
Alice in Wonderland:
A Literary Guide

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About Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice was the work of a mathematician and logician who wrote as both a humorist and as a limerist. The story was in no sense intended to be didactic; its only purpose was to entertain. One may look for Freudian or Jungian interpretations if one chooses to do so, but in the final analysis, the story functions as comedy, with dialogue used largely for Carroll to play on words, mixing fantasy with burlesque actions.

The success of Alice (1865) enabled Carroll to forego his activities as a deacon. After the death of his deeply religious father in 1868, Carroll was able to propose a one-third cut in his salary as a mathematical lecturer. His most famous mathematical work, Euclid and His Modern Rivals, had been published the year before, and in 1881, he proposed to resign his academic post so that he could give full time to writing and pursuing mathematical studies. But in 1882, he was made Curator of the Common Room and was persuaded to remain there until 1892. He continued to write on mathematical topics and completed the first volume of his Symbolic Logic. By then, he was independently wealthy as a result of his many successful publications: Phantasmagoria appeared in 1869; in 1871, Through the Looking Glass came out; in 1876, The Hunting of the

Snark appeared; and in 1883, Rhyme and Reason was published. Carroll's university responsibilities broadened in those years and from time to time he even accepted a request for a sermon. Though his authorship of the Alice books was well known, he absolutely shunned all publicity and refused to acknowledge any connection to „Lewis Carroll."

After leaving Oxford, Carroll settled into his sister's house in Guildford. And there he died in the afternoon of January 14, 1898. His memory is preserved in a perpetual endowment of a cot in the Children's Hospital, Great Ormond Street, London. In the long run, his books for children, especially theAlice books, have taken their place as books worthy of serious study of English literature. Thus, almost ironically, the so-called nonsense writer's achievements are timeless and unchallengeable, and the fame of Alice endures. To fully appreciate Alice, one must keep in mind that the whole is simpler than its parts, and that although it was written originally for children, Alice has become a favorite adult piece of literature, a critical and philosophical work, and rich in multiple meanings. More scholars (particularly economists and mathematicians) seem to allude to the Alice books with each passing day.

The broad appeal of Alice, then, certainly lends substance to the notion that Alice and the novel are, ultimately, what you make of them. But there is some question as to whether children enjoy the puzzlement found in the story's episodes more than the story itself. In any case, children do not

need critical information to appreciate Alice. The philosophical allusions and psychological implications are for adult tastes.

As a work of fiction, Alice lacks the conventional story line that we normally associate with a coherent, unified tale. Yet reading Alice does not leave us with a sense of incompleteness; Alice is far more than merely a series of disconnected episodes. In fact, Alice is told in the form of a dream; it is the story of Alice‘s dream, told in the third person point-of-view. Because Carroll chose a dream as the structure for his story, he was free to make fun of and satirize the multitudes of standard Victorian didactic maxims in children‘s literature. Alice lacks a „morally good“ heroine and meaning; instead of Carroll‘s making an ethical point about each of her adventures (and showing how „good little girls“ should behave in a situation just described), Alice parodies the instructive, solemn verse which filled Victorian children‘s books, verses which children were made to memorize and recite.

Alice, however, is not intended to instruct children in points of religion, morality, etiquette, and growing up to be mature, reasonable adults. In this novel, conventional „rationality“ is replaced by the bizarre, fantastic irrationalities of a dream world. From episode to episode, Alice never progresses to any rational understanding or mental or psychological growth. Her adventures are not ordered; they are disordered. They are shifting and unpredictable, and there is always the menace of Gothic horror laced with the fantasies of Carroll‘s fairy tale. Indeed, Alice‘s dream sometimes has the aspects of a nightmare.

Wonderland is a world of wonders, a world where fairy or elf-like creatures and humans meet and talk with one another. Wonderland is a world where a baby is transformed into a pig; it is a place where a Cheshire-Cat keeps disappearing and reappearing, until only his grin remains – and even that suddenly disappears! Wonderland is a kingdom in which the Queen and King of Hearts have subjects who are a deck of cards, and where all the animals (except the pig/baby) have the nagging, whining, complaining, and peevish attitudes of adults. It is as though Carroll were trying to frustrate logical communication and trying to turn extraordinary events into what would seem like very ordinary events in Wonderland. The only laws in Alice seem to be the laws of chaos; all is nonsensical. Yet, one of the novel‘s key focuses is on the relationship between the development of a child‘s language and the

physical growth of the child. In Wonderland, illogical and irrational Wonderland, sudden size change has a distorting psychological effect on Alice, and this is made even more mysterious by the verbal nonsense that accompanies it. This dream magic mesmerizes children, and it makes them laugh. Most adults do not. To break a law of logic is serious business to adults; children, however, love the wildly improbable.

