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## VICTORIAN FAIRY PAINTING

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Richard Dadd (1817-1886), *Titania Sleeping* (detail), 1840, 64.8 × 77.5 cm, Louvre Museum

- Fairy painting today is **anachronistic** but at the height of its popularity it **combined many Victorian obsessions and desires** and so tells us a lot about society at the time.
- It was an escape from the **pressures of everyday life**, it was **sentimental**, that is it provided cheap, easy pleasure, it was **poetic** and harked back to a lost world of wonders and there was a **sexual element that avoided censure**. In a world a **steam trains, pollution, disease, hard work and early death** it was a salve that combined **Shakespeare with eroticism**.
- In addition, there was a **serious, scientific aspect** as the possibility of the existence of fairies **was taken seriously** by a small number of intellectuals. One argument was that such stories are widespread across Europe, have a similar form and we know of pygmy people in Africa. So, some believed that **thousands of years ago** there could have been a race of tiny people that lived in remote areas and interacted occasionally with humans thus giving rise to folk legends across Europe.
- **Victorian fairy painting like Victorian orientalism created an alternative world** which, was 'Other', that is different in **strange and exotic ways** that could be explored through your **desires and imagination**. In **fairyland anything was possible and you could explore your deepest desires**.
- Enthusiastic admirers of fairy painting included **Queen Victoria**, Charles

Dodgson (**Lewis Carroll**), William Makepeace **Thackeray**, Charles **Dickens** and **John Ruskin**.

### **FAIRY PAINTING**

- Rooted in the literary influences of Romanticism. Henry Fuseli painted *Titania and Bottom* c. 1790.
- Artists were inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Other literary works, such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Alexander Pope's mock-heroic *The Rape of the Lock*. Mostly it was fantasy with dream elements and sometimes eroticism.
- In the 1840s the Scottish painter **Joseph Noel Paton** (1821-1901) was a well-known fairy painter who painted *The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania* (1847) and *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* (1849).
- By the 1870s, **Richard 'Dicky' Doyle** and **John Anster Fitzgerald** (1823?-1906, 'Fairy Fitzgerald') were well-known fairy painters and illustrators. By the end of the century, many artists painted and illustrated works with fairy themes, such as Arthur Rackham (who illustrated many fairy tale stories), Edmund Dulac (who illustrated *The Little Mermaid*), Walter Jenks Morgan and Laurence Housman.
- Many well-known artists painted a few fairy paintings, such as Edwin Landseer (1802-1873, 'the Victorians favourite painter'), John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Arthur Hughes and William Bell Scott.

### **FAIRY PAINTERS**

- Fuseli *Fairy Mab*, c. 1815, *Titania Awakening*, 1785
- William Blake, *Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing*, c. 1786
- Turner, *Queen Mab's Cave*, 1846, Tate Britain
- Joseph Noel Paton, *The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania*, 1847
- Richard Dadd, *Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*, 1855-64, Tate Britain and *Come unto these Yellow Sands*, 1841
- John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Captive Robin*, 1864 and *Fairies looking through a Gothic Arch*, C. 1864
- John Atkinson Grimshaw, *Spirit of the Night*, 1879
- Edward Robert Hughes, *Midsummer's Eve*, 1908
- Rackham, *A Fairy*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, 1906 and *The Fairies of the Serpentine*, 1906

- Edward Burne-Jones, Hill Fairies
- Mark Symons, A Fairy Tale
- John Fitzgerald, The Captive Robin, 1865
- Luis Falero, A Fairy under Starry Skies

## 1880-1901 THE LATE VICTORIAN PERIOD

### • **Decline of Royal Academy Monopoly**

- By the late Victorian period the importance of the **Royal Academy** and the old **academic style** of painting had **declined**. With the decline of the Royal Academy artists in various geographic locations were able to form substantial and influential groups of like minded artists.

### • **Pessimism and Decadence**

- It was a time of **contradictions**. It was a time of **prosperity** (although the '**Long Depression**' was from 1873-79) and the **Empire was the largest** it had ever been yet among intellectuals there was a **feeling of pessimism and impending doom**. **Max Nordau** expressed this well in his book **Decadence**, in which he made the surprising claim that art, starting with the Pre-Raphaelites, was the product of diseased minds. The disease was mysticism and irrational thinking that he thought would lead to the collapse of civilization. From an art historical perspective, this shows that the **Pre-Raphaelites** had begun a **profound change**, which indicates that they should be regarded as an early vanguard (an 'avant garde') of what we now call the modern art movement.
- A related concern was **physical health**. The 1880-81 and particularly the 1899-1902 Boer Wars were a shock to public confidence in the Empire. Britain used 450,000 troops to defeat 35,000 Boers. During the Boer War a **half of all the young men** conscripted were in too poor health to serve. In some towns **90% of men were rejected**. It was found to be caused by **poor diets** and in 1906 schools provided meals to their pupils There was a movement to improve the health of the nation both physically and mentally. It was related to 'muscular Christianity' where godliness was equated with manliness, and Thomas Arnold's educational system at Rugby School.

