

Ballad: The Two Ogres

"The Two Ogres" in **The Bab Ballads** spins a whimsical yet moralistic tale, perfectly suited for both obedient and mischievous children. This ballad, set in the magical Wickham Wold, introduces us to two distinct ogres representing the extremes of good and evil. The younger ogre is as virtuous as the elder is vile, embodying the dichotomy of character in fantastical form. James M'Alpine, the elder, is a creature of base desires, indulging his appetite with a ruthless efficiency that targets well-behaved children. His preference for exemplary youths—those who excel in academics, manners, and obedience—highlights a grotesque form of retribution against virtue.

In stark contrast, Applebody Bland, the paragon of selective morality among ogres, reserves his appetite exclusively for boys of questionable character. His criteria for consumption reflect societal admonitions against misbehavior, targeting children who swear, lie, and exhibit rudeness. Bland's peculiar ethics suggest a monstrous form of discipline, punishing only those who knowingly deviate from good conduct.

M'Alpine, despite his wickedness, is not without intelligence. Educated and logical, he presents a fallacy that confounds his mentors. His justification for preying on the innocent—allegedly based on a twisted interpretation of moral teachings—underscores the ballad's satirical edge. His reasoning, that he was taught to love and hence consume only the "good", introduces a dark humor that belies a critique of moral instruction taken to a ludicrous extreme.

"The Two Ogres" uses fantastical elements to explore themes of morality, ethics, and societal expectations of behavior. With a blend of humor and horror, it delves into the consequences of actions, suggesting that virtues in excess can be as dangerous as vices. This narrative, rich in allegory and irony, serves as a cautionary tale, reminding readers of the importance of balance and the complexities of moral judgment in a world that often defies simplistic categorizations of good and evil.