

Five Victorian Fairy Tales

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Author: John Cargill Brough

Illustrator: Charles H. Bennett

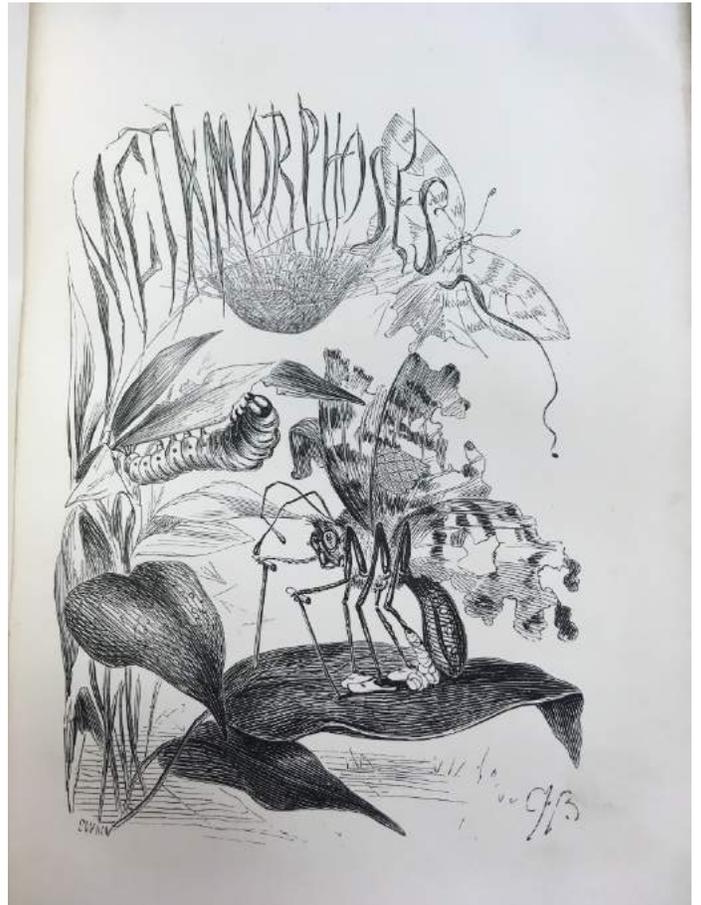
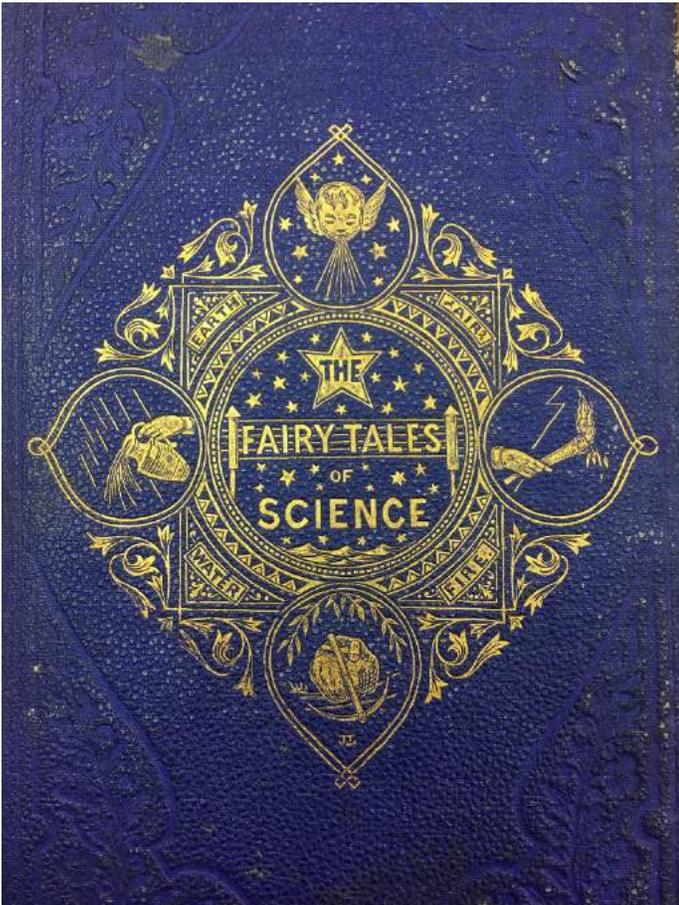
Title: Fairy Tales of Science; A Book for Youth