### • **Orientalism**

- **Orientalism** was concerned with representing scenes from the Middle East but **more generally** there was an interest in other societies, sometimes called **the 'Other'** (Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1979). This included what were known as **'primitive' societies** that were **geographically remote**, such as **fishing villages** like Newlyn and exotic societies such as **Japan** as well as those that were **remote in time** such as **classical and medieval** societies.
- **Fairy Painting**
  - The idea of other worlds also included literary and fantasy worlds that included **fairy painting**.
  - Masters of fairy painting include Richard Dadd, John Anster Fitzgerald, Daniel Maclise, and Sir Joseph Noël Paton, but also such surprises as Sir Edwin Landseer, Sir John Everett Millais, and J. M. W. Turner.
- **New Art Movements**
  - The stranglehold of the Royal Academy was being broken by art movements, such as the Pre-Raphaelites and by artists, such as Whistler, that were outside the establishment.
  - It was further weakened when the **Grosvenor Gallery** opened in **1877** and promoted **'modern' art**.
  - British attitudes to modern art were "**polarized**" at the end of the 19th century. **Modernist movements** were both cherished and vilified by artists and critics; Impressionism was initially regarded by "many conservative critics" as a "**subversive foreign influence**", but became "fully assimilated" into British art during the early-20th century.
  - The **New English Art Club** (NEAC) started in **1885** and became another alternative to the Royal Academy and led to other groups including:
    - **English Impressionism** was influenced by Jules Bastien-Lepage.
    - **Newlyn School**, was founded by Stanhope Forbes and it became a large artistic community.
    - **Glasgow School** which includes the **Glasgow Boys and the Glasgow Girls**.



- **Walter Sickert, the Fitzroy Street Group and the Camden Town Group** developed an English style of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism with a strong strand of social documentary. They combined with the **English Vorticists** in 1913 to form **The London Group** and artist-led organisation that still holds exhibitions.
- There were also smaller artistic communities, such as:
  - **Staithe Group**, an art colony in North Yorkshire, 25 artist, inspired by Monet, Cezanne and Renoir. It included Laura Knight.
  - **Cullercoats**, Winslow Homer spent two years there 1881-2.

## NOTES

- **Royal Academy** became increasingly **ossified**; the unmistakably **late Victorian** figure of **Frank Dicksee** was appointed **President in 1924**.
- The NEAC conveniently used the Egyptian Hall opposite the Royal Academy. Today the NEAC remains figurative and the Royal Academy is mostly abstract and conceptual art. Early members included Thomas Cooper Gotch, Frank Bramley, **John Singer Sargent**, **Philip Wilson Steer**, George Clausen and **Stanhope Forbes**
- Jules Bastien-Lepage had a profound effect upon a group of young Scottish painters who came to be known as the "Glasgow Boys", who included Sir John Lavery and George Henry. They straddled Impressionism, and Art Nouveau, Japonisme and the Celtic Revival in design, with the architect and designer **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** now their best-known member. Painters included Thomas Millie Dow, George Henry, Joseph Crawhall and James Guthrie.
- The Camden Town Group included Walter Sickert, Harold Gilman, Spencer Frederick Gore, Charles Ginner, Robert Bevan, Malcolm Drummond and Lucien Pissarro (the son of French Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro).
- The **Scottish Colourists** indeed mostly used bright light and colour; some, like Samuel Peploe and John Duncan Fergusson, were living in France to find suitable subjects. They were initially inspired by Sir William McTaggart (1835–1910), a Scottish landscape painter associated with Impressionism.
- Victorian art also includes **British Orientalism** (John Frederick Lewis, Holman Hunt, David Roberts, Edward Lear) and **Fairy painting**.
- Important artists not mentioned include:

- Samuel Palmer, mystic landscape artist in the tradition of William Blake
- James Tissot, French painter of middle-class social scenes.
- Gustave Dore, engraver of scenes including the London poor
- In photography **Pictorialism** aimed to achieve artistic indeed painterly effects; The Linked Ring (founded 1892) was founded by Henry Peach Robinson, George Davison, and Henry Van der Weyde with the aim of bringing art back into the science of photography.
- The American **John Singer Sargent** was the most successful London portraitist at the start of the 20th century, with **John Lavery**, **Augustus John** and **William Orpen** rising figures. John's sister Gwen John lived in France, and her intimate portraits were relatively little appreciated until decades after her death.
- The London-born Irish artist **Jack Butler Yeats** (1871–1957), was based in Dublin, at once a romantic painter, a symbolist and an expressionist.
- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Vorticism** was a brief coming together of a number of Modernist artists in the years immediately before 1914; members included **Wyndham Lewis**, the sculptor **Sir Jacob Epstein**, David Bomberg, Malcolm Arbuthnot, Lawrence Atkinson, the American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn, Frederick Etchells, the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Cuthbert Hamilton, **Christopher Nevinson**, William Roberts, Edward Wadsworth, Jessica Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Dorothy Shakespeare.
- The early 20th century also includes The **Sitwell's artistic circle** and more notably the **Bloomsbury Group** a group of mostly English writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists, including painter Dora Carrington, painter and art critic **Roger Fry**, art critic **Clive Bell**, painter **Vanessa Bell**, painter **Duncan Grant** among others; very fashionable at the time, their work in the visual arts looks less impressive today. British modernism was to remain somewhat tentative until after World War II, though figures such as Ben Nicholson kept in touch with European developments.

### WHAT WAS THE STATE OF THE BRITISH ECONOMY DURING THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY?

The agricultural economy was dependent on the weather and the import and export laws. The manufacturing economy depended on the availability of capital, a skilled workforce, political stability and the availability of raw

materials.

- 1814 the last 'Frost Fair' held on the Thames. The 'Little Ice Age' started in 1350 and ended in the 1850s, with three particularly cold periods from 1650, 1770 and 1850.
- 1815 Implementation of the 'Corn Laws' to artificially fix the price of corn. The start of an agricultural depression leading to the Swing Riots of the 1830s.
- 1816 Terrible harvest, the 'Year Without a Summer'
- 1825 Banking crisis
- 1840s 'The Hungry Forties'
- 1846-49 Great Irish Famine
- 1846 the repeal of the 'Corn Laws' by Robert Peel, a Conservative with the support of the Whigs against his own party.
- 1847 Rail stock crash
- 1873-79 the Long Depression, particularly in the US where it extended into the 1890s.
- 1877-95 agricultural depression caused by wet summers, US imports and animal diseases
- 1870-1914 foreign trade tripled
- 1880-1913 the 'Golden Age' for international finance
- 1900-1914 the Edwardian Era was a time of peace and prosperity with no depressions and widespread prosperity.
- 1913 US overtook the UK as the largest economy in the world. London became the world's financial capital and the export of capital became the basis of the UK economy.

