

3.3 Edward Lear



Figure 41 - Logo for the Edward Lear 2012 Celebration representing one of Edward Lear's self-portraits

3.3.1 Life

Edward Lear was born in London in 1812. He was the twentieth of the twenty-one children of Jeremiah Lear and Ann Skerrett. There are scanty and sometimes erroneous informations about Lear's childhood and education.²⁶⁸ It is known, however, that he was brought up by his elder sisters, especially by Ann, because his mother was often unwell. Lear himself had a frail health too. He was forced to spend most of his winters abroad because he suffered from asthma and bronchitis. He was also epileptic, but, with the help of his sister Harriet, he was able to control the spasms, "and he did so to such a degree that few or none of his friends guessed the secret until he was dead and it was found in his diaries."²⁶⁹ For this reason, he attended school only for a very short period and was educated at home by his sisters Ann and Sarah. It was probably Ann who taught him drawing and painting.

At the age of fifteen, he started to earn his living as an artist through teaching, decorating screens and fans and making anatomy drawings. He then dedicated himself to

²⁶⁸ Sources: Noakes, Vivien. "Lear, Edward (1812-1888)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101016247/Edward-Lear>. (accessed February 28, 2014); Levi, Peter, *Edward Lear: A Biography*, London, MacMillan, 1995; Jackson, Holbrook, "Introduction. Edward Lear: Laureate of Nonsense", in Lear, Edward, *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear - Edited and Introduced by Holbrook Jackson*, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, pp. xi-xxx, p. xvii.

²⁶⁹ Levi, Peter, *Edward Lear: A Biography*, cit., p. 5.

ornithology. At first, in fact, he became the unofficial apprentice of the ornithologist Prideaux Selby who, between 1821 and 1834, published *Illustrations of British Ornithology*. Then, in 1829, when the gardens of the Zoological Society of London were opened, Lear obtained the permission from the president Lord Stanley to make drawings of the parrots there. For the next two years, Lear worked hard to carry on the project of a publication of his own. *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots*, in fact, was meant to be published for 175 subscribers in twelve parts between 1830 and 1832. As observed by Vivien Noakes, this book was new because:

It was the first devoted to a single family of bird, the first in a large format (imperial folio) in which the illustrations were reproduced by lithography, and the first in which the artist worked direct from nature, using living birds rather than stuffed skins.²⁷⁰

It is also interesting to notice that Lear prepared the lithographic stones himself.



Figure 42 - Edward Lear, Barnard's Parakeet (sx) and Stanley Parakeet (dx), from *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots* (1830-1832)

²⁷⁰ Noakes, Vivien. "Lear, Edward (1812-1888)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101016247/EdwardLear>. (accessed February 28, 2014).



Figure 43 - Edward Lear, Scarlett-collared Parakeet (sx) and Hyacinthine Macaw (dx), from *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots* (1830-1832)

Lord Stanley had built a private menagerie at his home, at Knowsley, near Liverpool. He was so impressed with Lear's work to ask him to make an accurate record of his collection. Thus, between 1831 and 1837, Lear spent long periods at Knowsley and the result of his work was *Gleanings from the Menagerie and Aviary at Knowsley Hall* (1846). From this moment on, Lord Stanley, who in 1834 became the thirteenth Earl of Derby, was to represent a sort of patron for Lear. In effect, in 1837, Lord Stanley and his cousin Robert Hornby offered Lear to go to Rome to recover from some health problems and to devote himself to landscape painting. Lear lived in Rome until 1848. There, he went round with a group of international artists including the painters Wilhelm Marstrand and Samuel Palmer and the architect Thomas Wyatt. During those years he also visited Naples, Florence, Sicily and Abruzzi. He occasionally came back to England to publish the landscape books which were the result of all his travels, that is, *Views in Rome and its Environs* (1841) and *Illustrated Excursions in Italy* (1846). Both works contained lithographic

plates and brief descriptive texts, because Lear believed that only through the combination and interdependence of words and pictures it was possible to recreate his travelling experiences. Moreover, the books were published using the subscription method already adopted for *Parrots*. Among the subscribers there was also Queen Victoria; the Queen was so impressed with Lear's work to ask him to give her a series of twelve drawing lessons. In the same years Lear started practising the oil painting technique and developed his characteristic watercolour style. As explained by Vivien Noakes,

His method was to make an accurate pencil drawing on the spot, annotating the drawing with descriptive notes which could relate to content ('rox', 'sheep', 'fig trees'), to colour ('dove grey', 'dim purple', 'bloo ski'), or to form ('wider apart', 'this set of lines is the real proportion'). [...] Later, following his colour notes, he would spend winter evenings in his studio laying in watercolour washes, and then go over pencil lines and annotations in sepia ink.²⁷¹

Before leaving Italy to go back to England, he visited again Naples and Sicily, and then he ventured on a journey to Calabria, Malta, Corfu, Greece, Constantinople, Albania, Egypt and Sinai. In Malta he met Franklin Lushington, who was to become his closest friend. It is striking that, despite of all his health problems, Lear was able to make long and hard journeys, travelling on foot, or on horseback, for all day long, only stopping to draw. During his travels, Lear produced an impressive number of drawings. As underlined by Holbrook Jackson, Lear "had the concentration of a beaver and never liked parting with a job once he had started to gnaw it."²⁷²

Once back in England, in 1849 he took advantage of an inheritance to apply as a student to the Royal Academy Schools. Information about this event is limited and we do not know exactly how long he attended the classes and why he decided to leave. Between

²⁷¹ Noakes, Vivien. "Lear, Edward (1812-1888)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101016247/Edward-Lear>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

²⁷² Jackson, Holbrook, "Introduction. Edward Lear: Laureate of Nonsense", in Lear, Edward, *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear - Edited and Introduced by Holbrook Jackson*, cit., p. xvii.

1851 and 1852 Lear published *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania, &c.* and *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria, &c.*



Figure 44 - Edward Lear, *Reggio Calabria*, from *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria, &c.* (1852)

The following year he exhibited *The Mountains of Thermopylae* at the British Institution and *The Quarries of Syracuse* at the Royal Academy.



Figure 45 - Edward Lear, *The Mountains of Thermopylae* (1852)



Figure 46 - Edward Lear, *Quarries of Syracuse* (1847)

However, his bad health made impossible for him to bear the English weather, especially in winter. He then decided to go back to Corfu and to start travelling again. He revisited Egypt and Palestine and went to Petra and Lebanon. He spent some time in Rome, but in winter 1860 he went back to England because his sister Ann was ill. She died in March

1861. The following year he completed his largest and most important painting, *The Cedars of Lebanon*.



Figure 47 - Edward Lear, *The Cedars of Lebanon*, (1858-1862)

Unfortunately, this work was not well received by critics. Lear was really disappointed by this fact, which worsened in him the irritation concerning his finances. The lack of a regular income, in fact, “gave him a permanent feeling of insecurity.”²⁷³

He began to take into consideration the idea of living permanently abroad. At first, he settled in Nice. He kept on travelling and in 1870 he published *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Corsica*. The year before, thanks to Ann’s legacy and the savings from his publications, he bought a plot in San Remo and started to design Villa Emily, his future house. He moved there in 1871 with his Albanian servant Giorgio Kokali and his beloved cat Foss. In this period he began to work on the project of illustrating Tennyson’s poems. Lear had been a great friend of Tennyson and his wife Emily since 1851. Lear was never able to finish this project, but some of the drawings he had realised were published posthumously in a book entitled *Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Illustrated by Edward Lear* (1889). Between 1873 and 1875 he visited India. Back in San Remo, he looked for a site to build a new house – Villa Tennyson – because the construction of a hotel in front of

²⁷³ Jackson, Holbrook, “Introduction. Edward Lear: Laureate of Nonsense”, in Lear, Edward, *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear - Edited and Introduced by Holbrook Jackson*, cit., p. xix.

