

Untangling the Octopus v3 by Belbin/Palacios



Untangling the Octopus

By Paul Belbin, 2005-8

Revised by Julian Palacios, 2009

'I carried that about in my head for about six months before I actually wrote it. So maybe that's why it came out so well. The idea was like those number songs like 'Green Grow the Rushes, Ho!' where you have twelve lines each related to the next and an overall theme. It's like a foolproof combination of lyrics really, and then the chorus comes in and changes the tempo but holds the whole thing together.'

- Syd discussing 'Octopus' in an interview with Giovanni Dadomo in early 1970

Pioneering research by Paul Belbin proved the Rosetta stone in decoding Syd Barrett's song writing inspirations for one of his most beloved songs, 'Octopus'. Belbin's original 2005 (revised 2008) essay, 'Untangling the Octopus' provoked a sea change in understanding Barrett's work. Palacios has expanded on Belbin's essay to further delve into the myriad origins of 'Octopus'.

Too often dismissed as a fantasist who collated drug driven word salad imagery, Barrett in time will assume his rightful place in the canon of English poetics, to which he made vital contributions. In the most literal interpretation, 'Octopus' recalls memories of fairground rides, collated with a sea-faring poem. Barrett's song resounds with a long string of references to rhymes, poems, and songs culled from English lore. The works of English classics scholar, poet, translator and novelist Robert Graves, a favourite of Syd's, also figure prominently in 'Octopus'.

The country's oldest travelling funfair, Midsummer Fair, has been held on Cambridge's Midsummer Common for over 800 years. At the end of June an encampment of lorries roll into Cambridge, bringing dozens of fairground rides, tents, games and diversions. Assembled on the Common for several days, townspeople flocked with their children, a vivid alternate fairground world. Walking through the amusements tent, the scent of mown grass rising up through the tent in the heat, Midsummer fair was magic.

A visit in 1963 with Libby Gausden left strong memories, ones that he sketched in a letter. Further, his trip to the Skegness Butlin's Holiday Camp took him through a Pleasure Ground with octopus ride and vibrant painted carousel with stallion horses. The Octopus ride, with gyrating arms, bright with lights, whirled on a central axis, while centrifugal motion spun each car willy-nilly. Lusse of Blackpool built Octopus rides in the 1930's. The machines proved popular, with vertiginous rises, and sweeping plunges.

By the 1950s, when young Barrett rode the Octopus, artist Fred Fowle applied painted octopi to panels ringing the ride. Suffused with lurid lacquered colours, in the relative dullness of the grey 1950's, these murals must have seemed magical to impressionable children like Barrett, who gazed awestruck at the scenes of giant octopi smashing frigates to bits with tentacles, replete with sailors thrown pell-mell into the sea.



In the maelstrom of touring, Barrett was swept along to Blackpool's famed promenade, deserted fairground at Pacific Ocean Park in California, and Tivoli in Copenhagen. On tours, funfairs marked a welcome respite from the grind of touring. A chance for Barrett to reconnect with the parallel worlds of childhood, fantasy and dreams threaded deep into his inspiration.

'The Enchanted Forest, Magic Carpet Ride and Flight to Mars,' Belbin writes, 'may well have appealed to the lyricist behind 'The Gnome', 'Flaming' and 'Astronomy Dominé. Syd would have faced a deserted fairground. I can't help feeling that would have made a stronger impression on him than a working amusement park... perhaps sufficient to inspire a song that brought together fairgrounds, sea-faring, childhood rhymes and the warm winds that caress the California coast?'

'Trip to heave and hoe, up down, to and fro' Barrett sings. On May Day, villagers marked the beginning of spring by 'going a-maying' out in the woods and gathering flowers. As they roamed the fields, they sang the ancient rhyme 'Trip and go', theme to a favourite Morris dance in the 16th centuries. Syd culled the old rhyme from his copy of the 1886 *The Nursery Rhymes of England*, by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps. The rhyme forms both the beginning and end of 'Octopus'.