## **UK POPULATION**

- From 1801 to 1901 the UK population increased from 10.5m to 40m (fourfold in a century). The population in 1701 was estimated to be 6.5m.
- In 1700 only 17% of the population lived in urban areas, by 1800 it was 25.5% and by 1900 it was 77%. That is, during the nineteenth century roughly half the population moved from rural to urban areas. This was to meet the demand for labour and because of the 'agricultural revolution' that pre-dated 1750 a was a combination of good harvests, crop rotation and increased mechanisation.

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Luis Ricardo Falero (1851–1896), *A Fairy Under Starry Skies*, c. 1880, 59.1 × 103.5 cm, private collection

Luis Ricardo Falero (1851–1896), *A Fairy Under Starry Skies*, c. 1880, 59.1 × 103.5 cm, private collection

- So that you understand some of the points I have been making this is a painting by the Spanish artist Luis Falero. He gave up a career in the Spanish navy to study art and chemistry in Paris. As the experiments were dangerous he decided to focus on art and he moved to London where he eventually settled. He had an interest in astronomy as shown in this painting and he became a successful artist but died in London aged only 45.

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Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), *Titania and Bottom*, c. 1790, 217.2 × 275.6 cm, Tate

- Let us return to the roots of fairy painting in the eighteenth century. Artists were inspired by folk tales and literary work particularly William Shakespeare. This work by Henry Fuseli was inspired by Act 4, Scene 1 when Titania awakes and asks Bottom to sit. He calls for Peaseblossom and says,
  - BOTTOM: Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Monsieur Cobweb?
  - COBWEB: Ready.
  - BOTTOM Monsieur Cobweb, good monsieur, get you
  - your weapons in your hand and kill me a red-hipped
  - humble-bee on the top of a thistle, and, good
  - monsieur, bring me the honey-bag.
- Fuseli shows us the darker side of fairyland, there are devilish faces, demure ladies, an old man on a lead and diabolical activities. In the centre is a nearly naked Titania succumbing to the spell Oberon has cast over her as she prepares to wind Bottom in her arms.





William Blake (1757–1827), *Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing*, c. 1786, watercolour and graphite on paper, 47.5 × 67.5 cm, Tate Britain

William Blake (1757–1827), *Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing*, c. 1786, watercolour and graphite on paper, 47.5 × 67.5 cm, Tate Britain

- Titania has been freed from the spell and she stands on the left with Oberon and Puck while Moth, Peaseblossom, Cobweb and Mustardseed dance in a ring
- Titania says,
  - *Hand in hand, with fairy grace,*
  - *Will we sing, and bless this place.*
- In the 1780s there was a growing demand for illustrations of Shakespeare's work and Blake, who had recently set up a print-publishing business may be trying to break into this market.
- It was the following year (1787) that his much loved younger brother , Robert, died and Blake had a vision in which he discovered "illuminated printing", a way for him to produce a complete book including text which meant that from then on he controlled all aspect of production.

## **NOTES**

- Blake's skill at mirror writing was a major part of his technique of illuminated printing. By writing backwards and reversed using a mordant he could add all the text to the same etching plate. A mordant or stop-out was a traditional varnish that dried hard and prevented the acid from eating away the writing. This reversed the normal etching technique that involved scratching through a layer of wax. Instead, like woodcut, the raised areas took the ink.



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Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Queen Mab's Cave*, exhibited 1846, 92.1 × 122.6 cm, Tate Britain

- Queen Mab is a character that appears in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 1, Scene 4). It is likely that Shakespeare invented the character based on a variety of fairy queen characters. Romeo has fallen in love with a woman called Rosaline who he has seen but never spoken to. His friend Mercutio makes fun of Romeo and blames his lovesickness on Queen Mab in a famous speech that begins,
  - *O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.*
  - *She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes*
  - *In shape no bigger than an agate-stone*
- In Shakespeare's time a fairy could mean a witch or a hag and a midwife was a reference to a wise or cunning woman who provided potions for a variety of purposes.
- Turner may have also read *Queen Mab*, a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1813) but the painting does not seem to refer directly to either source. There is a flooded cave in the centre and high cliffs either side. It is impossible to make out where cliff and cave and water begin and end. Fairies flit above the water, some swimming, some misty. One on the right is being lifted by a swan, perhaps a reference to Leda, some are red, possibly demons and Turner includes a line of poetry "*Thy Orgies, Mab, are manifold*".
- It is the only picture he painted of fairies and yet it encompasses all the various

aspects of their Romantic conception. It was described by one critic as a "gorgeous daylight dream". Fairyland is not an imaginary country but a shifting, blurred vision on the border between dreaming and reality. It is a metaphor for nowhere peopled by non-beings.

- Turner's champion, the art critic John Ruskin did not like the painting at all. He wrote that it was a, "**strange example of the way in which the greatest men may at times lose themselves**".

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Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901), *The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania*, 1847, 76.20 x 122.60 cm, National Gallery of Scotland

Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901), *The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania*, 1847, 76.20 x 122.60 cm, National Gallery of Scotland

- This was painted as a sequel to his painting of the quarrel between Titania and Oberon and this painting won a prize for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament in 1847 as it could be seen as an allegory of harmonious government.
- It is a mixture of the sentimental and the grotesque. At the bottom centre, there is a bird being beaten to death.
- Robin Goodfellow has anointed the eyes of Lysander with a love potion by mistake and when he awakes he sees Helena and falls in love with her. She thinks he is making fun of her and leaves. The abandoned Hermia wakes from a nightmare and goes in search of her beloved Lysander. Realising the mistake Oberon orders Robin to put them all to sleep again and correct the mistake. Titania awakes (Act 4, Scene 1) and reconciles herself to Oberon while the four lovers sleep which is the scene we see here.