Publisher: Griffith and Farran

Where: London

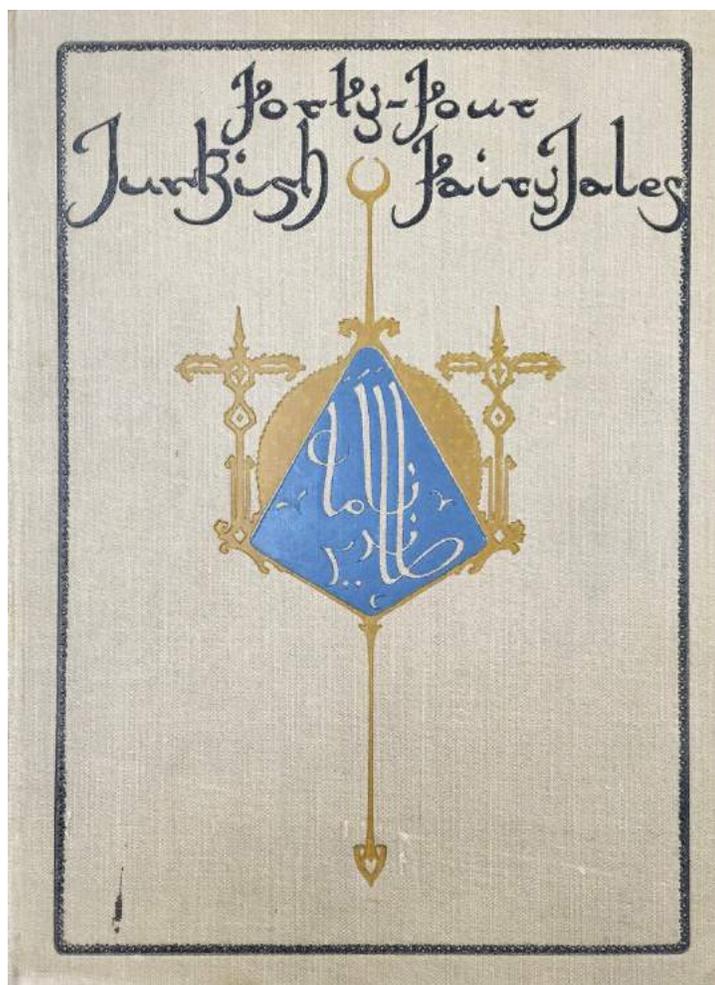
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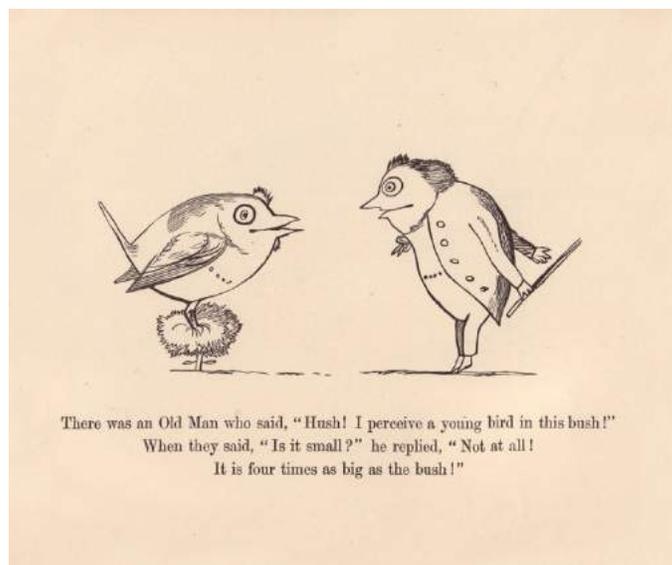
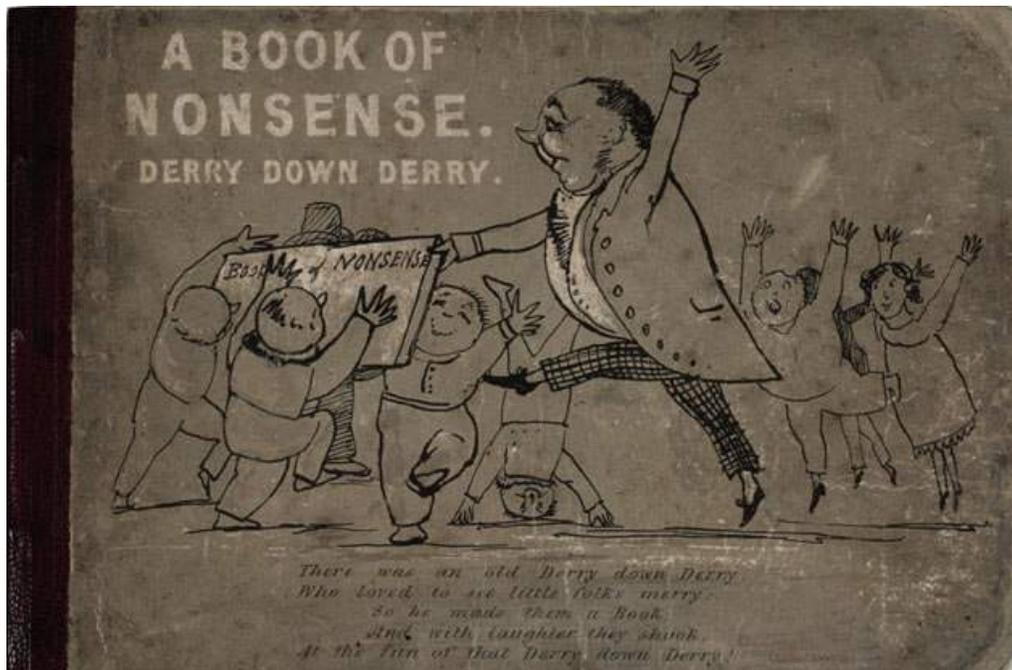