*Trip and go, heave and hoe,
Up and down, to and fro,
From the down to the grove
Two and two, let us rove;
A-maying, a-playing;
Love hath no gainsaying;
So merrily trip and go,
So merrily trip and go.*

'Trip, trip to a dream dragon' echoed murals of dragons, octopi, and myriad creatures culled from annals of fantasy literature as fairgoers wandered the Common taking in the sights. Belbin writes, 'Syd begins to take us on a tour of the fairground, and of our own imaginations. The opening 'trip' wasn't the psychedelic experience we might have expected from the founder of the Pink Floyd, but a stumble into motion. Now mischievous Syd sings the word twice more, emphasising the 'word has different meanings': the trip is a physical journey, but also a journey into fantasy.'

Belbin writes, 'Another popular fairground ride was the 'Sea Dragon', a large wooden replica of a Viking boat mounted on a pivoting arm, swinging high up into the sky, and hang suspended for a moment, with a vertigo inducing pause right on the cusp between nausea and exhilaration. The entire boat swings up to 50 feet into the air, and at its highest point leaves many riders almost perpendicular to the ground'

At Butlins, there was also a Sea Serpent, a roller coaster with a giant dragon perched at the bow. He writes, 'So this 'dream dragon' also appears to be the first of the images of wind-torn seas and seafaring which occur throughout the song. A dragon ride must have appealed to Barrett's childhood imagination, sparked by fairy tales and Tolkien. Belbin asks, 'Couldn't Bilbo Baggins' quest to raid Smaug's mountain treasure trove in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* be described as a 'trip to a dream dragon'?'

Kenneth Grahame and Edith Nesbit collaborated on the 1898 *Dragon Tales*, a collection of four dragon stories by two master writers for children. One of which, 'The Fiery Dragon', has a Princess locked in a dragon-proof tower, while a fiery dragon roams outside.

Hide your wings in a ghost tower

Looming above Pacific Ocean Park at Venice Beach was the Mahi Mahi ride, a ghost tower with metal turrets and painted steel skin rusting in the ocean breeze, an outsize version of the helter-skelter slide erected in the centre of Midsummer Fair. At Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, the Pink Floyd dined at a restaurant atop the Chinese Tower overlooking the Gardens.

More direct, in *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet's father enters from behind the watchtower. Shakespeare had based the scene of the Ghost Tower in *Hamlet* on Warwick Castle, in his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. In *Outing*, a late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sporting magazine, the 'The Brigand of the Wild' by F. St Mars featured a Ghost Tower, that '...stood in the heart of a wood on the top of a 70-foot cliff overlooking a swift and lawless river,' where birds roosted, fluttering wings.

Sails cackling at every plate we break

Barrett makes clever use of cackling rather 'crackling', imbuing canvas tents of the fair crackling in the breeze with life. Belbin says, 'From the rides to the stalls, each in its own tent: alongside the coconut shy and the air rifle 'duck shooting' range are rows of white china plates on dressers: pay your money, and wait for enough other punters to assemble. Then, on the stallholder's signal a mad interlude begins... throw wooden balls to break every plate you possibly can!'

In the 1947 children's book *The Enchanted* by Martin Flavin:

The ship was still hove to, teetering gently up and down, swinging to and fro, as if not quite decided what to do, its great square sails crackling idly in the breeze.

In James Gates Percival's 1859 poem *Sea Pictures* is the couplet:

*Sounds cheerily amid the crackling sails
Away, away! The wind is fair.*

Barrett makes clever use of cackling rather 'crackling', imbuing canvas tents of the fair crackling in the breeze with life. Belbin writes, 'From the rides to the stalls, each in its own tent: alongside the coconut shy and the air rifle 'duck shooting' range are rows of white china plates on dressers: pay your money, and wait for enough other punters to assemble. Then, on the stallholder's signal a mad interlude begins... throw wooden balls to break every plate you possibly can!'



Cracked by scattered needles



Here we have a photograph of Barrett and the Floyd at Tivoli in September 1967. Belbin points again to 'Mr Nobody', which also inspired 'Bike'. 'Mr Nobody' is a perfect choice for Barrett to draw on, as he was often the rascal in childhood who could get away with murder just by being his impish, smiling self.