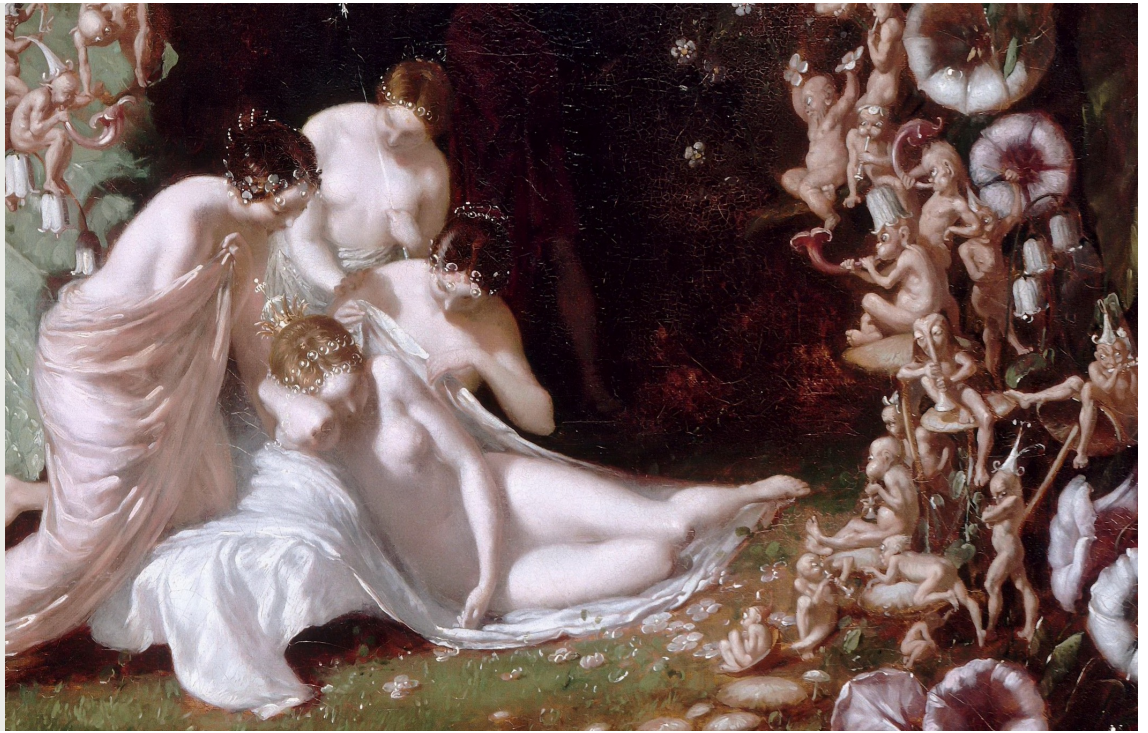
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Richard Dadd  
(1817-1886),  
*Titania Sleeping*,  
1840, 64.8 × 77.5  
cm, Louvre  
Museum



Richard Dadd (1817-1886), *Titania Sleeping*, 1840, 64.8 × 77.5 cm, Louvre Museum

- Richard Dadd was an English painter who showed an early aptitude for art and entered the Royal Academy of Art when he was 20. He was awarded a medal for life drawing when he was 23 and together with William Powell Frith, Augustus Egg and Henry O'Neil and others he founded The Clique.
- He was considered the leading artist of the group and in July 1842 he was selected to accompany the mayor of Newport through Europe to Greece and eventually Egypt in order to record the trip.
- This painting of *Titania Sleeping* was painted before he left for Egypt and was one of many fairy painting he created.
- (CLICK) Here is a detail of Titania with he attendants surrounded by a variety of grotesque creatures.
- Before leaving on the Grand Tour, Dadd was self-sufficient and described by friends as a leader, noble, and gentle—one of nature's aristocrats. He was establishing himself as the leading fairy artist at a time when they were much in demand.
- While travelling up the Nile by boat he suddenly underwent a dramatic personality change. He became delusional, violent and believed he was under the influence of the Egyptian god Osiris.
- On his return he was diagnosed to be of unsound mind and was taken to recuperate in Kent. In August having convinced himself his father was the Devil

in disguise he killed him with a knife and fled to France. On the journey he tried to kill a fellow passenger and was overpowered and arrested. He was sent back to England where he was committed to Bethlem psychiatric hospital (also known as Bedlam) and he spent the rest of his life here and in the newly created Broadmoor Hospital. An enlightened doctor encouraged him to continue painting and he created many masterpieces.

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Richard Dadd, *Fairy Fellers' Master-Stroke*, 1855–64, 54 x 39.5 cm, Tate Britain



Richard Dadd (1817-1886), *Fairy Fellers' Master-Stroke*, 1855–64, 54 x 39.5 cm, Tate Britain

- Perhaps the most famous is this painting. The fairy Feller's Master-Stroke. Richard Dadd was the first Victorian artist to experience positive critical recognition for his fairy paintings.
- **Commissioned by 'Bedlam'**.
  - In **1842 (aged 25)**, while traveling up the Nile by boat, Dadd underwent a **dramatic personality change**, becoming delusional, increasingly **violent**, and believing himself to be under the influence of his true father the Egyptian god **Osiris**. He was diagnosed as of unsound mind and cared for by his family in Kent. He became convinced that his father was the Devil in disguise and in 1843 killed him with a knife and fled for France. On the way he tried to kill a tourist with a razor but was overpowered and was arrested by the police. Dadd confessed to the killing of his father and was returned to England, where he was committed to the criminal department of Bethlem psychiatric hospital (also known as **Bedlam**) at the age of 27. Here and later at the newly created **Broadmoor** Hospital, Dadd was cared for and encouraged to continue painting. Hospital notes are sparse but Dadd probably suffered from a form of **paranoid schizophrenia or bipolar manic depression**. Two of his six siblings were similarly afflicted, while a third had "a private attendant" for unknown reasons.
  - This painting by Richard Dadd took nine years to complete and was



**commissioned** by George Henry Haydon, head steward at the Bethlem Royal Hospital or **Bedlam** (Bethlam is the world's oldest psychiatric institution, founded in 1247 by the Bishop-elect of Bethlehem in the reign of Henry III). Dadd used a layering technique to achieve a three-dimensional effect and even after nine years he considered it unfinished which he signified by adding 'Quasi' to its title. He wrote a long poem called 'Elimination of a Picture & its Subject—called The Fellers' Master Stroke' naming and describing every character in it to show that it was well considered and not just a random assemblage of figures.