In any case, most of the humor in Alice is due to the fact that the reader has the privileged knowledge that Alice is dreaming; thus, she should not assume that anything in Wonderland should function as it does inthe real world. Wonderland is a sort of reverse utopia, a decadent, corrupted one.

Many years ago, Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget demonstrated that children learn in stages and that before a certain mental age, a child will not be able to comprehend certain abstract relationships. Carroll seems to have already grasped this principle and is playing with the notion in this novel. Alice changes in size, but she never matures. The solemn adult creatures whom she meets speak to her, but what they say to her seems like absolute nonsense – that is, Carroll was satirizing the pseudo-intellectuality of adults in the Victorian world he saw all around him. And part of Alice's problem is that none of the nonsense ever makes sense; she never learns anything, even when she physically grows, or wanders through Wonderland's garden meeting people and creatures.

She grows nine feet tall after eating a cake in the opening chapter, yet she remains a child. Presumably, Alice would have continued to be baffled forever, so long as she remained in Wonderland. She is trapped in the midst of a vacuous condition, without beginning or end, without resolution.

Book Summary

The novel is composed of twelve brief chapters; it can be read in an afternoon. Each of the brief chapters, furthermore, is divided into small, individual, almost isolated episodes. And the story begins with Alice and her sister sitting on the bank of a river reading a book which has no pictures or dialogue in it. „ . . . and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, „without pictures or conversations?" Thus, we find many pictures and read much dialogue (although very little of it makes sense) in this novel.

After introducing us to one of the creatures in Wonderland, the Gryphon, for instance, the narrator tells us, „If you don't know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture." As noted earlier, Wonderland is filled with strange animals, and Alice's encounters with these creatures, all of whom engage her in conversations, confuse her even more whenever she meets yet another inhabitant of this strange country.

Slowly losing interest in her sister's book, Alice catches sight of a white rabbit. However, he is not merely a rabbit; he will be the „White Rabbit," a major character in the novel. In this first paragraph, then, we learn about the protagonist, Alice, her age, her temperament, and the setting and the mood of the story. In a dream, Alice has escaped from the dull and boring and prosaic world of adulthood – a world of dull prose and pictureless experiences; she has entered what seems to be a confusing, but perpetual springtime of physical, if often terrifying, immediacy.

The White Rabbit wears a waistcoat, walks upright, speaks English, and is worrying over the time on his pocket watch. Alice follows him simply because she is very curious about him. And very soon she finds herself falling down a deep tunnel. For a few minutes, she is frightened; the experience of falling disorients her. Soon, however, she realizes that she is not falling fast; instead, she is falling in a slow, almost floating descent. As she falls, she notices that the tunnel walls are lined with cupboards, bookshelves, maps, and paintings. She takes a jar of orange marmalade off a shelf. But finding the jar empty, she replaces it on a lower shelf, as though she were trying to maintain a sense of some propriety – especially in this situation of absolute uncertainty. As she reflects on the marmalade jar, she says that had she dropped the jar, she might have killed someone below. Alice is clearly a self-reflective young girl – and she's also relatively calm; her thinking reveals a curiously mature mind at times. But like an ordinary little girl, she feels homesick for her cat, Dinah. In that respect, she is in sharp contrast with conventional child heroines of the time. Although Alice may be curious and sometimes bewildered, she is never too nice or too naughty. But she is always aware of her class-status as a „lady." At one point, she even fears that some of Wonderland's creatures have confused her for a servant, as when the White Rabbit thinks that she is his housekeeper, Mary Ann, and orders Alice to fetch his gloves and fan.

Thus, in Chapter I, Carroll prepares us for Alice's first major confrontation with absolute chaos. And note that Alice's literal-minded reaction to the impossible is always considered absurd here in Wonderland; it is laughable, yet it is her only way of coping. As she falls through the rabbit-hole, for instance, she wonders what latitude or longitude she has arrived at. This is humorous and ridiculous because such measurements

– if one stops to think about it – are meaningless words to a seven-year-old girl, and they are certainly meaningless measurements of anything underground.