*I know a funny little man,
As quiet as a mouse,
Who does the mischief that is done
In everybody's house!*

*There's no one ever sees his face
And we all agree
That every plate we break was cracked
By Mr Nobody.*

*'Tis he who always tears our books,
Who leaves the door ajar,
He pulls the buttons from our shirts
And scatters pins afar.*

*That squeaking door will always squeak,
For, prithee, don't you see,
We leave the oiling to be done
By Mr Nobody.*

*He puts damp wood upon the fire,
That kettles cannot boil;
His are the feet that bring in mud,
And all the carpets soil.*

*The finger marks upon the door
By none of us are made;
We never leave the blinds unclosed,
To let the curtains fade.*

*The ink we never spill; the boots
That lying round you see
Are not our boots; -- they all belong
To Mr Nobody.*



The little minute gong coughs and clears his throat

Belbin says, 'The clock has run down, the minute is up... a bell rings to put an end to our plate smashing. However, that's only the precursor to the next entertainment, the gong is the prompt for a barker to step forward and grab our attention: the two events flow so smoothly together that Barrett describes them in unison. The barker has an announcement to make...'

Barrett corrects interviewer Giovanni Dadomo about the phrase 'little minute gong', leaving little doubt each phrase was crafted rather than thrown together at random:

Dadomo: Some of your words don't come over too clearly, like on 'Octopus' there's 'little Minnie Conn coughs and clears his throat'. Have you thought about printing the words on the sleeve next time?

Syd: Yeah, that would be nice (laughing). That was 'little minute gong.'

In My Circular Notes by Scottish folklorist John Francis Campbell, an account of his voyages around the world in 1876, 'We went in through dark passages, past long-robed priests followed by the boys, and following the doleful sound of a minute gong, and stumbled into light...'

In The Story of Marie Powell, Wife to Mr. Milton by Robert Graves, 1949, 'Thus licensed, he straddles his feet apart and coughs and clears his throat a little, and at last he bellows out in a great gruff voice, 'My throat is dry...'



**'Madam, you see before you stand...'
Heigh ho! Never be still!
The old original favourite grand
Grasshoppers Green Herbarian group
and the tune they play is 'In Us Confide'**

Belbin identifies these lines in Rilloby Rill by Sir Henry Newbolt, found in his Poems: Old and New, 1912.

*'Madam you see before you stand,
Heigh-ho! Never be still!
The Old Original Favourite Grand
Grasshoppers Green Herbarian Group,
And the tune we play is Rilloby-rilloby,
Madam, the tune is Rilloby-rill.'*

Belbin states, 'In Rilloby Rill, 'Heigh-ho! Never be still' has the same purpose as the refrain 'Green Grow the Rushes, O!' in each verse of the song Syd was seeking to emulate...'

*I'll sing you two, O
Green grow the rushes, O
What are your two, O?
Two, two, lily-white boys,
Clothed all in green, O
One is one and all alone
And evermore shall be so*

Belbin says, 'In the closing section of Octopus, the line 'Heigh ho! Huff the Talbot' has a similar role. Throughout the song the refrain 'please leave us here...' has the same function as 'one is one and all alone, and ever more shall be so' in Green Grow the Rushes. As Syd put it to Dadomo, 'and then the chorus comes in and changes the tempo but holds the whole thing together.' The end of 'Green grow the rushes, O' further echoed at the end of Syd's poem 'Rooftop in Thunderstorm Row Missing the Point':

*One is one and all alone
And evermore shall be so.*

*'As high is high, so low is low
And that's the end of it.'*



Belbin says, 'Barrett reverts from Newbolt's lines to his own choice of song at this point, the mysterious 'In Us Confide': presumably a song he connects with the fairground, where the traditional musical accompaniment came from the steam organ, often reproducing the sound of a Bavarian 'oompah' group. To add conjecture to this presumption: a candidate for the title 'In Us Confide' is the hymn 'A Mighty Fortress is our God', which was written by Martin Luther, inspired by Psalm 46. The second verse begins 'Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing'.'