## NOTES

### Richard Dadd

- Dadd showed an aptitude for drawing at a young age and entered the Royal Academy School when he was 20 where he was awarded the medal for life drawing.
- With **William Powell Frith, Augustus Egg, Henry O'Neil** and others, he founded **The Clique**, of which he was generally considered the **leading talent**.
- In the hospital he was allowed to continue to paint, and it was here that many of his masterpieces were created, including his most celebrated painting, *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*, which he worked on between 1855 and 1864.
- Dadd wrote a long poem to explain the painting but it helps very little with the interpretation, for example,

*Above Clod-hopper sits and like the sod –  
He's brown in colour, also he's well shod.  
A satyr's head has, buckles in his shoes.  
Nurses one foot upon his knee amuse with him  
Yourself he's modern fay.*



Joseph Noel Paton (181-1901), *The Fairy Raid: Carrying Off a Changeling, Midsummer Eve*, 1867, 90.5 x 146.7 cm, Glasgow Museums

Joseph Noel Paton (181-1901), *The Fairy Raid: Carrying Off a Changeling, Midsummer Eve*, 1867, 90.5 x 146.7 cm, Glasgow Museums

- **Some fairy paintings had dark themes**
- Fairy paintings were not all semi-naked women. Some had a dark element to the story. **Changelings** were thought to be the offspring of a fairy, troll, elf or other legendary creature that has been secretly left in the place of a human child. Sometimes the term is also used to refer to the child who was taken.
- The **Fairy Queen's** route is lined by fairy ladies, knights, elves, a Puck, goblins and a jester with an animal face. They are moving towards a clearing marked by standing **megaliths**.
- The large fairies are conventionally beautiful but the smaller attendants are **grotesque**. The horror of the scene is suggested by the **knight** on the right about to plunge his **lance** into something that looks like a **monster maiden** holding a lantern. **Black-hooded creatures** attempt to climb out of a pit and several fairies are riding demonic devil's mounts.
- The **stolen child** has its thumb in its mouth and stares out of the picture while its royal abductress ignores the child.
- Three **three human children dance** in the foreground but the sinister implications only become clear when we notice the **thin chain round their ankles**. They are a captives monitored by a tiny elf between their legs. The ostensibly pretty picture is actually of slave owners and the slaves they have stolen.

- **Meaning.**
- Paton is dealing with the **anxiety of child abduction** and the folklore of changelings. The primitive other world at the edge of society still lurked and could take children or young girls for evil or unnatural purposes. As the century developed the fear of fairy abduction was replaced by a fear amongst middle-class families of abduction by gypsies, another form of outsider.
- **Changelings**
- The legend of the changeling is widespread across societies from Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland, Scandinavia, Spain and Africa and it may have been a psychological defence against the shock of giving birth to a child with a genetic disease.

## NOTES

### **Joseph Noel Paton** (1821–1901)

- A Scottish painter and a friend of Millais (a fellow student at the Royal Academy), he had a kinship with the Pre-Raphaelites early in his career.
- He painted mythological and historical scenes and later gained great success with rather portentous and sentimental religious pictures such as *The Man of Sorrows* (1875, Laing AG, Newcastle upon Tyne). They were much reproduced in engravings, and some of them went on tour and were even made the subject of sermons.

### **Bridget Cleary** ('last witch burned in the UK')

- In 1895 **Bridget Cleary** was **murdered by her husband** but his defence was that **she was a changeling** and that he was simply trying to get his wife back. His wife had been ill and at the trial he was accused with eight others of the 'wounding'. His wife had been burned before or after her death. It is possible the story was concocted by the husband to avoid or mitigate the murder charge but the involvement of other villagers suggests not. The trial was at a time when Irish home rule was being debated and it was used as an example of the Irish people's inability to govern themselves, and worries were expressed about the credulity and superstition of rural nationalist Catholics. The coroner who examined Bridget's corpse claimed that "amongst Hottentots one would not expect to hear of such an occurrence." Her husband Michael Cleary was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 15 years. He emigrated to

Montreal on his release in 1910.

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John Anster Fitzgerald (1819–1906), *The Fairy's Lake*, 1866, 15.2 x 20.3 cm, Tate

John Anster Fitzgerald (1819–1906), *The Fairy's Lake*, 1866, 15.2 x 20.3 cm, Tate

- John Anster Christian Fitzgerald (1823? – 1906) was a Victorian fairy painter and portrait artist. He was nicknamed "**Fairy Fitzgerald**" for his main genre. Many of his fairy paintings are dark and contain images of ghouls, demons, and references to drug use; his work has been compared to the surreal nightmare-scapes of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel.
- Not much is known about Fitzgerald. He is generally remembered today for his pictures of fairyland, this one probably being the example shown at the Royal Academy in 1866. Other paintings by him depict humans deep in sleep, conjuring up in their dreams a fantastic world of elves, sprites and devils similar to the creature shown here astride the wings of a bat, attempting to spear an innocent water-sprite.
- He was born in London and was largely self-taught. His work was first shown at the Royal Academy in 1845 and he exhibited at other societies. His work used brilliant colours and was rarely based on any literary theme. He was reclusive by nature and had little contact with other artists. Twentieth-century art forgers have been active in creating phony Fitzgerald fairy pictures. Brought to public attention by the 1998 exhibition of Victorian fairy paintings at the Royal Academy of Arts his paintings have since sold for up to £500,000, although most sell at prices between £30,000 and £120,000.