Villa Emily disturbed him. He moved to Villa Tennyson in 1881 and there he spent the rest of his life. He died in 1888 and was buried in San Remo.

3.3.2 Lear's Nonsense

Dwelling on the most important events in Lear's life, I have focused on the analysis of his work as a painter. However, it is relevant for this dissertation to point out that Lear's reputation as a painter is a quite recent (re)discovery. Until the mid-nineteenth century, in fact, it was obscured by his great fame as a nonsense writer and illustrator.

Lear published four nonsense books: *The Book of Nonsense* in 1846, *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* in 1871, *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, &c.* in 1872, and *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems, Songs, Botany, Music, &c.* in 1877. In 1895 Sir Edward Strachey edited a posthumous volume entitled *Nonsense Songs and Stories*, which included a selection of the earlier *Nonsense Books* with the addition of some unpublished verses and drawings. Before examining in details Lear's nonsense books, it could be useful to make some general remarks about the nonsense. The OED defines nonsense as "that which is not sense; absurd or meaningless words or ideas."²⁷⁴ In effect, critics describe nonsense as something opposed to sense. Carolyn Wells, for example, states that "etymologically speaking, nonsense may be either word without meaning, or words conveying absurd or ridiculous ideas."²⁷⁵ She considers the nonsense of ideas the most meritorious and interesting because it "embodies an absurd or ridiculous idea, and treats it with elaborate seriousness."²⁷⁶ In "Nonsense as a Fine Art", Edward Strachey starts from a definition of what is sense

Sense is the recognition, adjustment, and maintenance of the proper and fitting relations of the affairs of ordinary life. It is a constitutional tact, a keeping touch

²⁷⁴ "nonsense, n. and adj.". OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proslib.unimi.it/view/Entry/128094?rskey=DajzKM&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 28, 2014).

²⁷⁵ Wells, Carolyn, "Introduction", in Wells, Carolyn, ed., *A Nonsense Anthology*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, pp. xix-xxxiii, p. xx.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

with all around it, rather than a conscious and deliberate action of the intellect. It almost seems the mental outcome and expression of our five senses.²⁷⁷

to assert that nonsense “is the proper contrary of sense. In contradiction to the relations and harmonies of life, nonsense sets itself to discover and bring forward the incongruities of all things within and without us.”²⁷⁸ According to X.J. Kennedy, nonsense in children’s books is “the account of anything that isn’t likely to happen, whether or not it conceivably could.”²⁷⁹ Kennedy distinguishes between loose and strict nonsense, defining this last category – which Lear’s poems belong to – as a kind of nonsense in which

The laws of nature must be suspended, replaced by new laws which the author decrees. The result is a new world extremely systematic and, in its goofy way, eminently reasonable. Such a new world comes with its own animals, birds, insects, and plants; and in this department the inventiveness of nonsense poets is wonderful to behold.²⁸⁰

Lear did not write his nonsense books with the intention of having them published. His main aim was to amuse the children who were in the house of his patron, the Earl of Derby, during the time spent at Knowsley. This is clearly shown by the dedication at the beginning of *A Book of Nonsense*.

²⁷⁷ Strachey, Edward, “Nonsense as a Fine Art”, in *Littell’s Living Age*. Fifth Series, Vol. LXIV, Oct-Nov-Dec 1888, pp. 515-531 (reprint from *Quarterly Review*, 167, 1888, pp. 335-365), p. 515.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Kennedy, X.J., “Strict and Loose Nonsense: Two Worlds of Children’s Verse”, in Egoff, Sheila, Stubbs, Gordon, Ashley, Ralph, eds., *Only Connect: Readings on Children’s Literature*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 225-235, p. 226.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

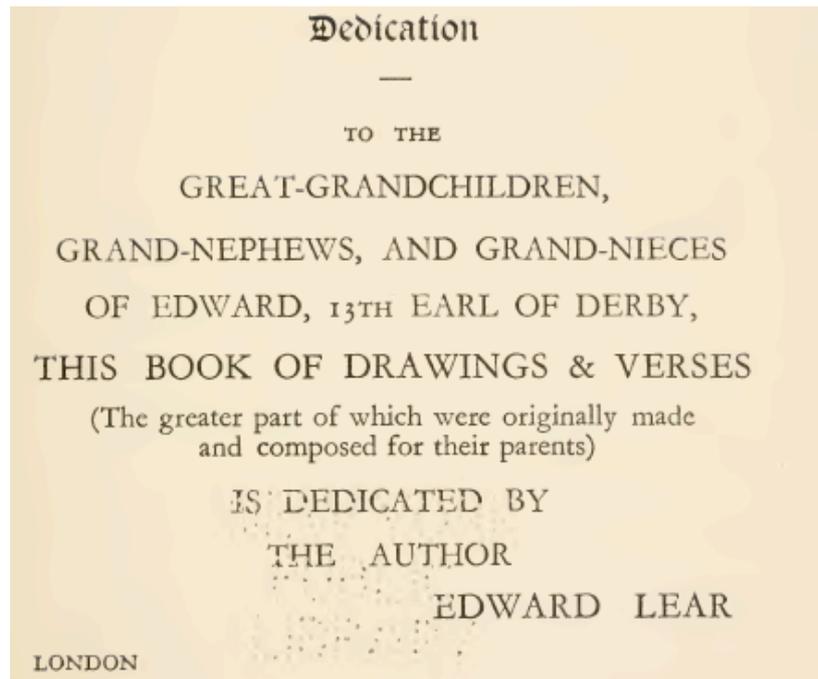


Figure 48 - Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense* (187...)

He also wanted to amuse and divert himself; for him nonsense was a sort of “refuge from the trials and irritations of life [...]. It was as though he lived a double life, one in the realm of sense and the other in that of nonsense.”²⁸¹

The first of Lear’s nonsense books, *A Book of Nonsense*, was published in 1846 by Thomas McLean under the pseudonym of Derry down Derry. It was in two volumes and it contained 72 illustrated limericks. The book was reprinted in one volume in 1855, but it was with the third edition published in 1861 that it achieved a great success. In the 1861 book Lear’s name appeared for the first time. He added 43 limericks to the 72 of the first edition. It is worth remarking that *A Book of Nonsense* has never been out of print since its first publication. The possible sources of Lear’s book could be two collections of limericks which Lear probably read at Knowsley, that is, *The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women* (1821) and *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentleman* (c1822).

²⁸¹ Kennedy, X.J., “Strict and Loose Nonsense: Two Worlds of Children’s Verse”, in Egoff, S., Stubbs, G., Ashley, R., eds., *Only Connect: Readings on Children’s Literature*, cit., p. 227.



There was an Old woman of Bath,
And she was as thin as a Lath,
She was brown as a berry,
With a Nose like a Cherry;
This skinny Old Woman of Bath.

Figure 49 - *The History of Sixteen*

Wonderful Old Women (1821)



There was an old captain of Dover,
Whom all the physicians gave over;
At the sound of the drum
And "The enemy's come"
Up jump'd the bold captain of Dover.