In Sergeant Lamb's America by Robert Graves:

The first of us to contemplate desertion was Brooks the Dipper, but he did not confide in us, knowing of our objections to him.

Another possibility is an 1867 poem 'The Seven Children' by JC Cox

*'Tis He, my love, directs the storm;
The children all in us confide,
And should not we in Him abide;
Who freely does His blessings give.*

More likely, the Scottish traditional ballad Charlie, which fits the general meter of 'Octopus'

*... So princely he trode on our heather,
So nobly did in us confide,
That our sires, sternly grouped together,
For him fought and conquered and died.*

**So trip to, heave and ho, up down, to and fro,
You have no word.**

Belbin writes, 'And so the whirling, rising, falling motion continues to the soundtrack of a group playing a tune which is only heard in random snatches by the speechless, disorientated riders of the Octopus. Lyrically, Syd has presented us with a vision of what he created sonically in the middle section of 'Jugband Blues', where he instructed the members of a Salvation Army Brass Group to 'play anything'. Then he juxtaposed their performance with a circling loop of 'la-la-la-la-la-la' vocals which rise into the foreground and then fall away into a fragmented collage of random sound pandemonium.'

**Please leave us here!
Close our eyes to the Octopus ride!**

Belbin says, 'the singer is attracted and repelled, fascinated and frightened: wanting to be a part of the pandemonium ('please leave us here') but uncertain of the consequences ('close our eyes...'). In the rest of the song, Syd explores other options, other ways of being.'

The Middle Section: Lost in the Wood

Belbin says, 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn was named after the chapter in The Wind In The Willows where Mole and Rat spend the night searching for Otter's lost son, Portly, and discover him entranced (as they are) by a vision of Pan. To this childhood idyll Syd retreats.'

The Wandlebury Woods and the Beech Woods outside Cambridge were idyllic retreats from town life for Syd, as well as reputed scenes of Druidic worship in days of old. The theme of being 'lost in the wood', ultimately, is a recurrent allegory throughout Romantic poetry, the classics and English literature; a popular conceit in Victorian literature and poetry in particular.

Isn't it good to be lost in the wood? Isn't it bad so quiet there, in the wood

Aeneas gets lost in the woods in the Aeneid by Virgil. Dante's pilgrim in The Inferno: 'In the dark woods I lost my way. The path unfolded, unfamiliar and menacing.' In Shakespeare's A Midsummer's Night Dream, Hermia and Lysander get lost in the woods. In Hansel and Gretel by the Brothers Grimm, the two children are abandoned in the woods by their father, at the behest of their stepmother. No longer able to feed them, the children are left to their own devices in the darkest woods.

In Walden, Thoreau writes, 'It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods.' Belbin suggests a further parallel with the journey through Mirkwood in The Hobbit.

Further, Enid Blyton's The Enchanted Wood (1939) a gigantic magic tree, discovered by three children, has a ladder to a magic land. Each time they visit, they have to leave before the land 'moves on' or they will be stuck there until the hole comes back and they can get down the ladder at the top of the tree. Barrett drew on these books in 'Scream Thy Last Scream' as well. Finally, the Victorian poet, scientist and explorer William Howitt wrote in his 1855 A Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Australia, '*...it is most difficult to prevent one's self from being lost in these woods. I know it by my own experience.*'

Belbin notes, 'When Rabbit decides it's time to un-bounce Tigger, his plan goes wrong and he ends up lost and afraid. Can you guess who comes to save him? Milton's 'Lady lost in the wood'.' In John Milton's 1634 Comus, a young girl lost in the woods is captured by the magician Comus, and magically affixed to a chair with 'gums of glutinous heat' until a water nymph frees her.

