

What are copyright rules regarding using traditional tales for books?

Q: While flipping through my portfolio, one art director suggested I illustrate the work of Edward Lear, an English author who wrote several nonsense poems and stories during the 1800's. Since NY, I've been reading Lear's work and have found one story, which I love. I would like to turn into a picture book. But, I don't know if I have the right to do this. One art director seems to think Lear's work is copyrighted while another believes his work is in the public domain or soon will be. Do you know who is correct or how I can find out?

I've spoken with a publishing lawyer and a contact at one of the educational review journals. Both think it's likely that Lear's work would be in the public domain, but to be sure, you can do a search online at the U.S. Copyright Office site www.copyright.gov/records, or you can call the Library of Congress' Public Information Office at (202) 707-3000. You might also find the following website helpful: <http://www.library.yale.edu/~okerson/copyproj.html>. 11-12:02