

A Bestiary (of Sorts): Fairy Tale Dinosaurs, Blood-Thirsty Cats, Snap-Dragons, and other  
Fantastic Creatures

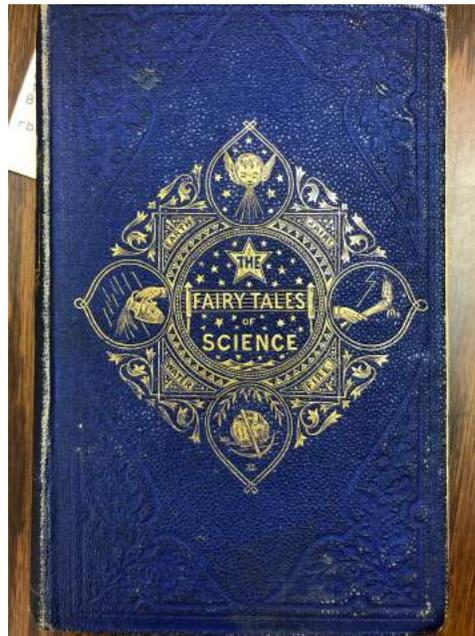
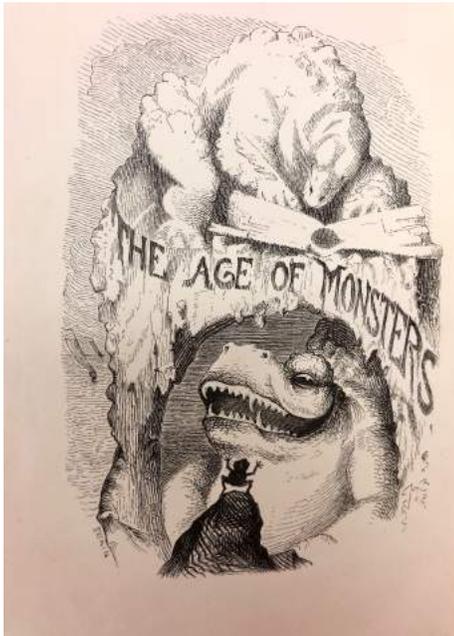
This selection of five Victorian fairy tales seeks to unify creatures of the delightful but unusual sort, some that one might be surprised to find in a fairy tale, in order to produce a collection that is a little bit eclectic but equally charming.

**Brough, John Cargill. "The Age of Monsters." *The fairy tales of Science; a book for youth.*  
London, Griffith and Farran, 1866.**

Illustrated by Charles H. Bennett

Call Number: PZ6 1866 .B76

UBC Permalink: <http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=2171234>