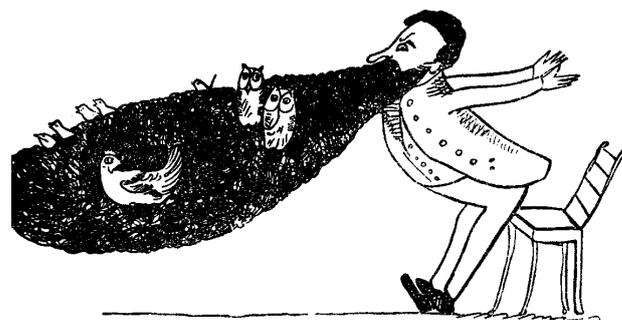
Figure 50 - *Anecdotes and Adventures o Fifteen Gentleman* (1822)

The structure of Lear's lines is very similar to the form of the limericks contained in these books who inspired him, but, as observed by William Harmon, the poems in *A Book of Nonsense* "do not meet the standards of the perfect limerick",²⁸² and Lear himself never used this term to describe them. The limerick is a particular form of nonsense poetry generally characterised by the following structure: a five-line form with a rhyme scheme of *aabba*. The first two lines are in anapaestic trimeter, the third and the fourth lines in anapaestic dimeter, and the fifth line again in anapaestic trimeter. The structure of Lear's poems is quite different:

²⁸² Harmon, William, "Lear, Limericks, and Some Other Verse Forms", in *Children's Literature*, Vol. 10, 1982, pp. 70-76, p. 70.

In its most characteristic form, the verse begins with a line of anapaestic trimeter in which a general type of character (old or young person, man, woman, or lady) is presented, with an indication of place, either general (a garden or a station, say) or specific). The second line, also of anapaestic trimeter, rhymes perfectly or comically with the first and, as a rule, sets forth some eccentricity of the person presented in the first line. The third line is anapaestic tetrameter with an internal rhyme linking the second and the fourth stressed syllable. The fourth line returns to the trimeter and ends with the same word as the first line.²⁸³

The same structure is also described by John Rieder in his essay “Edward Lear’s limericks: The Function of Children’s Nonsense Poetry”.²⁸⁴



There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!—
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!

Figure 51 - Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense* (1846)

According to Andrew Casson, the distinctive element of Lear’s work is the complete integration between text and illustration, between visual and literary grotesque elements, where the visual grotesque is something that “in one way or another can be seen as grotesque”, while the literary grotesque “is more dependent on narrative in its widest sense.”²⁸⁵ The relationship text-image in Lear’s poems is extremely complex because it is characterised by almost all the types of word-picture dynamic described by Nikolajeva and

²⁸³ Harmon, William, “Lear, Limericks, and Some Other Verse Forms”, in *Children’s Literature*, Vol. 10, 1982, pp. 70-76, p. 70.

²⁸⁴ Rieder, John, “Edward Lear’s Limericks: The Function of Children’s Nonsense Poetry”, in *Children’s Literature*, Vol. 26, 1998, pp. 47-61.

²⁸⁵ Casson, Andrew, *Funny Bodies: Transgressional and Grotesque Humour in English Children’s Literature*, cit., p. 63 and p. 26.

Scott. The word-picture interaction, in fact, is at the same time symmetrical, complementary, enhancing and counterpointing.²⁸⁶



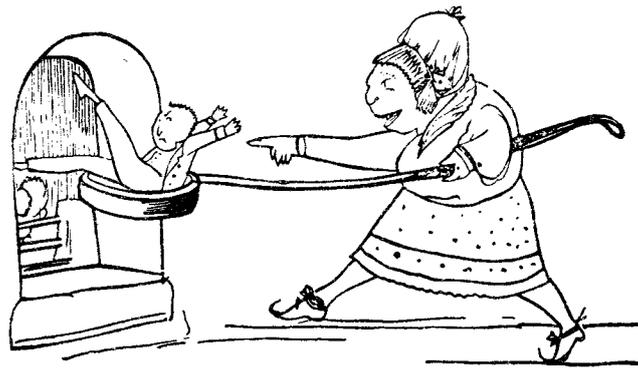
**There was a Young Lady whose chin,
Resembled the point of a pin;
So she had it made sharp, and purchased a harp,
And played several tunes with her chin.**



**There was a Young Lady whose eyes,
Were unique as to colour and size;
When she opened them wide, people all turned aside,
And started away in surprise.**

Figure 52 - Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense* (1846)

²⁸⁶ Cfr. p 23-24.



**There was an Old Man of Peru,
Who watched his wife making a stew;
But once by mistake, in a stove she did bake,
That unfortunate Man of Peru.**

Figure 53 - Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense* (1846)

The interdependence between text and images here is also shown by the distribution of them on the page, because, as observed by Nodelman in *Words about Pictures*, the spatial organisation in a picturebook is never chosen at random.²⁸⁷

Casson also notices that the main themes of Lear's nonsense – death, despair, conflict, violence, eccentricity, madness – are closer to tragedy than to comedy. Lear speaks about them with a tone of emotional detachment which, according to Kennedy, is typical of the strict nonsense, where “the writer may not directly express personal feeling, and can betray neither affection nor kindness.”²⁸⁸ This detachment makes Lear's nonsense grotesque because it creates a contemporary presence of opposite elements, the comic and the horrible, the ludicrous and the fearful. The pictures which illustrate the text are functional in this context because through them Lear showed “that he wrote of unreal things.”²⁸⁹ As observed by Strachey, nonsense creates confusion “by setting things upside down, bringing them into all sorts of unnatural, impossible, and absurd, but not painful or dangerous, combinations.”²⁹⁰ Lear's nonsense is characterised by a “suspended referentiality” because its world can be compared to a playground: Lear separates it from the real world, “letting loose a number of possibilities, including dangerous and violent

²⁸⁷ Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit. p. 53.

²⁸⁸ Kennedy, X.J., “Strict and Loose Nonsense: Two Worlds of Children's Verse”, in Egoff, S., Stubbs, G., Ashley, R., eds., *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, cit., p. 229.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

²⁹⁰ Strachey, Edward, “Nonsense as a Fine Art”, in *Littel's Living Age*, cit., p. 515.

ones, and at the same time disconnecting those possibilities from the real world.”²⁹¹ To this extent, the “suspended referentiality” of Lear’s nonsense is comparable with Bakhtin’s carnivalesque. Moreover, the particular text-image relation characterising Lear’s nonsense is “an invitation to imaginative role-playing”,²⁹² because it arouses in the (young) readers the desire to imagine their own world turned upside down, thus improving the “literacy of the imagination”. All the elements pointed out so far characterise Lear’s *Book of Nonsense* as well as his other *Nonsense Books*. The only difference is that they do not contain only limericks, but also songs, stories, nonsense botany, nonsense alphabets, rhymes, music, pictures and much more.

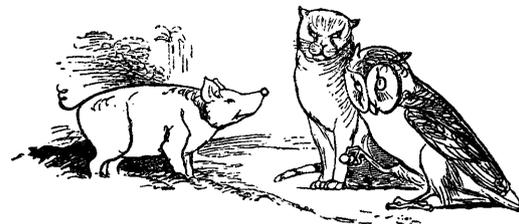


THE OWL AND THE PUSSY-CAT

I

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
 In a beautiful pea-green boat,
 They took some honey, and plenty of money,
 Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
 The Owl looked up to the stars above,
 And sang to a small guitar,
 ‘O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
 What a beautiful Pussy you are,
 You are,
 You are!
 What a beautiful Pussy you are!’

II
 Pussy said to the Owl, ‘You elegant fowl!
 How charmingly sweet you sing!
 O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
 But what shall we do for a ring?’
 They sailed away, for a year and a day,
 To the land where the Bong-tree grows
 And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
 With a ring at the end of his nose,
 His nose,
 His nose,
 With a ring at the end of his nose.