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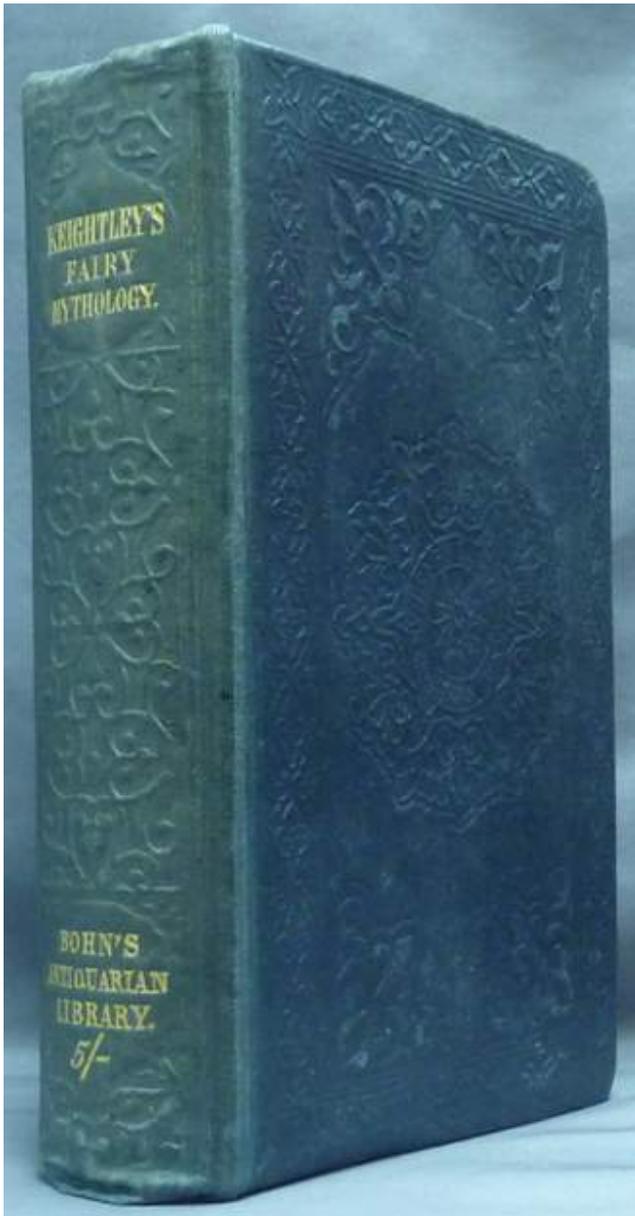
Author: Ignác Kúnos
 Illustrator: Willy Pogány
 Title: Forty-four Turkish Fairy Tales
 Publisher: Harrap
 Where: London
 When: 1913
 Call #: PZ6 1913 K956