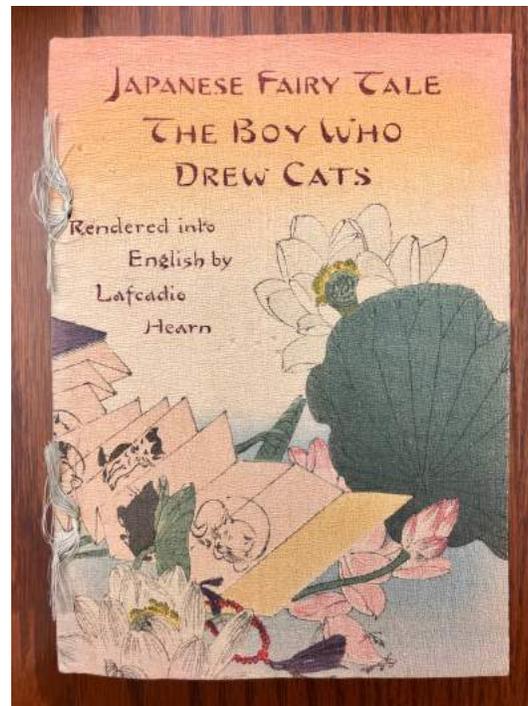
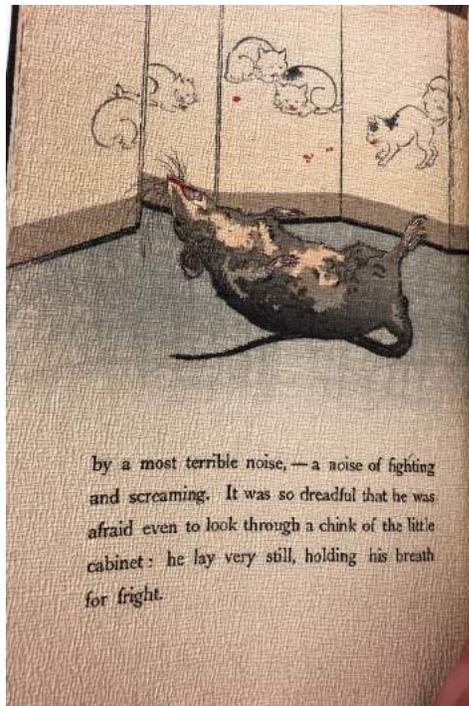
I chose this image and cover for how they reflect the application of fairy tale whimsy to scientific discovery that the “The Age of Monsters” story takes up. This enchanting collection uses the stylistic tendencies of fairy tales to explain Victorian scientific discoveries, and the image demonstrates the collection’s interest in how ancient mediums describing fantastical creatures were somewhat routed in reality. The tale begins with references to mythic stories that tell of “a terrible race of monsters” (1) as a way to chart the progress from a belief in these fairy tale creatures to the contemporary moment when “the lamp of science was kindled” (3) and dinosaurs discovered. The image’s contrast between the frog, the dinosaur, and the dragon is fascinating in how it illustrates the tale’s interest of the ways in which myths and legends—“the wildest dreams of the old poets” (3)—are both mirrored and “transcend[ed]” (3) by the discovery of dinosaurs. The image gestures to myth’s insight through the juxtaposition of the frog, the dinosaur, and the dragon, as it shows the relationship between the everyday, visible reptile, the monster of the past, and the mythic one. The positioning and shading of the reptiles adds to this effect, as the frog’s small, dark form facing the dinosaur establishes it as the tiny, contemporary descendant in a line of monstrous beasts. The dragon’s position across the top reminds the viewer of the dinosaur’s mythical predecessor, while its lighter outline suggests it is receding from view, overtaken by the reality of scientific discovery. In regards to the cover, the textured blue pattern and gold foil representing the four elements evokes allusions to magic and alchemy, which infuses a sense of wonder into the idea of scientific discovery—a particularly effective tool to create excitement about new science in the book’s child readers.

**“The Boy Who Drew Cats.” *Japanese Fairy Tales*, rendered into English by Lafcadio Hearn, Tokyo, T. Hasegawa Publisher & Art Printer, 1898.**

Illustrated by Suzuki Kason

Call Number: PZ6 1898 H427

UBC Permalink: <http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=940351>



The unique artistic style and production of this fairy tale, combined with the absolutely delightful nature of the story its images reflect, is my reason for selecting “The Boy Who Drew Cats.” The experience of holding the book renders the tale more palpable, as the floppiness of the cloth book and the rougher quality of the pages creates a memorable, more immersive experience. I found the visibility of the art’s mechanics on each page engaging, as each brush stroke and detailed line is made apparent by the rougher texture of the pages. The cover’s bolder, bright colours and significant detail contrast against the sparse simplicity of the interior images, such as the simple outlines of the cats. The selected image, with the dots of red around the cat’s

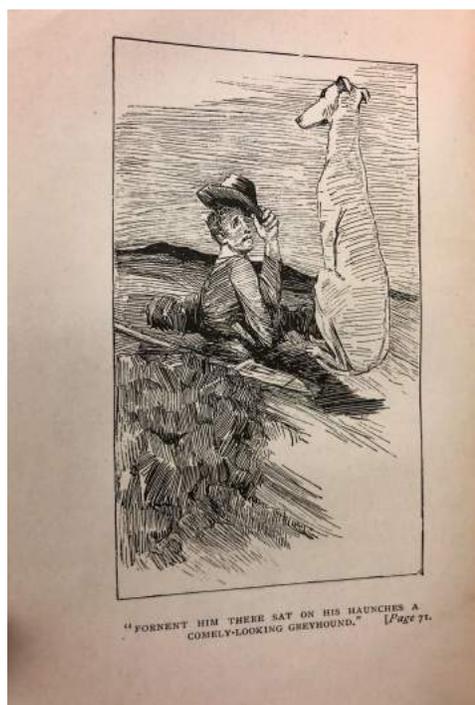
mouths, are particularly visible as bright paint flecks, which allows the viewer a larger awareness of the book as something created by the hand of an individual. The tale reveals that a young acolyte's cat drawings come alive and kill a goblin-rat, which the boy discovers by the blood around the mouths of his frozen-again drawings. Despite the blood, the cats' sweet faces in the image make them look incapable of killing the goblin-rat, perhaps reflecting the boy's experience, as he does not see them commit the act and they return to their positions.