III

‘Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
 Your ring?’ Said the Piggy, ‘I will.’
 So they took it away, and were married next day
 By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
 They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
 Which they ate with a runcible spoon;

Figure 54 - Edward Lear, *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871)

²⁹¹ Rieder, John, “Edward Lear’s Limericks: The Function of Children’s Nonsense Poetry”, in *Children’s Literature*, cit..

²⁹² *Ibid.*

And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

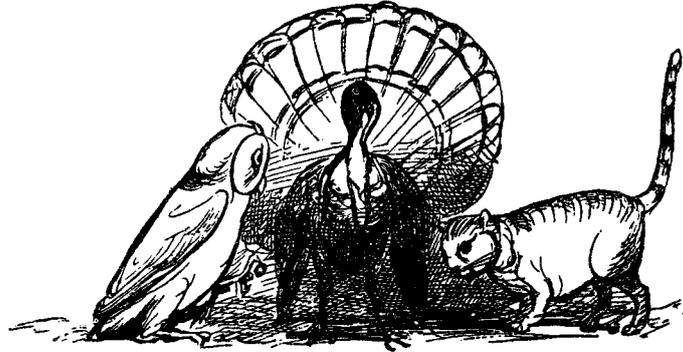
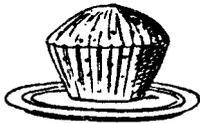


Figure 55 - Edward Lear, *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871)

A	B
	
a	b
A was once an apple-pie, Pidy Widy Tidy Pidy Nice insidy Apple-Pie.	B was once a little bear, Beary! Wary! Hairy! Beary! Taky cary! Little Bear!
C	D
	
c	d
C was once a little cake, Caky, Baky Maky Caky, Taky Caky, Little Cake!	D was once a little doll, Dolly, Molly, Polly Nolly, Nursy Dolly, Little Doll!

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Figure 56 - Edward Lear, *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871)

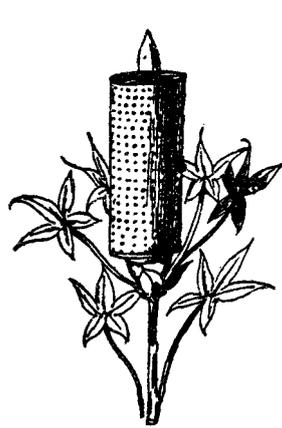


There was an old person of Bar,
Who passed all her life in a jar,
Which she painted pea-green, to appear more serene,
That placid old person of Bar.



There was an old person of Shoreham,
Whose habits were marked by decorum;
He bought an Umbrella, and sate in the cellar,
Which pleased all the people of Shoreham.

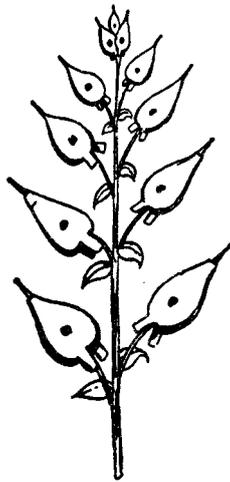
Figure 57 - Edward Lear, *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany &c.* (1872)



Knutmigrata Simplice



Tureenia Ladlecum



Puffia Leatherbellowsa



Queeriflora Babyoides

Figure 58 - Edward Lear, *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems, Songs, Botany, Music &c.* (1877)

3.4 Richard Dadd



Figure 59 - Richard Dadd's portrait

3.4.1 Life

Richard Dadd was born in 1817 in Chatham. He was the fourth of the seven children – four of them were to die insane – of Robert Dadd and Mary Ann Gillingham. His father was a chemist and a geologist who played a leading role in the town's intellectual life. His mother died young in 1824 and his father soon remarried with Sophia Oakes Munk. They had other two children, but also Sophia died very young. From 1827 to 1831 Dadd attended the cathedral grammar school at Rochester. He started to draw at the age of thirteen and maybe one of his first teachers was William Dadson, whose drawing academy was in Chatham, not far from the apothecary of Dadd's father.²⁹³

In 1834 the whole family moved to London because Robert Dadd gave up chemistry to run a gilding and ormolu manufacturing business which he had acquired from André Picnot, his first wife's brother-in-law. Dadd was determined to enter into the

²⁹³ Sources: Allderidge, Patricia H. "Dadd, Richard (1817-1886)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101037337/Richard-Dadd> (accessed February 28, 2014); Allderidge, Patricia, *The Late Richard Dadd 1817-1886*, London, Tate Gallery Publications, 1974.

Royal Academy Schools and, since the admission depended on the ability to draw from the antique, he spent a long period practising at the British Museum. He was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools as a full student in 1837. At the Academy he met William Powell Frith, Henry O'Neil, Augustus Egg and John Phillip, who were to become some of the most celebrated painters of the Victorian Age. Together they founded a sketching club called "The Clique". The young men used to gather once a week in Dadd's rooms for discussion, mutual criticism and encouragement. It was during the years spent at the Academy that Dadd started to show a great interest in imaginative painting. The works that he exhibited in the 1840s, in fact, were characterised by a preference for literary and historical subjects, and some of them, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Titania Sleeping* (1841), *Puck* (1841), *Fairies Assembling at Sunset to Hold their Revels* (1841), and *Come unto these Yellow Sands* (1842), gained Dadd a significant reputation as a fairy painter.



Figure 60 - Richard Dadd, *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Titania Sleeping* (1841)



Figure 61 - Richard Dadd, *Puck* (1841)



Figure 62 - Richard Dadd, *Come unto these Yellow Sands* (1841)

In 1842 Dadd left for a journey with Sir Thomas Phillips, a solicitor from South Wales. Phillips had decided to make an extended grand tour before settling down to a new career as a barrister in London, and he wanted to take a young artist with him to realise some drawings during the journey. Dadd's name was suggested by David Roberts, a friend of Dadd's father, because of "the knowledge that the young artist's powers as a draughtsman, and his amiable qualities as a man, would render him as charming in companionship as he would be efficient as an artist."²⁹⁴ The journey was very long and hard – it lasted ten months –and took Dadd and Phillips through Switzerland, the north Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Malta, and back through Italy from the south. In Egypt Dadd experienced the first symptoms of the illness which was to destroy his reason, symptoms which at first were mistaken for a sunstroke attack. In April 1843, while Dadd and Phillips were in Rome, Dadd passed from moments of tranquillity and self-control to moments of irrationality during which he believed to be persecuted by the devil. The journey went on but, when in Paris, Dadd suddenly left Phillips and went back to London. It was soon obvious to his family and friends that he was insane. His character had changed. He became suspicious, reserved, gloomy and occasionally violent. He was convinced to receive messages and orders from unknown sources and still believed to be pursued by evil spirits. In spite of this, Dadd behaved normally; he started to work again and went through a period of apparent recovery. For this reason, his father refused to put him under restraint.

In August 1843 Dadd asked his father to accompany him to Cobham Park in Kent and there "he stabbed him to death with a knife bought specifically for the purpose. Dadd later explained that he had killed the devil in disguise, and seems to have retained this belief throughout his life, talking objectively about the murder as an event for which he held no personal responsibility."²⁹⁵ Dadd fled to France, but he was arrested. He was then confined in a French asylum until July 1844, when he was expatriated to appear before the magistrates at Rochester. Certified as insane, he was admitted to the Bethlem

²⁹⁴ Allderidge, Patricia, *The Late Richard Dadd 1817-1886*, London, cit. p. 18.

²⁹⁵ Allderidge, Patricia H. "Dadd, Richard (1817-1886)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101037337/RichardDadd> (accessed February 28, 2014).

