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Land of Enchantment: British Fantasy Illustration in the Golden Age

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Land of Enchantment

British Fantasy Illustration in the Golden Age

An Exhibition
September 27, 1997
through
January 31, 1998

The Watkinson Library at Trinity College Hartford, Connecticut

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain saw a proliferation of sumptuously illustrated books, incorporating fantasy in its many facets. The times were right, with the social and political climate favorable to fantastic and visionary literature and art. An expanding British empire was sparking fascination with the non-Western world, giving rise to illustrations of exotic, far-away lands. At the same time, increasing interest in revivalism (Gothic, Medieval, and Renaissance), exoticism, and spiritualism found a natural outlet in fantastic themes. Fantasy was a form of escapism from an increasingly industrialized lifestyle and the often rigid confines of Victorian society.

While fantastic illustration is difficult to define and covers a broad spectrum, it usually involves the supernatural world or some other unreal element. Recurring themes in fantasy illustration include: folk and fairy tales, historic myths and legends, the horrific and grotesque, and the anthropomorphization of animals and flowers. Exhibited items represent these prevalent themes from the "Golden Age" of illustration in Britain which flourished from the mid-nineteenth century until the First World War. The illustrators included are British citizens, both native-born and emigrants, as well as non-citizens who had successful works published in England.

Folk Tales and Fantastically Illustrated Literature

On display, Case 1:

Willy Pogány (1882-1955)
Colum, Padraic. *The King of Ireland's Son*. [New York]: Henry Holt, c1916.

Arthur Rackham (1867-1939)
Ruskin, John. *The King of the Golden River*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, [1932].

Richard Doyle (1824-1883)
Ruskin, John. *The King of the Golden River, or, The Black Brothers: a Legend of Stiria*. Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1863.

Howard Pyle (1853-1911)
The Garden Behind the Moon: a Real Story of the Moon Angel. New York: Scribner, 1906.

Willy Pogány
Omar Khayyam. *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. New York: T.Y. Crowell, [19--?].

Edmund Dulac (1882-1953)
Omar Khayyam. *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1909?].
Dulac, regarded as the last of the great illustrators in the "Golden Age," was born in France but became a British subject at age twenty-nine. He liked working with oriental themes, illustrating works such as *The Arabian Nights* and *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Famous for his use of blue, his own shade was known as "bleu du lac."

Fairy Tales

Andrew Lang's *Fairy Books*

This successful series of fairy story anthologies compiled by Andrew Lang began with *The Blue Fairy Book* in 1884 and concluded with *The Lilac Fairy Book* in 1910. Color plates were not introduced until the *Violet* book in 1901. Henry Justice Ford did the majority of illustrations for this series.

George Cruikshank's *Fairy Library*

Cruikshank illustrated the first English translation of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales in 1823. From 1853 until 1864 he published additional illustrations to the Grimm's stories and rewrote the tales in the process. His alterations angered Charles Dickens, who attacked him in an article entitled, "Frauds on the Fairies" in *Household Words* (Vol. 8, no. 184:Oct. 1, 1853). Dickens asserted, "In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected."

On display, Case 2:

Henry Justice Ford (1860-1941)

The Blue Fairy Book. Edited by Andrew Lang. London ; New York: Longmans, Green, 1905.

The Crimson Fairy Book. Edited by Andrew Lang. New York: Longmans, Green, 1903.

The Pink Fairy Book. Edited by Andrew Lang. New York ; London: Longmans, Green, 1904.

The Brown Fairy Book. Edited by Andrew Lang. London: Longmans, Green, 1904.

George Cruikshank (1792-1878)

The Twenty-four Etchings by George Cruikshank to Illustrate His Fairy Library. [Proofs]

George Cruikshank's Fairy Library. London: Bell and Daldy, [186-?].

Hop-o'-My-Thumb and the Seven-League Boots. London: David Bogue, [between 1853 and 1864].

Puss in Boots. London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, [between 1853 and 1864].

Cinderella and the Glass Slipper. London: David Bogue, [between 1853 and 1864].

The History of Jack & the Bean-stalk. London: David Bogue, [between 1853 and 1864].

On display, Case 3:

Edmund Dulac

Edmund Dulac's Picture-Book. London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1919].

Arthur Rackham

Stephens, James. *Irish Fairy Tales*. New York: Macmillan, 1920.

Kay Nielsen (1886-1957)

Quiller-Couch, Arthur. *The Twelve Dancing Princesses and Other Fairy Tales*. New York: George H. Doran, [1923].

