to be seventy-five, his health was always delicate; he had poor eyesight and suffered from chronic respiratory problems. At the age of five he experienced his first epileptic seizure. For Lear this "Demon," as he dubbed his affliction, was a mark of shame. Much of his self-imposed isolation from those he loved derived from his need to hide his condition from them.

The year before the onset of the disease had brought trauma of another sort. Jeremiah Lear underwent severe financial reverses—in later years Lear repeatedly told friends his father had gone to debtors' prison, but no evidence substantiates this claim—and the family had to rent out their home, Bowman's Lodge, for a time. Mrs. Lear entrusted Edward to the care of his eldest sister, twenty-five-year-old Ann, and when financial stability returned, she did not resume her maternal duties. Ann never married and devotedly acted the mother's part to Lear as long as she lived; yet he never recovered from the hurt of his real mother's rejection, as the ambivalence about mother figures in many of his poems indicates.

Lear received little, if any, formal education. Anri tutored him at home and encouraged a talent for drawing and painting that he had early exhibited. When Jeremiah Lear retired and moved south of London in 1828, Edward and Ann remained in the city, taking up lodgings off the Gray's Inn Road. The sixteen-year-old Lear supported them by selling miscellaneous sketches; he soon moved on to anatomical drawings and then to illustrations for natural history books. His skill in this latter capacity led to the publication in 1832 of a volume of twelve folio lithographic prints of parrots, *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae*. This volume brought him to the attention of Edward Stanley, later thirteenth earl of Derby, who wanted an artist to draw the animals in his menagerie at Knowsley, the Derby estate in Lancashire. Lear accepted Stanley's offer of residency at Knowsley Hall while the work was in progress; he stayed there off and on from 1832 to 1837.

The Knowsley days shaped the course of Lear's entire subsequent career. In addition to gaining the unflagging patronage of the earl of Derby, he met and charmed many aristocrats who would later buy his paintings and provide entrée to a level of society usually unbreachable by a man of Lear's impecunious middle-class origins. In 1837, when failing eyesight and lungs forced Lear to abandon the detailed work of natural history draftsmanship and the English winters, the earl provided funds and introductions to establish him in Rome to pursue a vocation as a painter of topographical landscapes. He remained in Rome for ten years, during which time he first established himself as a nonsense poet and formed several of the deepest of his many intimate friendships.

Lear had initially produced poems, drawings, alphabets, and menus for the entertainment of the children at Knowsley; these "nonsenses"—and Lear's charming conversation and piano improvisations—had soon ingratiated him with the adults as well. In 1846 he gathered together some of his limericks, a verse form he had first encountered in the joke book *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (circa 1822), and had them published with his own illustrations in *A Book of Nonsense* under the pseudonym Derry down Derry.

He came close to marrying the one eligible woman with whom he ever maintained a long-term friendship, the Honorable Augusta "Gussie" Bethell of London, whom he had met in the early 1840s, when she was a child. But in 1866 he unwisely consulted her sister Emma about the advisability of a proposal. Emma firmly discouraged him, and he never approached Gussie, who by all accounts would have accepted. Despite his many long-distance friendships, Lear was doomed to a solitary life. His only constant companions were his manservant Giorgio Kokali from 1856 to 1883, and his cat Foss from 1871 to 1887."

Lear did not have any new nonsense published for fifteen years following the appearance of *A Book of Nonsense*. In 1861, however, a new, expanded edition was brought out under his own name. Its enthusiastic reception gratified but also perplexed Lear, who always hoped to gain fame as a painter and regarded nonsense only as a source of fun and money. His success as a poet did encourage him to compose more complex nonsenses, which appeared in three volumes during the 1870s after he had settled in San Remo, Italy."

The first, *Nonsense Songs* (1870), contained longer poems in which characterization is more realistic and emotions are less distanced than in the limericks. The characters are nonhuman, and the central actions frequently involve a pair or group taking off on a journey. The Owl and the Pussy-cat go to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat; the Jumblies depart in a sieve; the Duck and Kangaroo hop around the world; and even a nutcracker and some tongs, a table and a chair, go out to take the air. These first lyrics seem clearly to constitute Lear's reflections on his own life as a wanderer. At their happiest they also describe a joyful togetherness that he never attained. The elements of this Learian epiphany—song, dance, food, the shore in the moonlight—are established in "The Owl and the Pussy-cat" and recur frequently in later poems.

Lear frequently sets these poems in his nonsense landscapes on the Hills of the Chankly Bore or the Great Gromboolian Plain. It was only by creating such unreal beings and settings that Lear could write with unrepressed emotion about his own unhappiness and sense of isolation.

In 1886 Lear contracted a severe case of bronchitis, from which he never fully recovered. In that same year he wrote his last nonsense poem, "Incidents in the Life of My Uncle Arly".

Lear was a wandering nonsense minstrel, never completely free of physical and emotional pain. His health steadily deteriorated until he died, alone except for a servant, on 29 January 1888. His last words expressed gratitude for the kindnesses of all his absent friends.

Lear's poetry shares many elements with the nonsense verse of Lewis Carroll, Thomas Hood, W. S. Gilbert, and other Victorians, particularly in the use of verbal play and other distancing devices to derive humor from cruelty, pain, and death. It is above all an expression of the inmost longings, frustrations, and wish-fulfillment dreams of a lovable and intensely loving man who, despite the fond affection of numerous relatives, friends, and readers—children and adults—was never beloved in the intimate, exclusive, constant manner he so fervently desired.

II.A. Answer as directed: (10+5)

1. What sort of evidence, if any, can you find in this passage to confirm that Uncle Arly may be autobiographical? Does looking at Lear's life tell us anything that we can constructively use to understand nonsense literature?
Answer in about 150 words (10 marks)
2. What sort of illustration/drawing would you consider appropriate for a poem like Uncle Arly? **Answer in about five sentences and provide that drawing.(5 marks)**