John Atkinson  
Grimshaw (1836–  
1893), *Spirit of the  
Night*, 1879



John Atkinson Grimshaw (1836–1893), *Spirit of the Night*, 1879

- Grimshaw was a well known Victorian artist best known for his townscapes at night painted in almost photographic detail. Here we have Grimshaw's skill at night scenes demonstrated but instead of a gaslit suburban street we have a diaphanous fairy complete with magic wand floating through the sky and apparently blessing a port at night. The halo provides a link with Christian angels although angels have an indeterminate sex.
- Despite its apparent innocence I can't help thinking of a sentence I read "***Suddenly strict Victorian fathers became keen to read fairy stories to their young broods!***"[1]

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[1] Ralph Harvey, *Fairies: Plain and Simple, An Introduction to the History and Mystery of Their Magical Realm* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Road Publishing, 2017), p.22



Gustave Dore (1832-1883), *Red Riding Hood in bed with the wolf*, untitled illustration from *Les Contes de Perrault* sometimes called *Contes de Fées* (Fairy Stories), an edition of Charles Perrault's fairy tales illustrated by Gustave Dore, originally published in 1862

Gustave Dore (1832-1883), *Red Riding Hood in bed with the wolf*, untitled illustration from *Les Contes de Perrault* sometimes called *Contes de Fées* (Fairy Stories), an edition of Charles Perrault's fairy tales illustrated by Gustave Dore, originally published in 1862

## **FAIRY STORIES**

- We are in the nineteenth century and we have the first stories for children although many of the early fairy stories were fairly gruesome.
- It started in the seventeenth century. The French author **Charles Perrault** (1628-1703, pronounced 'peh-ROH') was one of the earliest writers to assemble fairy tales. You may have heard of the **Brothers Grimm** (Jacob 1785-1863 and Wilhelm 1786-1859) but they were later and they assembled a book of German folklore that grew and grew in editions from 1812 to 1857.
- This version of Perrault's fairy tales was **illustrated by Gustave Doré** and published in **1862**. The story of **Red Riding Hood is only six pages** long including three illustrations. In Perrault version the wolf meets Little Red Riding Hood in the woods and she innocently tells him where her grandmother lives. The wolf hurries on ahead eats the grandmother and when Red Riding Hood arrives he tells her to join him in bed and **then eats her, and that is the end of the story**. Remember, originally fairy stories derived from folk tales that were passed on from adult to adult and they often had a moral purpose.
- It was later when the Brothers Grimm toned down the stories and added a **hunter** who comes to the rescue, cuts open the wolf with an axe and rescues Little Red Riding hood and her grandmother who emerge unscathed. They fill the wolf's body with stones and when he wakes up and tries to drink from the



well he falls in and drowns.

- In fact, like many folk tales the story is ancient. The Greek writer Pausinias (c. 110-180) tells the story of how each year a virgin girl is offered to an evil spirit dressed as a wolf. Each year the spirit would rapes the girl until one year a boxer (Euthymos) comes along, kills the spirit and marries the girl.
- Returning to this version by Perrault. After commenting on her grandmother's big arms, big legs, big ears, and big eyes it ends with the famous lines:
  - "Grandma, what great big teeth you have!"
  - "The better to eat you with!"
  - And saying these words, the wicked Wolf fell upon poor Little Red Riding-Hood and ate her all up.
- The story ends with a moral, which I will read in full, as it explains that the wolf stands for wicked men,

### **The Moral**

Children, girls most of all-so sweet,  
So pretty, so innocent and nice—  
Don't listen to everyone you meet;  
But if you do, don't be surprised,  
When it's you the wolf means to eat.

I say wolf, as there are many kinds:  
Some seem mild-mannered, benign,  
Without wrath—smooth and refined—  
Who follow girls from time to time,  
These wolves are the most dangerous kind!