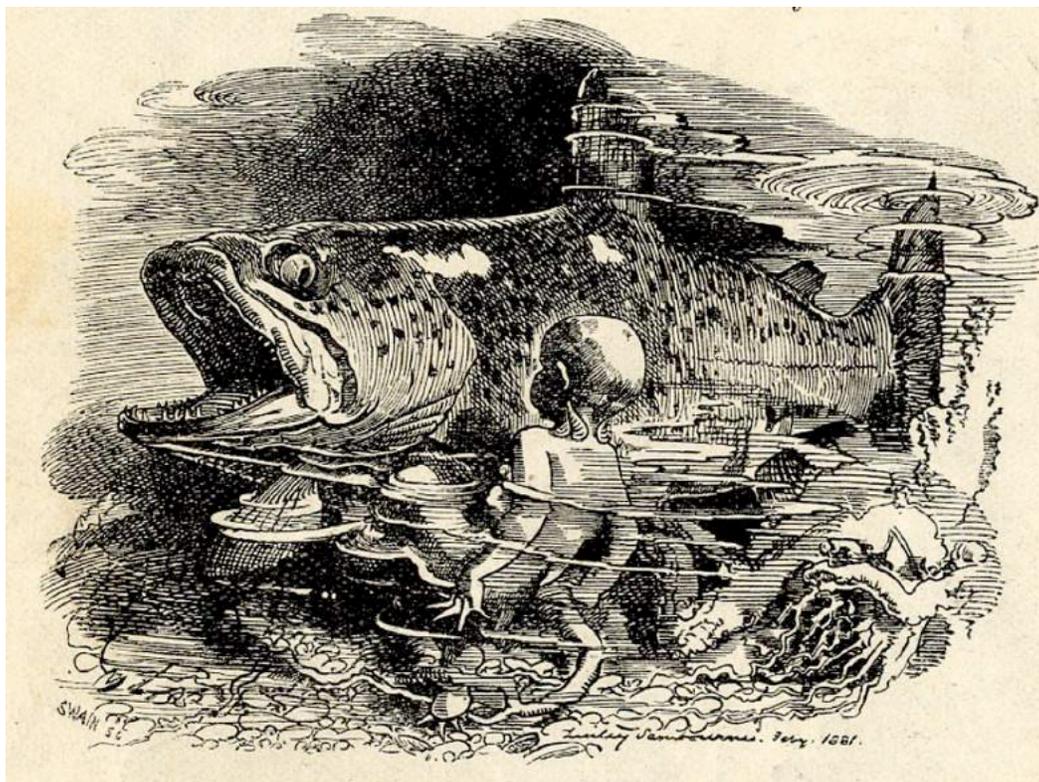
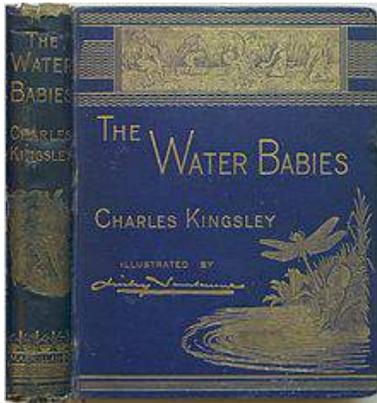
Author: Edward Lear
Illustrator: Edward Lear
Title: Book of Nonsense
Publisher: Thomas McLean
Where: London
When: 1855 (?)
Call #: PZ6 1855 .L427



Author: Thomas Keightley
Illustrator: George Cruikshank
Title: The Fairy Mythology: Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries
Publisher: H.G. Bohn
Where: London
When: 1850
Call #: GR550 .K4



Author: Charles Kingsley
Illustrator: Linley Sambourne
Title: The Water-babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-baby
Publisher: Macmillan and Co.
Where: New York
When: 1899
Call #: PZ6 1899 .K563



Commentary:

Before beginning my journey into the rare books and special collections section of the library, I decided on some critical criteria for any book to qualify for my own collection which can be summed up by: I'll know it when I feel it, I'll know it when I see it, and I'll know it when I think it.

Firstly, I had to get the right feeling from the book's atmosphere¹. The writing and images paired with the physicality of the book had to evoke a magical feeling, vaguely defined as: I'll know it when I feel it. In other words, I wanted each book to give me a sense of wonder. This sense should be elicited not only by the content, but also the vehicle. The worn cover and pages should make me feel a small portion of the remote majesty of a time long past, like what I would imagine feeling when picking up an ancient book of spells. To children, fairy tales are possibly true and definitely mysterious. I remember this feeling quite vividly from when I was younger and had a fascination with Greek mythology and folk tale creatures.