Hospital, the state criminal lunatic asylum. The 'government wing' where Dadd was confined

Was a prison-like block with heavily barred windows at the back of the main building, largely untouched by reforms which were taking place in the rest of the hospital. The internal environment was dark, cramped, and dismal, the outer world restricted to a bleak, high-walled exercise yard, and many of his companions were hardened criminals who had become insane while in prison.²⁹⁶

The imprisonment did not prevent Dadd from drawing. He was able to pursue his career as a painter despite the fact that his pictures were rarely seen outside the asylum. The favourite subjects were still scenes from literature and history, but also from the Bible and everyday life. He also painted landscapes and seascapes.



Figure 63 - Richard Dadd, *Sketch to Illustrate the Passions. Agony-Raving Madness* (sx) and *Sketch to Illustrate the Passions. Deceit or Duplicity* (dx) (1854)

²⁹⁶ Alderidge, Patricia H. "Dadd, Richard (1817-1886)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101037337/RichardDadd> (accessed February 28, 2014).



Figure 64 - Richard Dadd, *Sketch to Illustrate the Passions. Grief or Sorrow* (sx) and *Sketch to Illustrate the Passions. Murder* (dx) (1854)

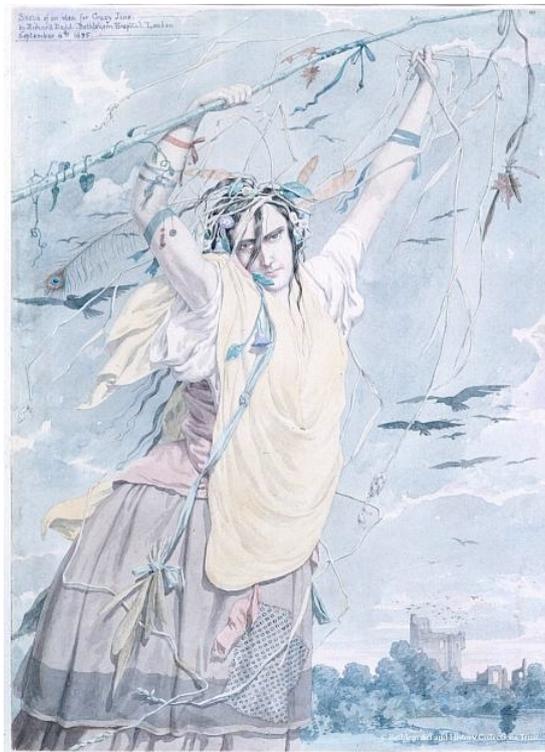


Figure 65 - Richard Dadd, *Crazy Jane* (1855)

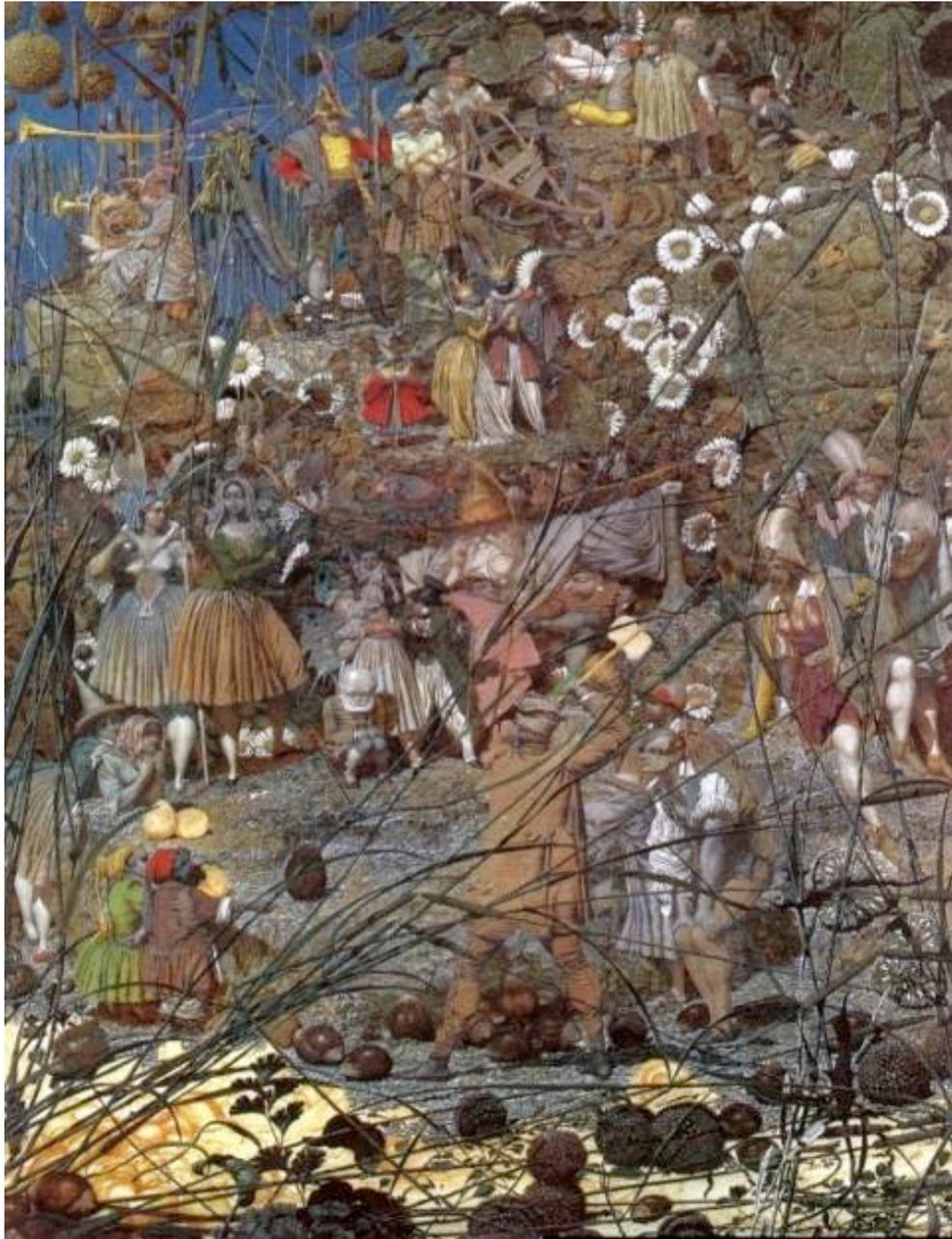


Figure 66 - Richard Dadd, *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke* (1855-1864)

In 1864 all the criminal patients were transferred from Bethlem to the new state asylum of Broadmoor (Berkshire). The conditions of life here were better than in Bethlem because the place looked like a small village at the top of a hill, and it had terraced gardens with views on the surrounding countryside. There were also facilities for recreation and employment. Here in Broadmoor, Richard Dadd died in 1886 and was buried in the cemetery within the hospital grounds.

3.4.2 The Book of British Ballads

In his study of the art of Richard Dadd, Simon Cooke points out that “Dadd is rarely regarded as an artist whose work can be separated from his ‘madness’. His paintings are viewed as the ravings of a maniac, and psychological interpretations have read them as the transcripts of insanity.”²⁹⁷ According to Cooke, such a view of Dadd’s work is quite limited and simplistic. Dadd, in fact, has never been a conventional artist and has always been attracted by strange, fantastic and greatly imaginative compositions. Distortion and aberrant or alternative views of the ‘real’ have always characterised his style long before his mental breakdown and the confinement in the asylum. This is particularly evident also in a work which falls outside Dadd’s usual artistic production, that is, the illustrations he realised for the ballad “Robin Goodfellow”, which is included in *The Book of British Ballads*.

