

## Edward Lear and the Pussycat: The Adventures of Famous Writers and their Pets

**Alex Johnson**

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Bonds between humans and animals are especially powerful when creative and eccentric people are involved, as Alex Johnson's quirky, alphabetical collection *Edward Lear and the Pussycat* demonstrates.

This slim, playful trip through literary history features a menagerie of creatures. In concise, encyclopedic entries, Johnson covers stories of writers and their pets. Although there are plenty of the typical suspects, including dogs and cats, the entries also highlight unusual companions, like Lord Byron's bear, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's wombat, Dumas's monkeys and vulture, and the French poet Gérard de Nerval's lobster. Beatrix Potter's rabbit, Benjamin Bouncer, is included for having inspired the Peter Rabbit stories; and, in addition to her mastiff mix, Keeper, Emily Brontë is recalled to have kept a rescued merlin hawk as a pet.

Pets and writers share the spotlight. While the volume does not set out to delve into analyses of its writers' psyches, tantalizing hints peep through. Edith Wharton and Thomas Hardy, for example, created cemeteries for their many pets, while Christina Rossetti eulogized her cat, Grimalkin, in her poem "On the Death of a Cat." Lord Byron did the same for his favorite Newfoundland, Boatswain, in "Epitaph to a Dog." Such illustrations result in a lovely picture of the relationships that are possible between species.

Although most of the entries are short on details—some are but a sentence or two long—the brevity prompts outside explorations of the writers' lives and work. Illustrations and photographs of famous pets and writers from the collections of the British Library accompany the entries and add an extra layer of charm and immersion.

*Edward Lear and the Pussycat* collects the stories of writers and their animals in a way that's sure to tickle the fancy and imagination.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (March / April 2020)

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