



ILLUSTRATED BOOKS BY
Walter Crane



NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA
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Spenser's Faerie Queene, bk. 4, canto 8, frontispiece (detail), p. 947

The importance of good design and handicraft cannot be exaggerated, for upon their health depends the health of all art whatsoever; and the test of the conditions of the arts in any age must be sought in those crafts of design which minister to the daily life and common enjoyment of humanity.

Walter Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art*, 1892

The current exhibition presents a selection of books illustrated by Walter Crane (1845–1915) from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada Library. All these works reflect, to a varying degree, a preoccupation with the book as a unified whole, a focus that helped to establish Crane as one of the most influential illustrators of the late Victorian period in England.

Crane initially achieved recognition for his illustrations of children's books, setting the standard in that genre and influencing such contemporary book designers as Randolph Caldecott and Kate Greenaway. As his career progressed, Crane turned increasingly to illustrating books for adult readers, works that served to extend his influence further. Among those indebted to his later book designs were Aubrey Beardsley, William Morris, Charles Robinson, and Heywood Sumner.

Crane's artistic development can be traced to a wide range of influences – Albrecht Dürer, William Blake, John Tenniel, and the Pre-Raphaelite artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, and John Everett Millais, to name a few. His own art was most directly aligned with the Aesthetic movement, which focused on the decorative rather than the utilitarian nature of art, and the Arts and Crafts movement, which sought the revival of handicraft as well as the need to produce tasteful, mass-produced items for a broad segment of the public. Crane's commitment to design reform and to making art accessible to all classes helped to nourish his lifelong passion for book illustration and served as a catalyst for his work in ceramics, textiles, and wallpaper design.

Walter Crane was born in Liverpool in 1845, the second son of Thomas Crane, a portrait painter and lithographer. He developed a talent for drawing in his father's studio, and by his early teens he began to paint in oils and to draw illustrations for stories and poetry. In 1858 a series of Crane's coloured page designs for Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" was brought to the attention of the well-known London engraver William James Linton (1812–1897), who was so impressed with the work that he offered to take Crane on as an apprentice.

During his three years with Linton, Crane learned the wood-engraving process, including the art of drawing on wood. One of his early assignments was to draw animals at the Zoological Gardens for a proposed natural history by Linton. He also received a few commissions to illustrate journals and religious tracts. His first published drawing, *A Man in the Coils of a Serpent*, appeared in the magazine *Entertaining Things* in 1861.

Crane began illustrating independently the following year, when he produced sixty-three landscape sketches for a gift book by John R. Wise entitled *The New Forest* [1]. The sketches, engraved by Linton, were drawn as vignettes, a common technique in book illustration during the Victorian period. Crane recalled his early training in this method in his 1907 autobiography, *An Artist's Reminiscences*: "Linton himself laid great stress upon the treatment of the vignette and how gracefully it should vanish into the white margins at the edges."

A turning point in Crane's career came in 1863, when he was introduced to the printer and wood engraver Edmund Evans (1826–1905), a pioneer in colour printing. Evans initially employed Crane to illustrate covers for inexpensive novels sold in train stations (the books were called "yellow backs" because of their yellow covers), but in 1865 the two began collaborating on a series of sixpenny toy-books of nursery rhymes and fairy tales. Engraved and printed in colour, the series became highly successful and established Crane as the most popular illustrator of children's books in England.

Crane and Evans produced two or three toy-books each year from 1865 until 1876. As the series grew, the books became more sophisticated, both in printing and design. With respect to colour, the earliest publications were limited to red and blue, with black used

for the key block. After 1869, in such books as *King Luckieboy's Picture Book* [2], the range of tints was expanded: black was used as a colour as well as for outlines and yellow was added, along with colours produced from superimposing yellow over red and blue. The toy-books also became more stylistically distinctive around 1870. The change resulted in part from Crane's fascination with Japanese prints, whose influence he described in his autobiography: "Their treatment in definite black outline and flat brilliant as well as delicate colours . . . struck me at once, and I endeavoured to apply these methods to the modern fanciful and humorous subjects of children's toy-books and to the methods of wood-engraving and machine-printing."