Warwick Goble (d. 1943)

James, Grace. *Green Willow and Other Japanese Fairy Tales*. London: Macmillan, 1910.

On display, Case 4:

Jessie Willcox Smith (1863-1935)
Smith, Nora Archibald. *Boys and Girls of Bookland*. New York: Cosmopolitan, 1923.

Willy Pogány
Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: E.P. Dutton, c1929.

John Tenniel (1820-1914)

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Abenteuer im Wunderland*. Leipzig: J.F. Hartknoch, [1869?].

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London: Macmillan, 1866.

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. London: Macmillan, 1872.

Although more than a hundred artists illustrated Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, including Lewis Carroll himself, Tenniel's representations are indisputably the most famous. Carroll's close supervision of Tenniel during the project, while irritating to the artist, obviously did not hinder his creativity.

Anthropomorphized Animals

Animals in late nineteenth-century literature were given such human characteristics as displaying a moral character and wearing clothes. Brigid Peppin in her book *Fantasy: The Golden Age of Fantastic Illustration* asserts, "If the White Rabbit [Alice's Adventures in Wonderland] was to share man's respect for time, it ought also to share his shame of nakedness." Peppin suggests that the depiction of animals with human characteristics may have been in part a response to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as expressed in *The Origin of the Species* (1859). If man was just another species of animal, then it is logical that he would view other creatures as having a sense of ethics.

Another reason for animal anthropomorphization was the shift in Britain from a rural to an urban society. The majority of children were living in cities by the early twentieth century and had little contact with animals in their native environment. This circumstance provided fertile ground for imaginative fantasies about the animal kingdom.

On display, Case 5:

Ernest Griset (1844-1907)
Griset's Grottesques, or, Jokes Drawn on Wood. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1867.

Jean de Boschère (1878-1953)
Folk Tales of Flanders. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1918.

Arthur Rackham

Grahame, Kenneth. *The Wind in the Willows*. New York: Heritage, c1940.

Kenneth Grahame's beloved *The Wind in the Willows* began as a series of bedtime stories for his son. Originally titled *The Wind in the Reeds* until just prior to publication, Grahame didn't want illustrations at first. Peter Green explains, "When asked specifically (apropos the escape on the railway train) whether Toad was life-size or train-size, he [Grahame] answered that he was both and neither: the Toad was train-sized, the train was Toad-sized, and therefore there could be no illustrations."

Arthur Rackham turned down an offer to illustrate *The Wind in the Willows* because he was working on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the time. He regretted the missed opportunity, and was pleased when asked to illustrate the book for the Limited Editions Club of New York, posthumously published in 1940.

On display, Case 6:

Beatrix Potter (1866-1943)

The Tale of Peter Rabbit. New York: F. Warne, [1902?].

The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, c1904.

The Tale of Tom Kitten. New York: F. Warne, c1907.

The Tailor of Gloucester. New York: F. Warne, c1931.

The Tale of Two Bad Mice. New York: F. Warne, c1904.

F. Warne Bookmark.

Ernest H. Shepard (1879-1976)

Milne, A.A. *The House at Pooh Corner*. New York: E.P. Dutton, c1928.

Milne, A.A. *Winnie-the-Pooh*. [New York]: E.P. Dutton, c1926.

Walter Crane's Floral Fantasies

Walter Crane was one of the most popular artists of the late nineteenth century. He was the first president of the Art Workers' Guild (1884), President of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society (1888-1890), and the Principal at the Royal College of Art (1898-1899). In addition to his illustrations, he designed textiles, wallpapers, tiles, and costumes. Although best known for his children's books, Crane produced several flower books, the first of which was *Flora's Feast*.

On display, Case 7:

Walter Crane (1845-1915)

Flora's Feast: a Masque of Flowers. London ; New York: Cassell, 1889.

A Floral Fantasy in an Old English Garden. London: Harper, 1899.

Queen Summer, or, The Tourney of the Lily & the Rose. London: Cassell, 1891.

The Horrific and Grotesque

Fantasy illustration is often intended as much for adults as for children. Indeed, illustrators such as Harry Clarke and Aubrey Beardsley created disturbing images that were frequently too terrifying for children. Illustrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found inspiration in the visionary and unsettling works of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century artists such as William Blake, Henry Fuseli, and John Martin.

On display, Case 8:

Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898)

Aubrey Beardsley's Drawings to Illustrate the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe. New York: The Colonial Co., [1901?].

René Bull (d. 1942)

Omar Khayyam. *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. [London]: Hodder and Stoughton, [1913].

John Tenniel

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. New York: Macmillan, 1872.