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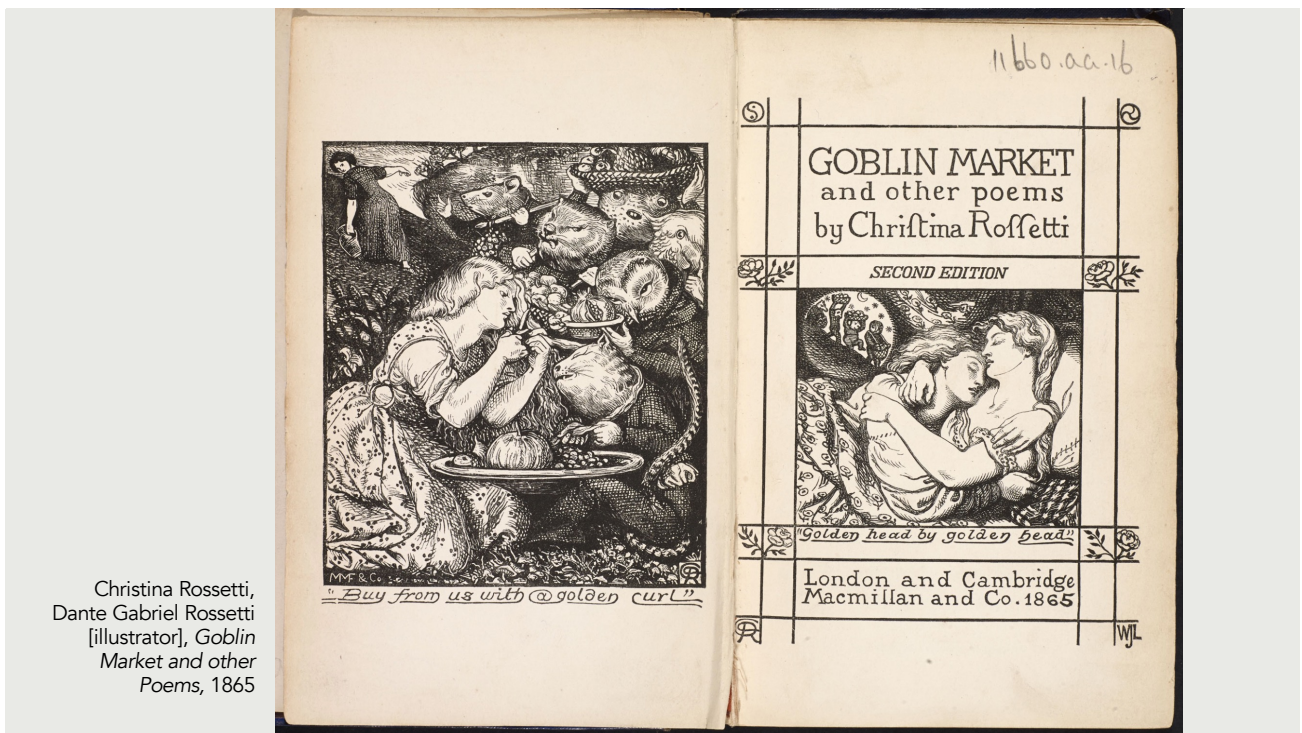
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Christina Rossetti,  
Dante Gabriel Rossetti  
[illustrator], *Goblin  
Market and other  
Poems*, 1865

Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti [illustrator], *Goblin Market and other Poems*, 1865

- This is her most famous poem *Goblin Market and other Poems*. It was her first collection of published poems. Reviewers highly praised the collection for Rossetti's unique voice and poetic talents, although it was not a commercial success.
- In 1858 she started **charity work for girls who were former prostitutes** and this prompted her to write her masterpiece, ***Goblin Market***. The poem is difficult to categorise as it has been described as everything from pornography to a child's fairy tale.
- The poem is about two sisters, **Laura and Lizzie**, shown on the right in Rossetti's woodcut.
- **Christina Rossetti maintained the poem was not a child's fairy tale** although *The Spectator* declared it a 'true children's poem'.
- Literary admirers include Algernon Charles Swinburne, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Lewis Carroll, whose *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* (1865) was partially inspired by the poem.
- It has been viewed in many ways over the years, as a moral allegory about giving in to temptation, as a feminist classic, as

unambiguously pornographic, a warning of the dangers of a free market economy, a Christian tale of sacrifice and salvation, a parable of lesbian empowerment, a fable about anorexia and an expression of incestuous yearning all of which can be clearly found in the poem which challenges Christina Rossetti's claim that she **'did not mean anything profound by this fairytale'**.

## NOTES

### GOBLIN MARKET

- The goblin men come to sell their their fruit but Laura bows her head and Lizzie blushes to hear their cries.
- "We must not look at goblin men" said Lizzie, but Laura is curious and Lizzie flees. Laura has no money so she offers a lock of her golden hair in exchange for their fruit. "Then suck'd their fruit globes fair or red ... She suck'd until her lips were sore."
- Laura waits and waits for their return but they do not come back and "Her hair grew thin and grey".
- To try to help Laura Lizzie, who can still hear the goblin men, goes to meet them with a silver coin. She offers the coin but then takes it back making them angry. They attack her, "Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking", pulled out her hair, stamped on her feet and "Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits / Against her mouth to make her eat." She resists but they try to cram the fruit into her mouth and she feels the "... juice that syrapp'd all her face, / And lodg'd in dimples of her chin, / And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd."
- Lizzie runs away back to Laura and she "Kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her." In the final stanza she writes, "For there is no friend like a sister".
- She also published children's stories and three poetry

collections. Her poetry was admired by Robert Browning, Algernon Swinburne and Lewis Carroll. Carroll's admiration for *Goblin Market* influenced his *Alice in Wonderland*.

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Illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867–1939), *Goblin Market*, author Christina Rossetti (1830–1894), publisher J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1933, New York City

- This illustrates part of Christina Rossetti's poem Laura tries to help her sister Lizzie by taking them a silver coin. She offers the coin but then takes it back making them angry. They attack her, "Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking", pulled out her hair, stamped on her feet and "Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits / Against her mouth to make her eat." She resists but they try to cram the fruit into her mouth and she feels the "... juice that syrapp'd all her face, / And lodg'd in dimples of her chin, / And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd."

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Arthur Rackham (1867-1939),  
'Fairies of the Serpentine', in  
*Peter Pan of Kensington  
Gardens* by J.M. Barrie,  
1906, watercolour



Arthur Rackham (1867-1939), 'Fairies of the Serpentine', in *Peter Pan of Kensington Gardens* by J.M. Barrie, 1906, watercolour

- A gentler children's story. This illustration is from J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* which was a prelude to *Peter Pan's Adventures in Neverland*. In this story Peter Pan learns he can no longer fly and is stranded in Kensington Gardens. He uses a thrush's nest as a boat and is helped by a group of fairies. Barrie himself said that of all the illustrations he liked this one the best.