**“The Fairy Greyhound.” *Irish Fairy Tales*, edited by W.B. Yeats, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1892.**

Illustrated by Jack B. Yeats

Call Number: PR10.S5 Y4 1892

UBC Permalink: <http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=2066952>



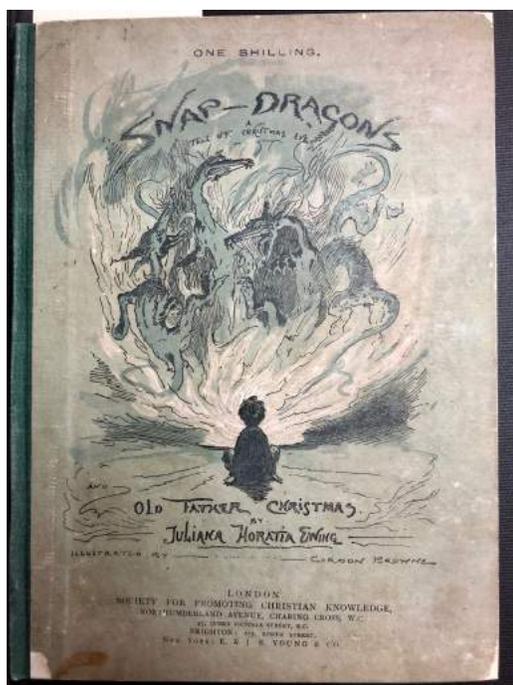
This image is one of only two in this collection, and is from a tale about the “Good People,” one of whom takes form as a greyhound. Part of the reason for this tale’s inclusion is amusement: I found it charming that of all the fantastical creatures the collection describes, the one illustrated is a greyhound. I also selected it for the image’s masterful reflection of the tale’s charming but dark nature; to see a greyhound in a fairytale is slightly bizarre and evokes a certain charisma, but the image’s dark lines, portrayal of the greyhound as looming over Paddy McDermid, and Paddy’s fearful face gesture to the Good People’s formidable and merciless quality.

**Ewing, Juliana Horatia. “Snap-dragons: A Tale of Christmas Eve” in *Snap-dragons: a Tale of Christmas Eve; and, Old Father Christmas: an old fashioned tale of the young days of a grumpy old godfather*. London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1888?.**

Illustrated by Gordon Browne

Call Number: PZ6 1888 .E955

UBC Permalink: <http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=2173595>



I chose this tale and its corresponding “snap-dragon” images for their representation of anger. The “snap-dragons” serve as a manifestation of anger, or “snappishness,” in a story meant to teach the societal ills of behaving irritably. Horatia describes the creatures as originating from candle flame, becoming “blue flames [that] leaped and danced” (33), with “long bod[ies]... which moved like the body of a snake” (34). This ghastly, snake-like body is portrayed in the images, with the dragons’ gnarled outline, slithering tail, curling talons, and gaping mouths. With the depiction of the little boy standing small in front of the dragons embedded in leaping flames, the images represent the furor and roaring totality of the snap-dragons as they blaze across the room in the story, which speaks to the overwhelming, destructive nature of anger. The employment of dragons and the flame-like, fantastical nature of these images render this story, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in order to teach proper behaviour, as inspiring and enjoyable rather than simply didactic.

Hueffer, Ford H. Madox. *The brown owl: a fairy story*. London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1892.

Illustrated by Ford Madox Brown

Call Number: PZ6 1892 .F673

UBC Permalink: <http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=9167601>



Perhaps an owl is a much more traditional fairytale creature, but I was drawn to the enchanting, timeless quality of the images the owl is depicted in, and how the drawings of the owl and Princess support particular readings of their characters that both affirm and complicate the text's descriptions. *The brown owl* situates itself in a land other than England, "long before Egypt had risen to power and before Rome or Greece had ever been heard of" (1). The landscape in the flying image contains the dark outlines of mountains, a valley, and a bright river that establish the setting as a whimsical yet nondescript place, while the moon and starry sky in both images lend an ethereal atmosphere to the tale. The lines around the owl's eyes represent them as sources of light, reflecting the story's description of them as "glittering...[ighting] up the whole

room, so that there was no need of light” (14). The owl’s position on the Princess’ headboard, watching over her as she sleeps, renders him as her protector. While the owl does in fact watch over her, it is noteworthy that the two positions the Princess is drawn in—one sleeping, the other being carried—portray a sense of passivity, even though she has an authoritative, active role in the story.