As the title suggests, *The Book of British Ballads* is a collection of old traditional British folk songs. The first edition, published in two volumes by Jeremiah How, appeared between 1842 and 1844. Subsequently, the book was published in one volume and stayed in print for about twenty years. The editor Samuel Carter Hall commissioned the illustrations of the ballads to several artists, including John Tenniel, Henry Courtney Selous, John Franklin, John Rogers Herbert, Henry James Townsend, and Richard Dadd. *The Book of British Ballads* is an interesting work to analyse, because it is a perfect example of the way in which “traditional tales, medieval epics and romances become part of children’s reading”,²⁹⁸ and of the growing taste for Germanic design typical of mid-nineteenth century. As far as this topic is concerned, it is relevant to notice that from 1840 onwards, German culture was greatly appreciated in England. This was also due to the influence of Prince Albert, who promoted Teutonic art, music, philosophy and literature. German illustrated books obtained a vast success of public and started to be imitated. *Das Nibelungenleid*, published in Leipzig by Wigands in 1840 with illustrations

²⁹⁷ Cooke, Simon. “Dadd as a Painter and Illustrator”. In *The Victorian Web*, edited by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/art/illustration/dadd/cooke.html>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

²⁹⁸ Blamires, David, *Telling Tales: The Impact of Germany on English Children’s Books 1780-1918*, cit., p. 353.

by Alfred Rethel, was particularly influential, because it gave birth to a new fashion in the field of book illustration. Cooke observes that

German illustration was primarily a literary art which focused on the dramatic representation of narratives. It was also intensely decorative. German books of the thirties and fifties are often enriched with ornamental borders enclosing the text. In part alluding to the manuscript art of the illuminated manuscript and in part a representation of the elaborate borders featuring in German *incunabula*, these publications gave an impression of luxuriousness that went beyond their status as mass-products.²⁹⁹

Rethel's drawings contain the features described by Cooke, including ornamental borders characterised by strap-works, floral devices and arabesques, all motifs typical of the grotesque and the Gothic style.

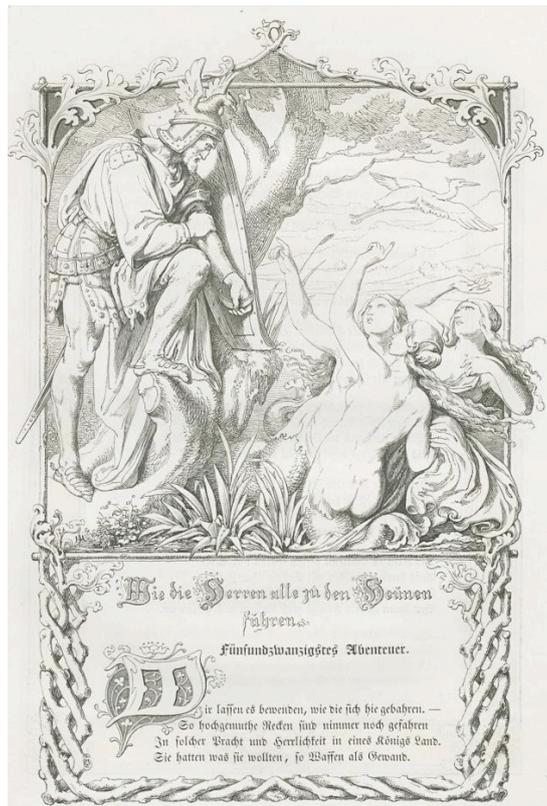


Figure 67 - Alfred Rethel, *Das Nibelungenlied* (1840)

²⁹⁹ Cooke, Simon. "Germanic Illustration in mid-Victorian Britain". In *The Victorian Web*, edited by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/art/illustration/german/cooke.html>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

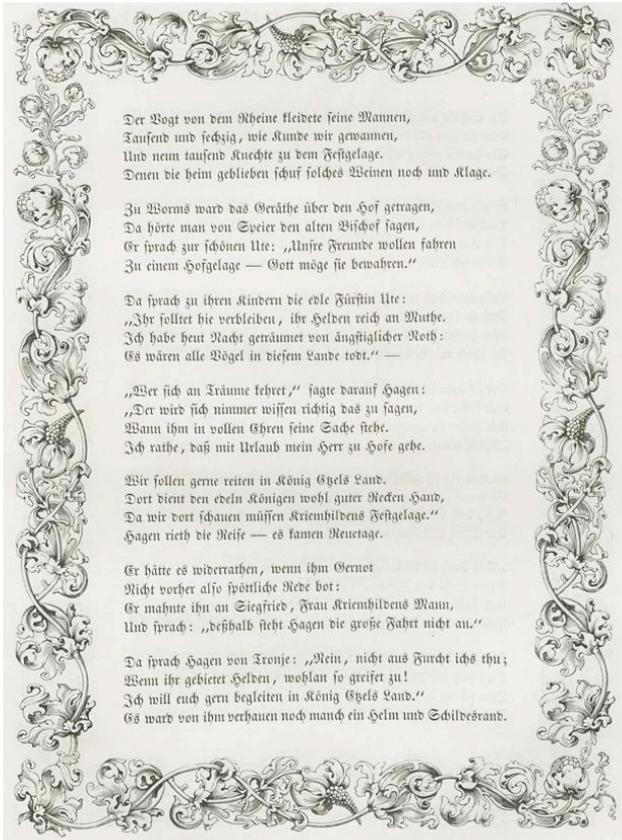
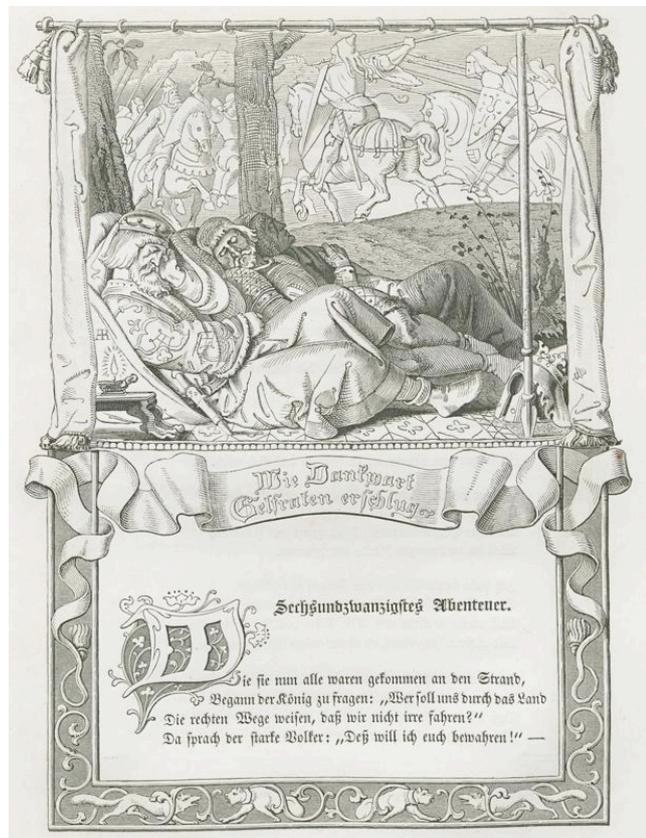


Figure 68 - Alfred Rethel, *Das Nibelungenlied* (1840)



Rethel's illustrations for *Das Nibelungenlied* were a great source of inspiration for Samuel Carter Hall. In *The Book of British Ballads* he introduced a new graphic arrangement which, with slight variation, became a model and characterised book illustration into the seventies. The structure of the book is quite simple. Each ballad is preceded by an introduction in which Hall tells its origins and gives some explanations about the text. After this short introduction, there is the illustrated text of the ballad-verse.