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Elsie Wright (1901–1988), *Frances Griffiths with Fairies*, 1917, first published in 1920 in *The Strand Magazine*

Elsie Wright (1901–1988), *Frances Griffiths with Fairies*, 1917, first published in 1920 in *The Strand Magazine*

- During the later part of the nineteenth century fairies were considered by some to have a **scientific basis**. For example, David MacRitchie, the Scottish antiquarian argued that they were rooted in a real diminutive or pygmy-statured indigenous population that lived during the late Stone Age across the British Isles, especially Scotland. The **Cottingley Fairy photographs** were cited by Conan Doyle as evidence but the photographs were later discredited when both sisters, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, confessed to the fraud.
- The Cottingley Fairies were photographs taken by Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths using their father's camera. He didn't believe their story and stopped them using his camera but Elise's mother did believe them and presented them at a local Theosophical Society meeting. One of the central beliefs of theosophy is that humanity is undergoing a cycle of evolution, towards increasing 'perfection', and it was believed that fairies could be the beginning of the next cycle of evolution so they were displayed at their annual conference. From there they reached Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who believed they were genuine and published them as part of an article he was writing for *The Strand Magazine*. The girls maintained they were genuine until old age when they admitted the trick. They had cut cardboard figures from magazines and supported them with hatpins. After Conan Doyle had become involved they were too embarrassed to change their story which was initially just done for fun. The fifth and last photograph was more controversial as Frances

maintained it was genuine and both girls said they have taken the picture. The most likely explanation is that both did take the picture and it was an accidental double exposure, one of some fake fairies taken by Elsie and the other of some grass in which Frances believed she had seen fairies.

- Cottingley is a village near Bradford where the photographs were taken.
- Some historians, such as Jeremy Maas, see fairy paintings as a profound **reaction against industrialization and science** but others see them as '**just about fun**' (Andrew Stuttaford).
- **Serious interest in fairy painting died** with the **First World War** but continued in illustrations for children's books and interest was **revived in the 1970s** and fairies now form part of **fantasy art**.

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Mark Lancelot Symons  
(1887-1935), *A Fairy Tale*,  
c. 1925-35, Newport Art  
Gallery



Mark Lancelot Symons (1887-1935), *A Fairy Tale*, c. 1925-35, Newport Art Gallery, Wales

- Mark Symons  **painted religious events taking place in modern dress** and in contemporary settings. They both believed that the Kingdom of God is already present on Earth if only we could see it.
- Some of his paintings seem to have been **influenced by Richard Dadd** (1817-1886) and this one possibly by the **Victorian fairy painter Joseph Noel Paton**. It was exhibited at the 1935 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition **shortly after his death** and bought by Newport Art Gallery, Wales.
- He was never really committed to paintings, **he sought a religious life** and after failing to become a monk he considered becoming an unordained minister. It was **his wife who encouraged him to paint**.
- His paintings were **often controversial** not because of the naked children but because he set religious scenes in the modern world. Although the public were easily offended by his work his use of naked children caused no objections.
- In this painting we see a young girl asleep on a bed of ivy on some architectural stonework and she is surrounded by **distorted young children** climbing through honeysuckle. It is unclear whether it is a **pleasant dream or a nightmare** or if there is some religious significance.

### **BIO:SYMONS**

- Mark Lancelot Symons (1887-1935) was born in Hampstead, London, and brought up in Sussex. His father was the artist William Christian Symons, who counted the celebrated painters James Abbott McNeill Whistler and John

Singer Sargent among his close friends. The family was staunchly Roman Catholic.

- Symons **studied at the Slade** School of Fine Art from 1905 to 1909. On leaving he **decided he wanted to join the priesthood**, although ill health prevented him from doing. He worked for the Catholic Evidence Guild from 1918 to 1924. He disseminated literature in the streets of London and preached at Hyde Park Corner. He continued to paint sporadically, exhibiting occasionally at the RA from 1913.
- In 1924, he married Constance Gerber, who **encouraged him to return to painting**. They moved to the Reading area, and for the last decade of his life he showed regularly at the RA.
- He died of a brain tumour at his home in Barkham, near Wokingham, February 1935, aged forty-eight. A number of his paintings belong to Reading Museum.
- Symons's eccentric and highly individual symbolist paintings can be seen as a late flowering of the Pre-Raphaelite style. (*True to Life*, p. 120)

### NOTES

- **Richard Dadd** (1 August 1817 – 7 January 1886) was an English painter of the Victorian era, noted for his depictions of fairies and other supernatural subjects, Orientalist scenes, and enigmatic genre scenes, rendered with obsessively minuscule detail<sup>12</sup>. He is known for his works created while he was a patient in Bethlem psychiatric hospital<sup>3</sup>.

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Kiki Smith (b. 1954), *Come Away From Her (After Lewis Carroll)*, 2003, Aquatint, drypoint, etching and sanding with watercolour additions on mould-made En Tout Cas paper, 128.3 × 188 cm, edition of 28, Brooklyn Museum

Hand drawn page from the original manuscript by Lewis Carroll of *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, 1863

- Kiki Smith is an internationally renowned German-born American artist whose work deals with a wide range of issues including sex, birth and regeneration.
- (CLICK) The work is based on this manuscript drawing by Lewis Carroll for his book *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (1854) which was published as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.
- It is a wonderful work on which to end this talk on many levels. It brings a classic Victorian story in the modern world by evoking the inner spirit of the timeless tale of fairies and their psychological meaning. A young girl watches as a swarm of dark winged creatures leaves her. Are these the ghosts, the dreams and fears of childhood leaving her as she becomes a woman and has to face the real world?

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## VICTORIAN FAIRY PAINTING



- That brings me to the end of my tale for today. I have avoided straying from fairies into related areas such as the representation of nymphs and other mythological creatures and I have avoided the modern representation of fairies and other phantasy figures by artists such as Howard David Johnson (see <https://www.howarddavidjohnson.com/>).
- The height of Victorian fairy painting was between about 1830 and 1870 although, as we have seen it continued in children's fairy stories and had a heyday just before the First World War with the photographs of fairies endorsed by Conan Doyle.
- The First World War brought an end to any serious belief in fairies but the evocation of spiritual, mythic beings continues until the present day.
- Thank you.

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