

Title: *Sketches and Scraps*
Author: Laura E. Richards
Illustrator: Henry Richards
Publisher: Estes and Lauriat; Boston
Copyright Date of Quigley Book: 1881
Original Copyright Date: 1881
Illustrations: Pen, ink, and watercolor drawings
Pages: 64
Audience: Mid to Late Elementary
Theme: Nonsense poetry geared for amusement.
Topics: Divided into different titles that *mostly* deal with the fallibility of human nature.

Review

By Irma Crespo

Introduction

A historical background is key to understanding the fundamental nature of *Sketches and Scraps*. In terms of the late nineteenth century style known as “nonsense poetry”, it is a book of poetry in the league of Edward Lear. With this approach, the readers are made to believe in the absurdity of its verses, which do not convey a moral or sense but a mere distortion for entertainment. The catchphrase on its cover, “Verses for Children, Great and Small”, is best described by the peculiar characteristics found inside its casing.

Content and Illustrations

Sketches and Scraps commits purposeful errors to defy proper language, to treat meaningful content with contempt, to ridicule both the naïve and the sophisticated, to project spontaneity in non-synchronicity of illustration and text, and finally, to create amusement without regard for value judgments.

The play on expressions by coining words that are only found in Laura Richards’ works, the topicalization of phrases, and the uncapitalized letters on words at the start of a sentence for continuity reveal childlike discourse as exemplified in *The Legend of Lake Okeefinokee*:

So he climbed up the tree;
But alas! **down fell he!**
And his lovely green neck it
was **brokee**.

As for the satirical theme that truly requires no meaning, a good instance is found in *Harriet Hutch*:

She boiled her new bonnet
And breakfasted on it,
And rode to the moon on her
Grandmother's crutch.

A mockery of crude characters is illustrated through the emaciated *Mrs. Snipkin* and the obese *Mrs. Wobblechin*:

Skinny Mrs. Snipkin,
With her little pipkin,
Sat by the fireside **a-warming** her toes.
Fat Mrs. Wobblechin,
With her little doublechin,
Sat by the window **a-cooling** of her nose.

Even the monarchs are not spared from Laura Richards' manipulation of persona. A king is named *Bobbily Boo* and a queen is designated as *Wollypotump*.

To further impose its nonsensical nature, there are occasions when the illustrations are not in sync with the text, which leaves the reader perplexed but absorbed in pointlessness. A prime example is a colorful drawing of seemingly out of place dainty flowers on page 20 that is accompanied by texts of an appalling fate from the poem, *The Seven Little Tigers and The Aged Cook* (Image 20). Predominantly, the style of the illustrations is surrealistic: there is asymmetry, irregularity, and exaggeration in the likeness of people and objects (Images 21 and 23).

The disposition of *Sketches and Scraps* is atypical, apolitical, and amoral. It does not inculcate stereotypes or controversial overtones because its humor is supposed to be meaningless.

Physical Attributes of the Front Matter and Back Cover

The book is hardbound. It has a colorful cover in subdued light. The portrait depicts a girl in casual attire seated on a huge book in a homely and sheltered surrounding. The typeface of the title is playful with the letter S displaced (Image 1). It signifies a contrast, which also represents the mischief within its pages. Its front matter begins with two frontispieces. The first picture is a plain sketch of a naked child painting (Image 2). The following page reflects a colorful illustration of three properly dressed girls with two of them engrossed to a book while the oldest one stolidly stands (Image 3). The title page has a visual of a family in the theater with a gentleman projecting a camera that displays the title of the book (Image 4). The copyright page has the printer's symbol and below it is found the copyright date and the publisher's name. The pages are sturdy. However, due to wear and tear, some are detached from the book's spine. The back cover advertises the other books published by the publisher.

Author and Illustrator

Laura E. Richards' contribution to world literature was the "nonsense verse". She had written over ninety books. Majority of which were children's books and biographies. She was well known for her notable nonsense poetry entitled *Eletelephony*. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts. She came from a prominent family. Her father was a doctor who was also an abolitionist. Her mother wrote the words for *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. In 1871, she married Henry Richards, the illustrator of some of her books including *Sketches and Scraps*. Henry Richards managed the family's paper mill in Gardiner, Maine where the Richards moved with their three children. In 1917, Laura Richards became a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize. Moreover, both husband and wife were involved in charitable activities. The most noteworthy of which was the institution of the Gardiner Library Association. Laura Richards passed away in 1943 at 92 years old while Henry Richards lived until he was 101 years old.

Recommendations

The book is partitioned into several titled poems. If the reading is established on individual selections, then, a few poems in the book are suitable for early elementary. On the contrary, if it is to be read in its entirety, it is appropriate for children in the middle to late elementary due to some contents that require maturity (e.g. *The Little Cossack*). With *Sketches and Scraps*, there is neither a moral lesson to learn nor a meaning to decode. Its significance is pedagogical when it is utilized as an example to introduce a type of genre in poetry and when it is employed to enhance the writing skills of novice writers to pour their ideas onto writing no matter how trifling these ideas are.

References

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Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (2007). *Laura E. Richards*. Retrieved on February 22, 2007 from www.wikipedia.com

Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (2007). *Nonsense Verse*. Retrieved on February 22, 2007 from www.wikipedia.com

Evaluation:

The book's written content: 5 4 3 2 1

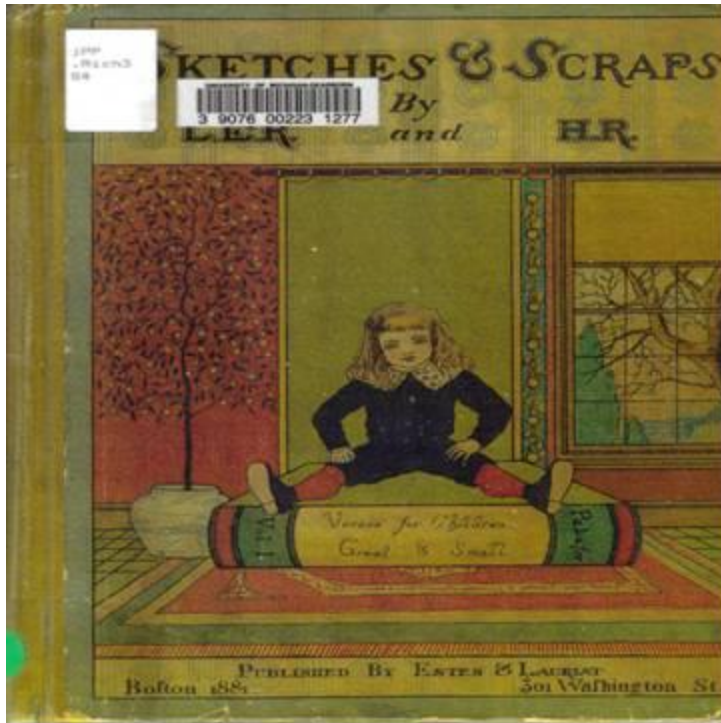
The attractiveness of the book for scanning: 5 4 3 2 1

Overall evaluation: 5 4 3 2 1

Images

1

Cover



2

First Frontispiece



3
Second Frontispiece



4
Title Page