Crane also drew inspiration from late Renaissance art, to which he was exposed during a lengthy visit to Italy in the early 1870s. Its impact is especially evident in the costume, furniture, and decorative patterns in the larger series of shilling toy-books first issued in 1873, including *Beauty and the Beast* [4], *The Hind in the Wood* (1875), and *Princess Belle Etoile* (1875).

After producing the last of his toy-books in 1876, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* [6], Crane and Evans embarked upon a new series of picture books beginning with *The Baby's Opera* [7], a collection of songs based on English nursery rhymes arranged by Crane's sister, Lucy. More ambitious than the earlier toy-books, *The Baby's Opera* included twelve full-page colour illustrations and a decorative border on each of the fifty-six pages. It was followed in 1878 by *The Baby's Bouquet* [8], a volume similar in format and colour range, but incorporating songs in German and French, as well as English. The final volume in the series, *The Baby's Own Æsop* [9], was issued almost a decade later and shows some of the advances Crane had made since publishing the two previous volumes, including a greater fluidity of line and a more harmonious integration of text and illustration.

Crane continued to illustrate children's books throughout the 1880s, his major effort being *Household Stories* [10], a collection of fifty-three fairy tales that Lucy Crane translated from the original German. Crane's contribution included over a hundred black-and-white illustrations (eleven full-page images, decorative initial letters, and 108 headpieces and tailpieces), all of which were engraved on wood.

After 1880 Crane's work was directed increasingly toward adult readers. In 1882, the same year *Household Stories* was published, he produced illustrations for *Pan-Pipes* [13], a collection of forty traditional English ballads arranged by Theophilus Marzials and engraved by Edmund Evans. The oblong format allowed for ease of handling at the piano, an elegant example of Crane's adapting the design of a book to its purpose. In a similar vein, the colours in *Pan-Pipes* were "subdued and reserved," in keeping with the old-world flavour of the tunes.

In 1888 Crane wrote and illustrated one of his best-known works, *Flora's Feast* [14]. The first in a series of flower books [14-16], *Flora's Feast* consists of forty lithographic illustrations along with verses handwritten by Crane in Gothic script. In a departure from his earlier books, Crane drew each illustration on a lithographic plate, a method that allowed him to achieve a range of colour effects not possible in wood engraving.

Flora's Feast was followed in 1891 by a second flower book, *Queen Summer* [15]. Here Crane adopted the flat design and subdued colours of medieval tapestries to complement the book's theme of a flower masque and a tournament of suitors competing for Queen Summer's favour. As with *Flora's Feast*, the illustrations in *Queen Summer*, framed and incorporating text written on scrolls, were printed from lithographic plates.

Crane's illustrations for Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* [17-19] were his main accomplishment in the 1890s. Considered by many to be his crowning achievement, the designs

consist of a distinct title page for each of the six volumes, headpieces and tailpieces, and one or more full-page illustrations for each of the seventy-two cantos. Each full-page design is enclosed in a decorative border, in which subsidiary incidents or characters of the poem are introduced, a device Crane adopted from medieval tapestries.

Although Crane continued to illustrate books throughout his life, his production in that area began to diminish in the late 1880s, as he became more actively involved in art education and politics. In 1888 Crane helped to found the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and served as its first president. He was part-time director of design at the Manchester School of Art from 1893 to 1896 and principal of the Royal College of Art from 1897 to 1898. His political interests led him to join the Socialist League in 1883 and to produce many leaflets, pamphlets, magazine covers, and posters promoting the socialist cause. In his later years, Crane also wrote several books on design theory, including *The Claims of Decorative Art* [20], *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books* (1896), *The Bases of Design* (1898), and *Line and Form* [21].

During the early years of the twentieth century, Crane was forced to adapt to the recently patented halftone printing process, which he did admirably in such books as *Rosebud and Other Tales* in 1909 and two years later in the anti-meat-eating satire *Rumbo Rhymes* [22]. Despite the technological change, the later illustrations continue the strong, linear, decorative style for which Crane became famous early in his career and exemplify his lifelong commitment to unified design.