Secondly, I had to get the right feeling from the illustrations. By this I mean that they had to satisfy my immediate aesthetic intuition; The feeling of pleasure in a piece of art that simply pleases me in a way that our language isn't quite up to articulating i.e. I'll know it when I see it. All of the illustrations in the books that I chose gave me that feeling and can act as examples of what I mean by this criterion. I wanted to treat the illustrations as enjoyable without the text. This is because when I was a child and would sit and look for hours at some of the books my family had, like the illustrated versions of *The Odyssey* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, I didn't pay attention to the words, I got a feel for the story through the images alone. This means that the

¹ Because of the global pandemic, I only got to physically engage with a few of the books. With the ones I didn't get to be with physically, I investigated online.

expressions and appearance of the characters, the environment, and the choice of what parts were represented were doing a lot of work. Thirdly, the content of the writing had to contain something unique and interesting to think about whether it be creatively, anthropologically, or philosophically. An instance of I'll know it when I think it. Finally, the book should invite and reward frequent revisits. The five fairy tales I chose fulfill all four criteria.

The Forty-four Turkish fairy tales succeeded in providing a magical atmosphere via its large size, making it feel like a great tome, and the English writing written to look like the beautiful and fluid Turkish alphabet on the cover and throughout the book. An added element was the use of two colours: black for the writing and images and light turquoise for symmetrical designs. There were many tales and even more illustrations. There were four different types of illustrations as well: 1. Expressive ink drawings of characters with minimal environment. 2. Full page ink images mostly representing the environment. 3. Full page stamps prints with colour. 4. Turquoise symmetrical patterns throughout and often paired with the first kind. All the images were very imaginative and fun to look at. The creatures were scary and hideous, and the humans were very expressive. One example of the creativity is in the image I included of the souls of the creature leaving through its nose. Finally, the text provides many fun-to-read tales. The tales are oral tales transcribed and translated by an English traveller in turkey. This means they provide a glimpse into a historical Turkish culture (albeit possibly changed for the sensibilities of the Victorian English) including their morals, their folk tale creatures, and the topics that they traditionally found important to write about and for others to learn. I see it as a magical tome with great illustrations which can also work as a crude ethnography.

The Fairy Tales of Science is a magical deep purple with gold indented writing and images on the cover. This gets the closest to what I would imagine a spell book to feel like. The

book blends the magic of fairy tales with the magic of reality (through science). The combination effectively brings out the magic of our world. We don't have to escape into a fictional world to find wonder and awe, we already live in a strange world filled with beauty that we may never understand. Each chapter is accompanied by a full-page illustration of the topic. These topics range through the various categories of science, such as chemistry, biology, geology, and paleontology. Each topic is related to the fairy world, for example, chemistry with potions and witches, geology with gnomes and goblins, and paleontology with dragons. Many tales are written in fairy tale form with added explanations of scientific concepts. This should not, however, be read to gain accurate scientific knowledge as there are many outdated ideas. It makes for an interesting marker of our scientific history and what expert opinion was in Victorian England. One example of this is the idea that it was irrefutably proven that the world is made up of four elements: earth, water, fire, air. It is very enjoyable in this regard.

The Book of Nonsense is an exception to the first criterion. I would not call its atmosphere magical. It is more fantastic and often comedic. It is a book of many nonsensical limerick's about strange people and happenings. The shining jewel of this book are the illustrations. They are drawn by the author and they look like they would have been very fun to draw. I don't know which came first, the limerick or the character, but they embody each other in a very delightful way. This reminded me of the play with language and nonsense in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

The Fairy Mythology has a very nice colour and indented design. A magical colour that reminds me of dusk or dawn on the bank of a turquoise river. There is one illustration at the beginning by George Cruikshank which represents many of these creatures or tales in one frame. It is a visually stimulating image with a lot to chew on. I especially liked his representation of

motion of the witch on her broom stick by repeating her form showing her trail through the sky. The book contains writing on the origins of belief in fairies and fairy tales from various regions around the world. I was fascinated in descriptions of creatures from folk tale around the world and drew many of them when I was younger. This is a book I would gladly add to my collection because it speaks about the beliefs people had and have from all over the world. It is an interesting look at our myths as well our psychologies.

Finally, *The Water Babies*. The illustrations do a great job of realistically representing the contents, making the idea of babies who live in water feel almost tangible. The people are simultaneously realistically represented and cartoonish in a way that highlights their expressions. This book also acts as an interesting marker of our scientific history. It is supposed to be support for evolutionary theory in the controversial wake of Darwin's publication of the theory. Furthermore, it expresses an idea about the philosophy of science still relevant today i.e. that we are not qualified to say that something does not exist if we have never seen it, like God, souls, or even water babies. Science only proceeds through negative claims, in other words, falsifiability rather than verifiability.