In Chapter II, Alice finds herself still in the long passageway, and the White Rabbit appears and goes off into a long, low hall full of locked doors. Behind one very small door, Alice remembers that there is „the loveliest garden you ever saw" (remember, she saw this in Chapter I), but now she has drunk a liquid that has made her too large to squeeze even her head through the doorway of the garden. She wishes that she could fold herself up like a telescope and enter. This wish becomes possible when she finds a shrinking potion and a key to the door. The potion reduces her to ten inches high, but she forgets to take the key with her (!) before shrinking, and now the table is too high for her to reach the key. To any young child, this is silly and something to be laughed at, but on another level, there's an element of fear; for children, the predictable proportions of things are important matters of survival. Yet here in Wonderland, things change – for no known reason – thus, logic has lost all its validity.

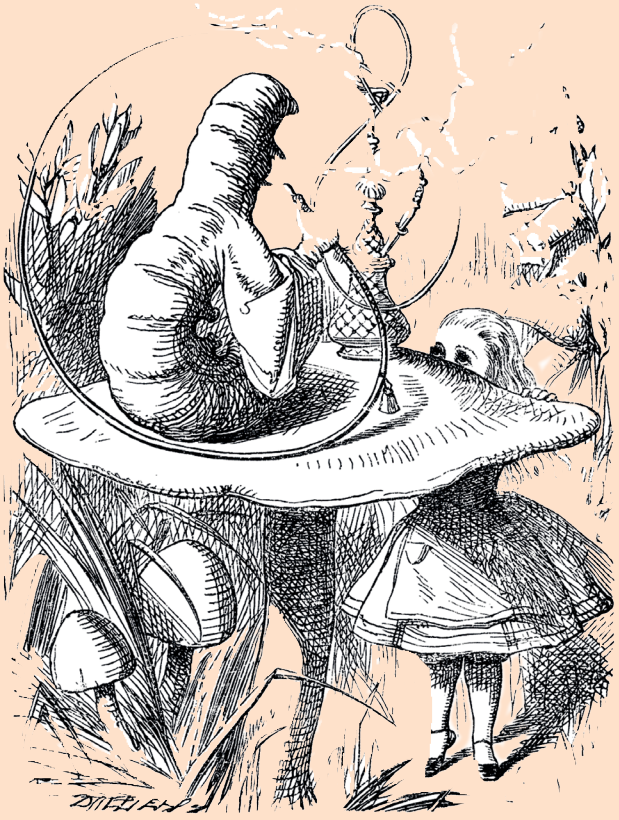
Then Alice eats a cake that she finds, and her neck shoots up until it resembles a giraffe's. Suddenly, she is a distorted nine feet tall! Clearly, her ability to change size has been a mixed blessing. In despair, she asks, „Who in the world am I?" This is a key question.

Meanwhile, the rapid, haphazard nature of Alice's physical and emotional changes has created a dangerous pool of tears that almost causes her to drown when she shrinks again. Why has she shrunk? She realizes that she has been holding the White Rabbit's lost white gloves and fan – therefore, it mustbe the magic of the fan that is causing her to shrink to almost nothingness. She saves herself by instantly dropping the fan. But now she is desperate; in vain, she searches her mind for something to make sense out of all this illogical chaos, something like arithmetic and geography, subjects that are solid, lasting, and rational. But even they seem to be confused because no matter how much she recites their rules, nothing helps. At the close of this chapter, she is swimming desperately in a pool of her own tears, alongside a mouse and other chattering creatures that have suddenly, somehow, appeared.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is full of parody and satire. And in Chapter III, Victorian

history is Carroll's target. The mouse offers to dry the other creatures and Alice by telling them a very dry history of England. Then, Carroll attacks politics: the Dodo organizes a Caucus-race, a special race in which every participant wins a prize. Alice then learns the mouse's sad tale as Carroll's editor narrates it on the page in the shape of a mouse's very narrow, S-shaped tail. The assembled, unearthly creatures cannot accept ordinary language, and so Alice experiences, again, absolute bafflement; this is linguistic and semantic disaster. Indeed, much of the humor of this chapter is based on Alice's reactions to the collapse of three above-ground assumptions: predictable growth, an absolute distinction between animals and humans, and an identity that remains constant. We might also add to the concept of a constancy of identity a conformity of word usage. But in Wonderland, Alice's previous identity and the very concept of a permanent identity has repeatedly been destroyed, just as the principles of above-ground are contradicted everywhere; here in Wonderland, such things as space, size, and even arithmetic are shown to have no consistent laws.