Philip Dombowsky

Library, National Gallery of Canada

With special thanks to Frances Smith



The Goose Girl (detail), in *Household Stories*, From the Collection of the Bros. Grimm, p. 20

Checklist

- 1 John R. Wise. *The New Forest: Its History and Its Scenery*. With 63 illustrations drawn by Walter Crane. Engraved by W.J. Linton. London: Smith, Elder, 1863.
- 2 *King Luckieboy's Picture Book*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1870. Engraved by Edmund Evans.
- 3 *Puss in Boots*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1874. Engraved by Edmund Evans.
- 4 *Beauty and the Beast*. London and New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1874. Engraved by Edmund Evans.
- 5 *Jack and the Beanstalk*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1875. Engraved by Edmund Evans.
- 6 *Sleeping Beauty*. Engraved and printed in colours by Edmund Evans. London and New York: John Lane [c. 1900]. Originally published as *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* by George Routledge and Sons in 1876.
- 7 *The Baby's Opera: A Book of Old Rhymes with New Dresses*. Engraved and printed in colours by Edmund Evans. London and New York: Frederick Warne [1900]. Originally published by George Routledge and Sons in 1877.
- 8 *The Baby's Bouquet: A Fresh Bunch of Old Rhymes & Tunes*. Arranged and decorated (in colour) by Walter Crane. Cut and printed in colours by Edmund Evans. The tunes collected & arranged by L.C. [Lucy Crane]. London and New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1878.
- 9 *The Baby's Own Æsop: Being the Fables Condensed in Rhyme with Portable Morals*. Pictorially pointed by Walter Crane. Engraved and printed in colours by Edmund Evans. London: Frederick Warne [1900]. Originally published by George Routledge and Sons in 1887.
- 10 *Household Stories, From the Collection of the Bros. Grimm*. Translated from the German by Lucy Crane; and Done into Pictures by Walter Crane. London: Macmillan, 1882.
- 11 Mrs. Molesworth. *Four Winds Farm*. Illustrated by Walter Crane. London: Macmillan, 1887.
- 12 *The Old Garden and Other Verses by Margaret Deland*. Decorated throughout in colours by Walter Crane. London: Osgood McIlvaine, 1893.

- 13** *Pan-Pipes, A Book of Old Songs*. Newly arranged with accompaniments by Theo. Marzials; Set to pictures by Walter Crane. Engraved and printed in colours by Edmund Evans. 2nd edition. London: George Novello [1893]. Originally published by George Routledge and Sons in 1882.
- 14** *Flora's Feast: A Masque of Flowers*. Penned and pictured by Walter Crane. London: Cassell, 1889.
- 15** *Queen Summer, or the Tourney of the Lily and the Rose*. Penned and portrayed by Walter Crane. London: Cassell, 1891.
- 16** *Flowers from Shakespeare's Garden: A Posy from the Plays*. Pictured by Walter Crane. London: Cassell, 1906.
- 17-19** *Spenser's Faerie Queene: A Poem in Six Books with the Fragment Mutabilite*. Edited by Thomas J. Wise. Pictured by Walter Crane. London: George Allen, 1894-97.
- 20** *The Claims of Decorative Art*. London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892.
- 21** *Line and Form*. London: George Bell and Sons, 1900.
- 22** *Rumbo Rhymes: or, The Great Combine: A Satire*. Written by Alfred C. Calmour. Rendered into pictures by Walter Crane. London and New York: Harper, 1911.

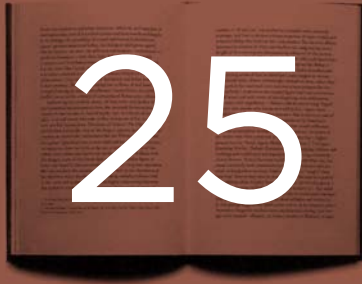


Further Reading

- Walter Crane. *An Artist's Reminiscences*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.
- Rodney Engen. *Walter Crane as a Book Illustrator*. London: Academy Editions, 1975.
- Anne Lundin. *Victorian Horizons: The Reception of the Picture Books of Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, and Kate Greenaway*. Lanham, Md.: The Children's Literature Association and Scarecrow Press, 2001.
- Isobel Spencer. *Walter Crane*. New York: Macmillan, 1975.

Cover: *Spenser's Faerie Queene*, bk. 1, canto 7, frontispiece (detail), p. 121

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