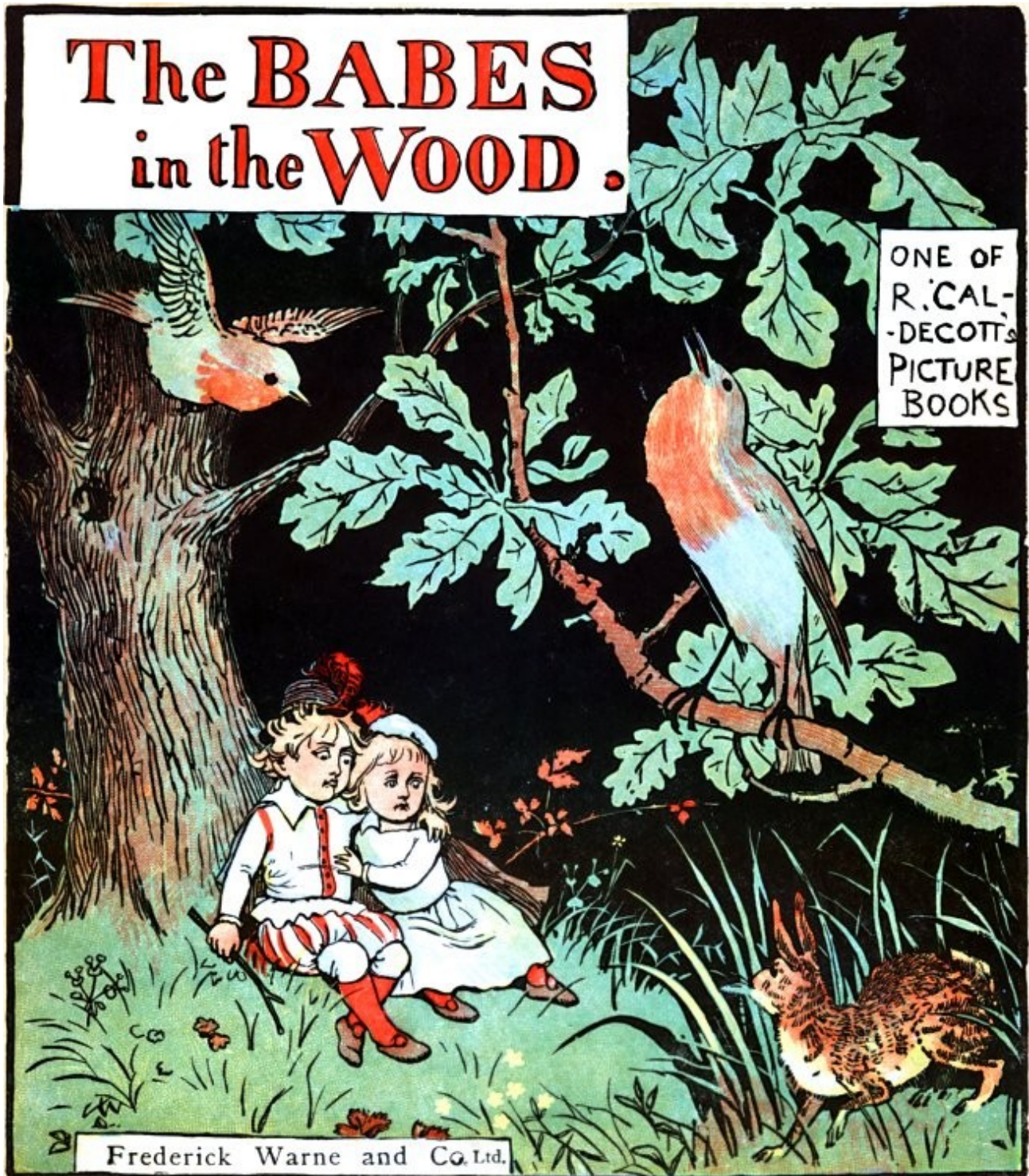
The motif was as old as time, being lost in the woods a metaphor for a journey into the recesses of the mind, into the subconscious. Syd's childhood haunt in the Wandlebury Woods was a sublimely spooky ring around the long gone fort, where fragments of skeletons still poke up underfoot. Clearly, there was a darker side to the Woods.