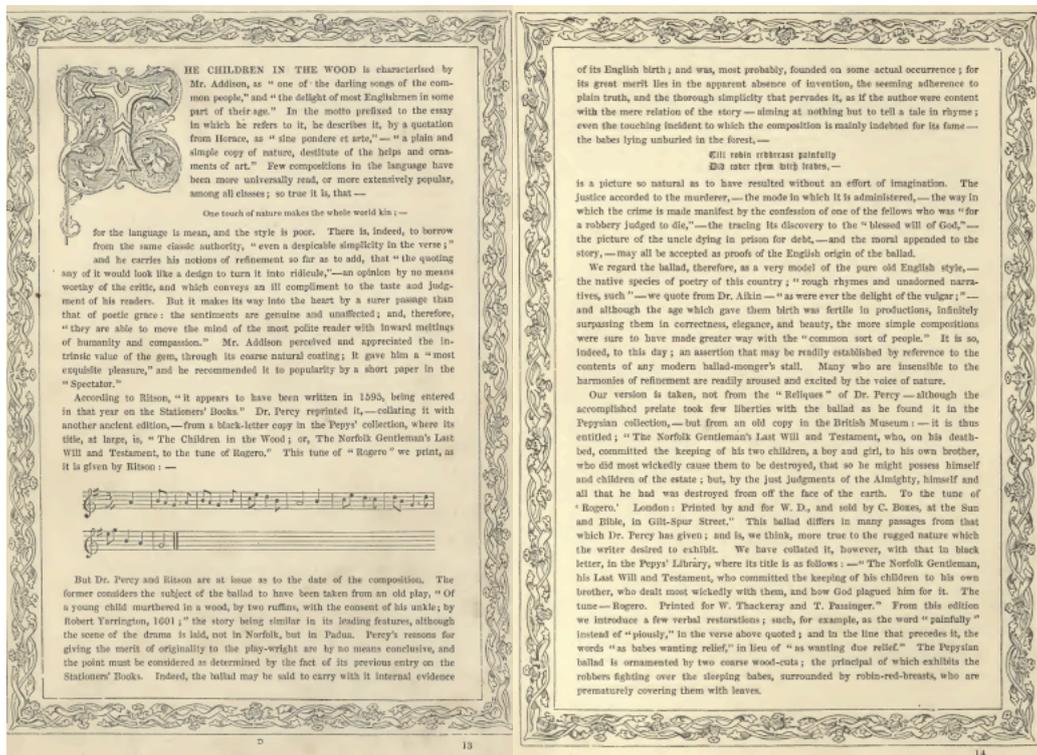


Figure 69 - "The Children in the Wood" illustrated by John Rogers Herbert

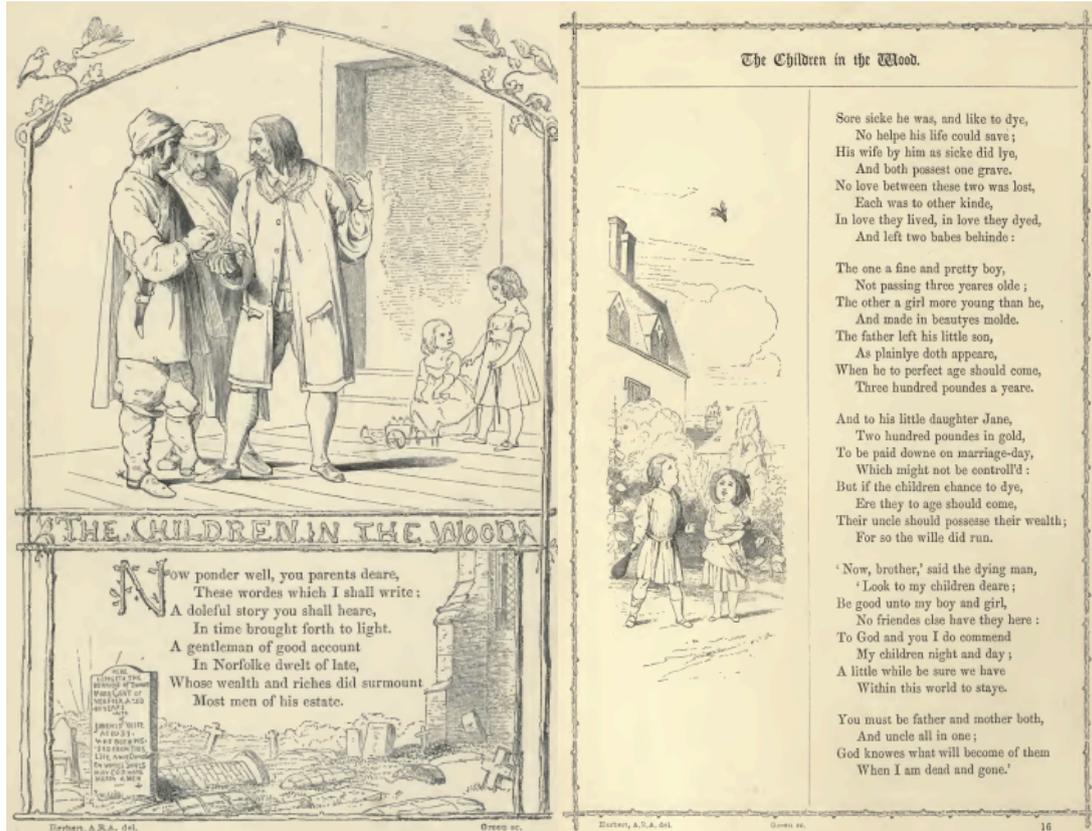


Figure 70 - "The Children in the Wood" illustrated by John Rogers Herbert

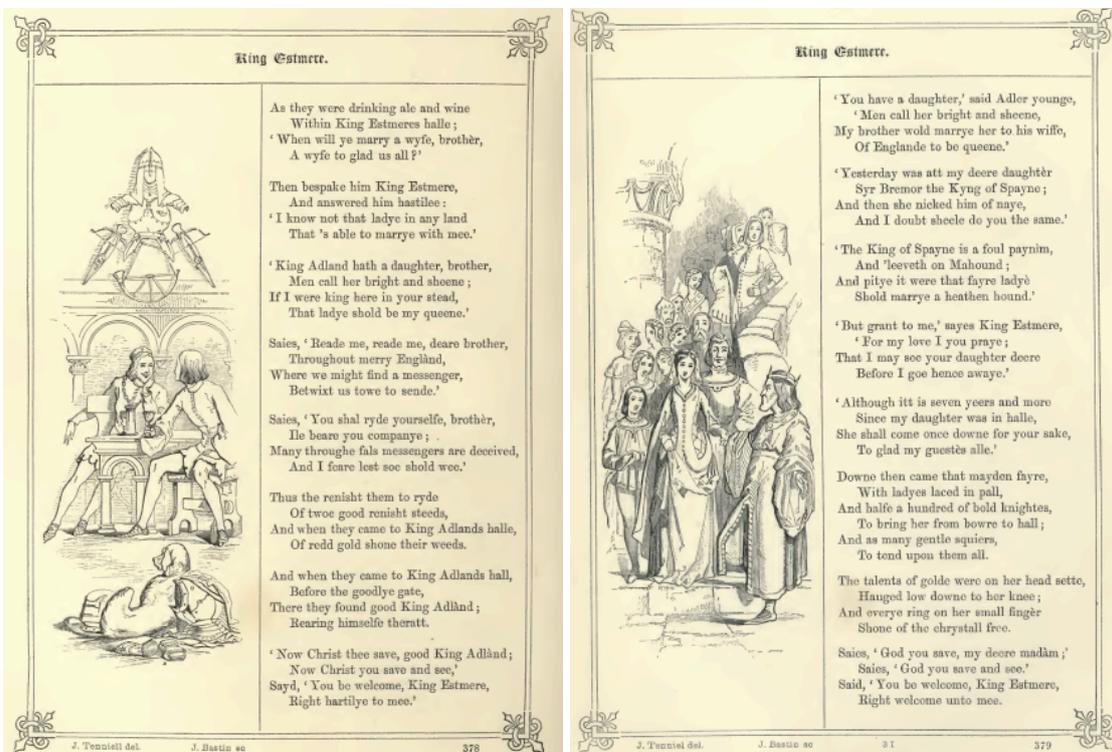


Figure 71 - "King Estmere" illustrated by John Tenniel

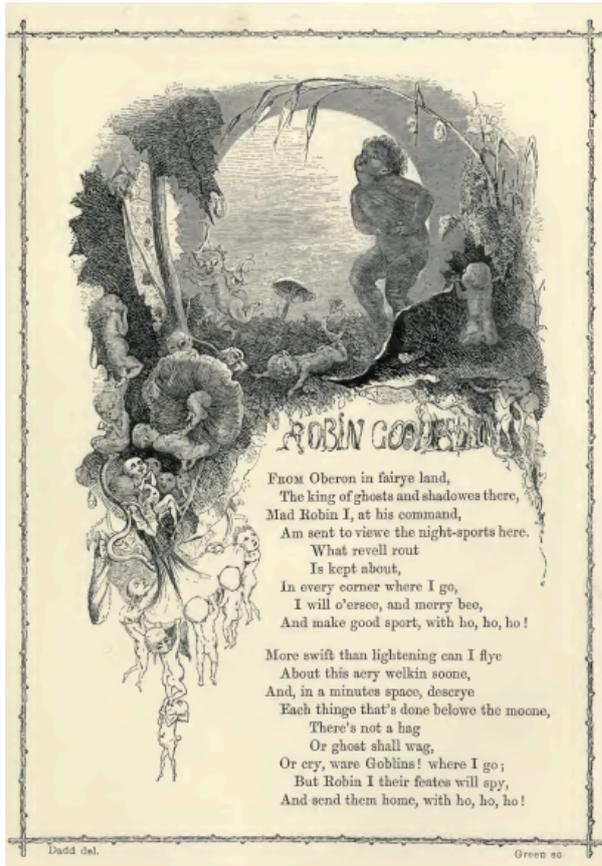


Figure 72 - "Robin Goodfellow" illustrated
by Richard Dadd

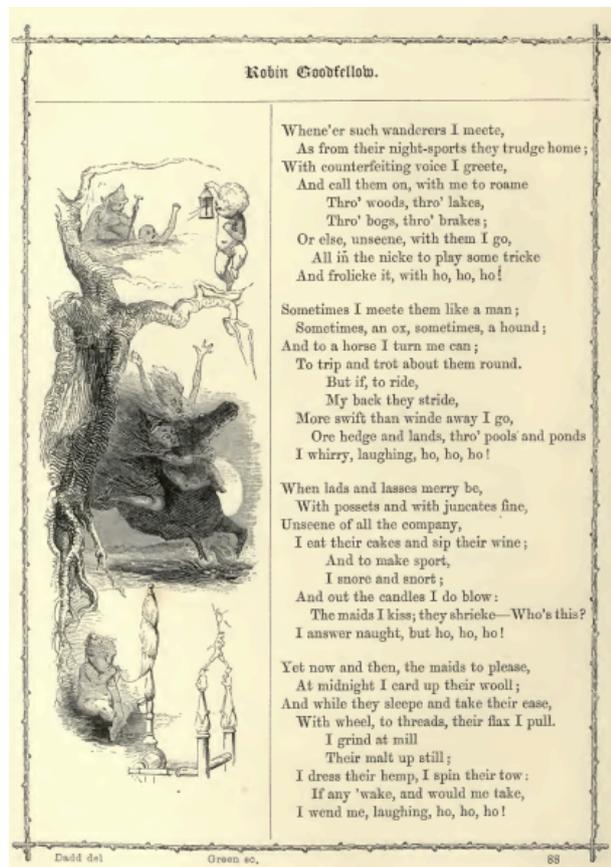
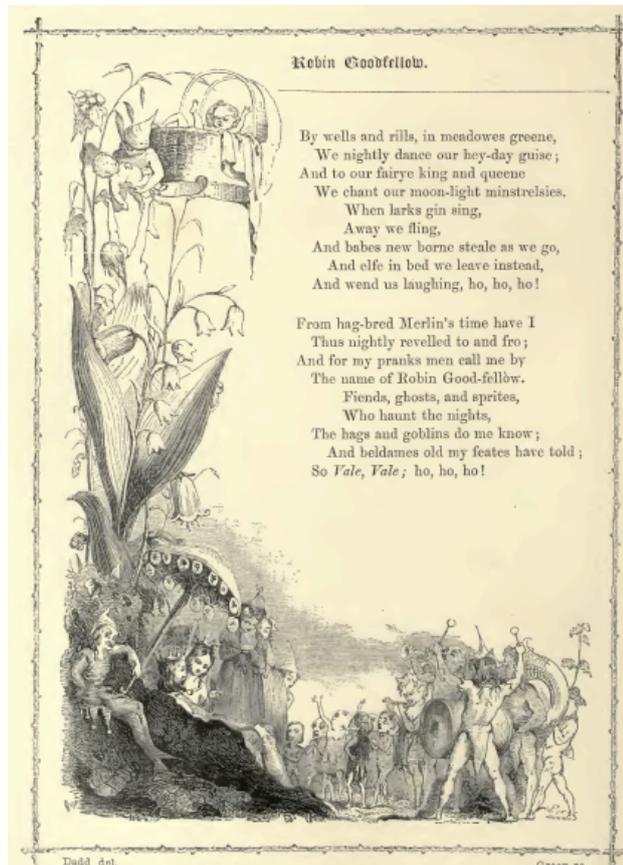




Figure 73 - "Robin Goodfellow" illustrated by Richard Dadd



The above pictures clearly show that Dadd's illustrations are very similar to those realised by the other contributors. The layout is the same: frames surrounding both the text and the pictures, and illustrations consisting of a vertical image placed next to the verses. However, the distinguishing feature of Dadd's drawings is that his vertical images do not represent just one of the events told in the verses, but they include multiple scenes in which Dadd tries to depict the whole ballad, simultaneously respecting its narrative sequence. Consequently, the text-picture dynamic here is undoubtedly symmetrical, but it is also enhancing, because the illustrations reinforce and support what is said in the text. As observed by Cooke,

The connection between the textual details and their visual showing is reinforced by the physical proximity between the stanzas and the designs. Presenting his illustrations as stacked compositions in which each part is placed to the left of the scene it represents, Dadd emphasises (and demands) the act of visualized reading. We scan from words to images and back again, with the illustrations providing a graphic version of the textual information.³⁰⁰

This particular layout in a sense loosens the tension between visual and verbal narrative typical of the picturebooks and the consequent "drama of the turning of the page".³⁰¹ Moreover, through the multiple scenes, Dadd succeeds to express graphically elements such as the general setting and the chronological sequence of the events, which belong to the verbal narrative. He also stresses the dark side of the fairy world because his fairies and goblins are quite menacing figures who evoke a nightmarish dimension rather than a dreamlike universe.

³⁰⁰ Cooke, Simon. "Dadd as a Painter and Illustrator". In *The Victorian Web*, edited by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/art/illustration/dadd/cooke.html>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

³⁰¹ Cfr. p. 20.