Harry Clarke (1889-1931)

Poe, Edgar Allan. *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. New York: Brentano, [193-?].

Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* with Clarke's illustrations was first published in 1919. The prospectus for the book informs readers that "Mr. Clarke does not attempt to limit the weird effect upon most readers of the *Tales*, but horror and intense feelings are depicted with grace and beauty of detail that lift the designs far above morbidity."

Malcolm C. Salaman wrote of the illustrations, "Never before ... have these marvellous tales been visually interpreted with such flesh-creeping, brain-haunting illusions of horror, and terror, and the unspeakable. In black and white and in colours, Mr. Clarke sets pictures before us that glimpse for us fresh meanings in the tales, and at the same time give us artistic satisfaction."

Historic Myths and Legends

On display, Case 9:

Walter Crane

Gilbert, Henry. *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood*. New York: F.A. Stokes, [1912].

Howard Pyle

The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown in Nottinghamshire. New York: Scribner, 1883.

Arthur Rackham

The Land of Enchantment. London ; New York: Cassell, 1907.

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898)

Morris, William. *The Doom of King Acrisius*. New York: R.H. Russell, 1902.

On display, Case 10:

Arthur Rackham

Malory, Thomas. *The Romance of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*. London: Macmillan, 1917.

Howard Pyle

The Story of King Arthur and His Knights. New York: Scribner, 1904.

Walter Crane

Gilbert, Henry. *King Arthur's Knights: the Tales Re-told for Boys and Girls*. Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1911.

Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

Tennyson, Alfred. *Vivien*. New York: G. Routledge, 1868.

Jessie M. King (1875-1949)

The High History of the Holy Graal. London: J.M. Dent ; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1903.

Jessie M. King was an early member of the "Glasgow School" of art and was influenced by Botticelli. Her trademark linear style lent itself well to legendary themes such as Arthurian romance. *The High History of the Holy Graal* was King's first major commission. It was published in standard and De Luxe editions. Colin White writes, "Jessie's drawings stressed the fantastic elements in the story. The columns in the halls were ornate with jewels and wreathed in spirals of carved fruit and blossom. Clouds were made up of tumbling balls of minute

dots, and the air was filled with stars and petals. The ladies' dresses were of fine lawn, totally unsuitable for the cold northern climate of the setting, but ideal for the eternal Spring of the legend."

Depictions of Fairies and Elves

No display of fantasy illustration would be complete without a few depictions of fairies and elves. For many, these spritely beings embody the very essence of fantasy. The portrayals of fairies and elves are as varied as the artists who illustrated them. From Housman's distinctive Art Nouveau elves to Doyle's childlike fairies, the portrayal of these creatures is as varied as the artists who illustrated them. Edward Hodnett, commenting on Rackham's illustrations for *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, says, "It was a great time for fairies, and Rackham gave them their most delightful embodiment: the fairy women, all ethereality; the fairy men, all long-nosed, bat-eared drollery."

On display, Case 11:

Laurence Housman (1865-1959)

Barlow, Jane. *The End of Elfintown*. London: Macmillan, 1894.

Arthur Rackham

Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. New York: Scribner, 1906.

Richard Doyle

Allingham, William. *In Fairy Land: a Series of Pictures from the Elf-World*. London: Longmans, Green, 1875.

Richard "Dick" Doyle, son of caricaturist John Doyle ("HB") and uncle of Arthur Conan Doyle, established his career as a regular contributor to *Punch*. His revision of the magazine's cover in 1849 was used for over a century.

Doyle's illustrations for *In Fairy Land*, which first appeared in 1870, are his most famous works. The following poem appeared in Longmans' catalogue, *Notes on Books*, by way of advertisement for the 1-1/2 guinea book:

Where had Dicky Doyle been
All this length of years
Since *Punch* wept to miss him
From his merry peers?

Now last, we know
Where Dicky Doyle as been!--
He has been to Elf-Land
With the Fairy-Queen

Yes, Dick has been in Elf-Land
And the pictures which he took
The worthy Messrs Longmans
Have published in a book.

On display, Case 12:

Arthur Rackham

Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. New York: Abaris, 1977.

Walter Crane

Wise, John R. *The First of May: a Fairy Masque*. Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1881.

J. Noël Paton (1821-1901)

Compositions from Shakespeare's Tempest. Edinburgh: W.P. Nimmo, [1845?].

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Hamilton, James. *Arthur Rackham: a Biography*. New York: Arcade, c1990.

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Curator of this exhibition is Kimberly C. Weatherford, Trinity College Library Catalog Librarian.

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