Robert Graves noted, 'The Greeks had a word for this sort of dread — 'panic' — meaning the fear that suddenly struck them in the woods when the God Pan was loose.' The goat god Pan inspired panic (panikon deima), or sudden fear in lonely places.

In Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, the mysterious 'master of wood, water and hill' Tom Bombadil rescues Merry and Pippin from the clutches of Old Man Willow, and again from malicious barrow-wights in the grim barrow-downs. In the Wind in the Willows, Mole's venture into the Wild Wood begins as adventure, but turns to terror. The trees 'all fixing on him glances of malice and hatred: all hard-eyed and evil and sharp'.

Syd's couplet most vividly recalled 'Babes in the Wood', a gruesome traditional Norfolk folk tale first published as a ballad in 1595. In the tale, the two children abandoned in the woods wander disconsolate until they die and are covered with leaves by birds.

'Their pretty lips with blackberries were all besmear'd and dyed. And when they saw the darksome night, they sat them down and cried.'



The single most succinct statement of Barrett's magical dualities, *'isn't it good to be lost in the wood? /isn't it bad/so quiet there/in the wood?'* The couplet best captures the opposing sides of Syd's nature, in contention and shivering contrast. The phrase captures the basic paradox of Syd's creative muse; in exploration was both excitement and dread. The ebullience in the first phrase gives way to doubt in the second, and a chill by the fourth. A heady destabilization of being alone with no bearings.

Meant even less to me than I thought

Syd once again delves into the works of Robert Graves. In Graves's seafaring poem 'A Former Attachment', we find:

*And glad to find, on again looking at it,
It meant even less to me than I had thought -
You know the ship is moving when you see
The boxes on the quayside slide away*

With a honey plough of yellow prickly seeds Clover honey pots and mystic shining feed

In their teens, Cambridge youngsters, fired up with dope, took to looking for other natural highs. Perusing botanical texts, they might have chanced across descriptions of the *Argemone Mexicana*, or yellow prickly poppy. Lancing the seeds much as one would unripe opium poppies, the crushed seeds or sap yielded a mild euphoria. This would have been in the same period circa 1965 when Syd and Emo took to eating morning glory seeds until they were sick!



Belbin points to a passage in *Fairy Things* by the great 19th Century poet John Clare (1793-1864).

*Grey lichens, mid they hills of creeping thyme,
Grow like to fairy forests hung with rime;
And fairy money-pots are often found
That spring like little mushrooms out of ground,
Some shaped like cups and some in slender trim
Wine glasses like, that to the very rim
Are filled with little mystic shining seed.
We thought our fortunes promising indeed,
Expecting by and by ere night to find
Money ploughed up of more substantial kind.
Acres of little yellow weeds,
The wheat-field's constant blooms,
That ripen into prickly seeds
For fairy curry-combs,
To comb and clean the little things ...*

John Clare remains England's foremost poet of nature, his writings having endured with unparalleled evocation of the English countryside. The nature elegies threaded through Barrett's albums bear the imprimatur of Clare's influence, from word structure to recurrent imagery. That nature could sometimes reveal darkness under its majesty Clare was well in tune with, making explicit the connection between his yawning moods and Mother Nature's Janus face.

After the early success of his poetry, Clare's style fell out of favour. He began a descent into madness, spending the rest of his life in asylums. Once, he left an asylum at Essex and went on a quixotic walk in search of his first love, a certain Mary Joyce, who in his delirium, he was convinced he would find in the woods. Legend holds Barrett reprised Clare's walk when he left London for Cambridge. In fact, he did - walking just over 50 miles. His sister Rosemary recalls he returned home with an awful lot of blisters!

Belbin says, 'In the closing section of the song, Syd returns to his childhood reading for his inspiration and it seems for his security. The words 'always' and 'never' occur regularly, and the language changes from the past tense to the present and the future during the final sequence, as though Barrett rediscovers his certainty and confidence.'

Well, the mad cat laughed at the man on the border

In *A Book of Limericks* by Edward Lear, from 1888, we find:

*There was an old man on the Border,
Who lived in the utmost disorder
He danced with the cat, and made tea in his hat*

Which vexed all the folks on the Border

Belbin further notes when Alice first meets the Cheshire Cat (and his circular logic) in Lewis Carroll's 1865 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:



'But I don't want to go among mad people,' Alice remarked.

'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat, 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'

'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.

'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.'



Heigh ho, Huff the Talbot

Barrett drew here from *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, compiled by Robert Graves in 1927, a fairly obscure and difficult to find folio even in the sixties, let alone now. Inspiration was culled from the nursery rhyme 'Huff the Talbot & our cat Tib'. In the English Civil War of 1485, hound dog Huff and Tib the Cat die in battle, but Tib having nine lives, gets up and walks away.

Belbin says, 'The verse refers to the War of the Roses, fought between the Houses of York (the White Rose) and Lancaster (the Red Rose) to determine the future of the crown. A Talbot is a hunting hound, so Huff and Tib were fighting like cats and dogs. 'Talbot' may refer to the same family as Shakespeare's Lord Talbot (later Earl of Shrewsbury) and his son in *Henry VI Part 1*, except that they're on the wrong side... Huff fought for the White Rose, whereas the real Talbot favoured Lancaster's cause.'

The War of the Roses

*Huff the Talbot and our cat Tib
They took up sword and shield,
Tib for the red rose, Huff for the white,
To fight upon Bosworth field.*

*Oh it was dreary that night to bury
These doughty warriors dead;
Under a white rose brave dog Huff,
And a fierce Tib under a red.
Low lay Huff and long may he lie!
But our Tib took little harm:
He was up and away at dawn of day
With the rosebush under his arm.*

'Cheat' he cried shouting kangaroo

Belbin says, 'Following a line about a man and a cat (from the border) came a reference to a dog and a cat (Huff and Tib). To match Syd's explanation to Dadomo that 'each line relates to the next', we might expect to find a source that brings together a dog and a kangaroo in a tale of cheating.'

In *Just So Stories for Little Children* by Rudyard Kipling, 1902, we find 'The Sing-Song of Old Man Kangaroo'. Old Man Kangaroo asks the God Nqong to be '...different, popular and wonderfully run after.' The god calls on Yellow-Dog Dingo, who chases the Kangaroo across Australia till his legs ache.



**So up, up touching hips
To a madcap galloping chase**

In 'Clowns and Jugglers', the earliest version of 'Octopus', Barrett added this couplet. Belbin says, 'The 'Gallopers' was another popular fairground ride, with ornate painted horses ('red and yellow mane of the stallion horse.')

From Syd's copy of the 1913 Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children, by Kenneth Grahame, there is 'The Wind in a Frolic' by William Howitt. A basic text that appears in dozens of anthologies for young readers, an essential early learning poem, 'The Wind in a Frolic' also contains the line 'apples and oranges'.

*The Wind one morning sprang up from sleep,
Saying, 'Now for a frolic, now for a leap!
Now for a madcap galloping chase!
I'll make a commotion in every place!'*

'So true!' in their tree they cried

The gnomes in Little Grey Men lived inside an oak tree, Tree Top House. Blyton's Faraway Tree might be another touchstone here as well. Belbin writes, 'Does this line refer back to the Cheshire Cat speaking to Alice, or to another aspect of the story of the kangaroo? To a separate story, which Syd made a connection to through the pattern, man - cat - dog - kangaroo - creatures in a tree? A tree-kangaroo... or... or... I don't know!'

**Please leave us here
Close our eyes to the octopus ride!**

Belbin writes, 'The refrain repeats after an instrumental break... so a brief pause to reflect that this isn't Syd's only fairground song. The original Clowns and Jugglers found their way (at least in part) into 'Baby Lemonade' (the 'party of clowns outside'). 'No Good Trying' also evoked merry-go-rounds and Octopus-style rides, 'spinning around and around in a car, with electric lights flashing very fast' and 'rocking me backwards and you're rocking toward the red and yellow mane of a stallion horse'. Please hold on to the steel rail!

**The winds they blew and the leaves did wag
They'll never put me in their bag**

Here Barrett drew from 'The Squirrel', a traditional folk song compiled in *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes* by Robert Graves. Barrett also used 'The Squirrel' earlier in the first version of 'Matilda Mother'.

*The winds they did blow,
The leaves they did wag;
Along came a beggar-boy,
And put me in his bag.*

Belbin writes, 'Syd inverts the outcome of these lines from the original, to make a declaration of independence, akin to 'It's what you see, It must be me, It's what I am' from 'Vegetable Man', rather than the resigned 'Oh, what a drag, caught in a bag' from the early version of 'Matilda Mother'.' Whether or not he can always illustrate his inner song the way he hears and sees it, he is always determined to continue trying.

In the eighteenth century ballad 'The Mermaid', found in the *Child Ballads*, we find a stylistic similarity in:

*Oh, the raging seas do roar,
And the stormy winds do blow.*

**The seas will ream and always seep
(or: the raging seas will always seep)**

Ream was an archaic word used by poet Robert Burns, as in 'ream o'er the brink.' Belbin writes, 'certainly another reference to sea faring, with lines about the wind evenly balanced on either side. In fact, this is a pivotal line in the closing section, as from here on each line makes a final reference to a theme or motif which has been raised earlier in the song.'

So high you go, so low you creep

Belbin writes, 'back to Wonderland, where Alice learned to control her size by alternatively eating and drinking the magical items she had found. In turn, this brings to mind other Barrett lyrics, 'When we grew very tall, when I saw you so small' ('Late Night') and 'I can creep into cupboards, sleep in the hall' ('It Is Obvious'). (Incidentally, creeping into cupboards and sleeping in halls is very distinctive behaviour: quiet while I make like a cat!)

The wind it blows in tropical heat The drones they throng on mossy seats

Belbin writes, 'each concludes an earlier theme: final mention of wind that earlier blew leaves and sails. The mossy seats take us back to the woods, and are also found in works of Lakeland poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Aenied, Louisa May Alcott's Flower Fables and the story of Lady Greensleeves, to name just a few possible sources.'

In The Cornflower by Jean Blewett, 1906:

*Come out where the bare furrows stretch in the glow,
Come out where the stubble fields glisten,
Where the wind it blows high, and the wind it blows low...*

In American Ballads and Songs by Louise Pound, 1922:

*The wind it blows with feverish heat
Across the plains so hard to beat.*

The squeaking door will always squeak

Another line borrowed from 'Mr Nobody'.

Two up, two down we'll never meet

Belbin writes, 'A 'two up, two down' is a small terraced house: two upper rooms, two lower. Syd's addition of 'we'll never meet' suggests motion, continually exchanging places: as on a seesaw or a swing-boat ride such as the Sea Dragon. We are almost back where we began.' 'Two up and two down' also refers to a pas a deux in sword fighting in Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain.

'Dumped their other traps on the ground, struck a fencing attitude, foot to foot, and began a grave, careful combat, 'two up and two down.'

So merrily trip forgo my side

To bring things tidily back to the beginning, a restatement of the opening May Day verse:

*A-maying, a-playing;
Love hath no gainsaying;
So merrily trip and go,
So merrily trip and go.*

**Please leave us here
Close our eyes to the octopus ride!**



Acknowledgements... thanks for the sauces and motivation!

- Bill McCarter
- Billy 'billyfreedom'
- Brian 'diedhairbri'
- Bruce 'nelsonsydpink'
- David Parker
- David 'sydlyrics / bearmail'
- John 'cakewalkingblues'
- Mark Sturdy
- Steve 'spfrancombe'

Copyright: July 2005 by Percy The Ratcatcher
a.k.a. paulbelbin@btinternet.com
Version 2 updated January 2006
Version 3 updated by Julian Palacios, September 2009

The Holy Church of Iggy the Inuit wants to thank Paul Belbin & Julian Palacios for allowing us to host this document.