In Chapter IV, the confusion of identity continues. The White Rabbit insists that Alice



fetch him his gloves and his fan. Somehow, he thinks that Alice is his servant, and Alice, instead of objecting to his confusion, passively accepts her new role, just as she would obey an adult ordering her about above-ground. On this day when everything has gone wrong, she feels absolutely defeated.

In the rabbit's house, Alice finds and drinks another growth potion. This time, however, she becomes so enormous that she fills up the room so entirely that she can't get out. These continuing changes in size illustrate her confused, rapid identity crisis and her continuous perplexity. After repulsing the rabbit's manservant, young Bill, a Lizard (who is trying to evict her), Alice notices that pebbles that are being thrown at her through a window are turning into cakes. Upon eating one of them, she shrinks until she is small enough to escape the rabbit's house and hide in a thick wood.

In Chapter V, „Advice From a Caterpillar," Alice meets a rude Caterpillar; pompously and dogmatically, he states that she must keep her temper – which is even more confusing to her for she is a little irritable because she simply cannot make any sense in this world of Wonderland. Alice then becomes more polite, but the Caterpillar only sharpens his already very short, brusque replies. In Wonderland, there are obviously no conventional rules of etiquette. Thus, Alice's attempt at politeness and the observance of social niceties are still frustrated attempts of hers to react as well as she can to very unconventional behavior – at least, it's certainly unconventional according to the rules that she learned above-ground.

Later, Alice suffers another bout of „giraffe's neck" from nibbling one side of the mushroom that the Caterpillar was sitting on. The effect of this spurt upward causes her to be mistaken for an egg-eating serpent by an angry, vicious pigeon.

In Chapters VI and VII, Alice meets the foul-tempered Duchess, a baby that slowly

changes into a pig, the famous, grinning Cheshire-Cat, the March Hare, the Mad Hatter, and the very, very sleepy Dormouse. The latter three are literally trapped (although they don‘t know it) in a time-warp – trapped in aperpetual time when tea is being forever served. Life is one long tea-party, and this episode is Carroll‘s assault on the notion of time. At the tea-party, it is always teatime; the Mad Hatter‘s watch tells the dayof the year, but not the time since it is always six o‘clock. At this point, it is important that you notice a key aspect of Wonderland; here, all these creatures treat Alice (and her reactions) as though she is insane – and as though they are sane! In addition, when they are not condescending to her or severely criticizing her, the creatures continually contradict her. And Alice passively presumes the fault to be hers – in almost every case – because all of the creatures act as though their madness is normal and not at all unusual. It is the logical Alice who is the queer one. The chapter ends with Alice at last entering the garden by eating more of the mushroom that the Caterpillar was sitting on. Alice is now about a foot tall.

Chapters VIII to X introduce Alice to the most grimly evil and most irrational people (and actions) in the novel. Alice meets the sovereigns of Wonderland, who display a perversely hilarious rudeness not matched by anyone except possibly by the old screaming Duchess. The garden is inhabited by playing cards (with arms and legs and heads),who are ruled over by the barbarous Queen of Hearts. The Queen‘s constant refrain and response to seemingly all situations is: „Off with their heads!“ This beautiful garden, Alice discovers, is the Queen‘s private croquet ground, and the Queen matter-of-factly orders Alice to play croquet. Alice‘s confusion now turns to fear. Then she meets the ugly Duchess again, as well as the White Rabbit, the Cheshire-Cat, and a Gryphon introduces her to a Mock Turtle, who sings her a sad tale of his mock (empty) education; then the Mock Turtle teaches her and the Gryphon a dance called the ‚Lobster-Quadrille.“ Chapters XI and XII concern the trial of the Knave of Hearts. Here, Alice plays a heroic role at the trial, and she emerges from Wonderland and awakens to reality. The last two chapters represent the overthrow of Wonderland and Alice‘s triumphant rebellion against the mayhem and madness that she experienced while she was lost, for awhile, in the strange world of Wonderland.

This story is characterized, first of all, by Alice‘s unthinking, irrational, and heedless

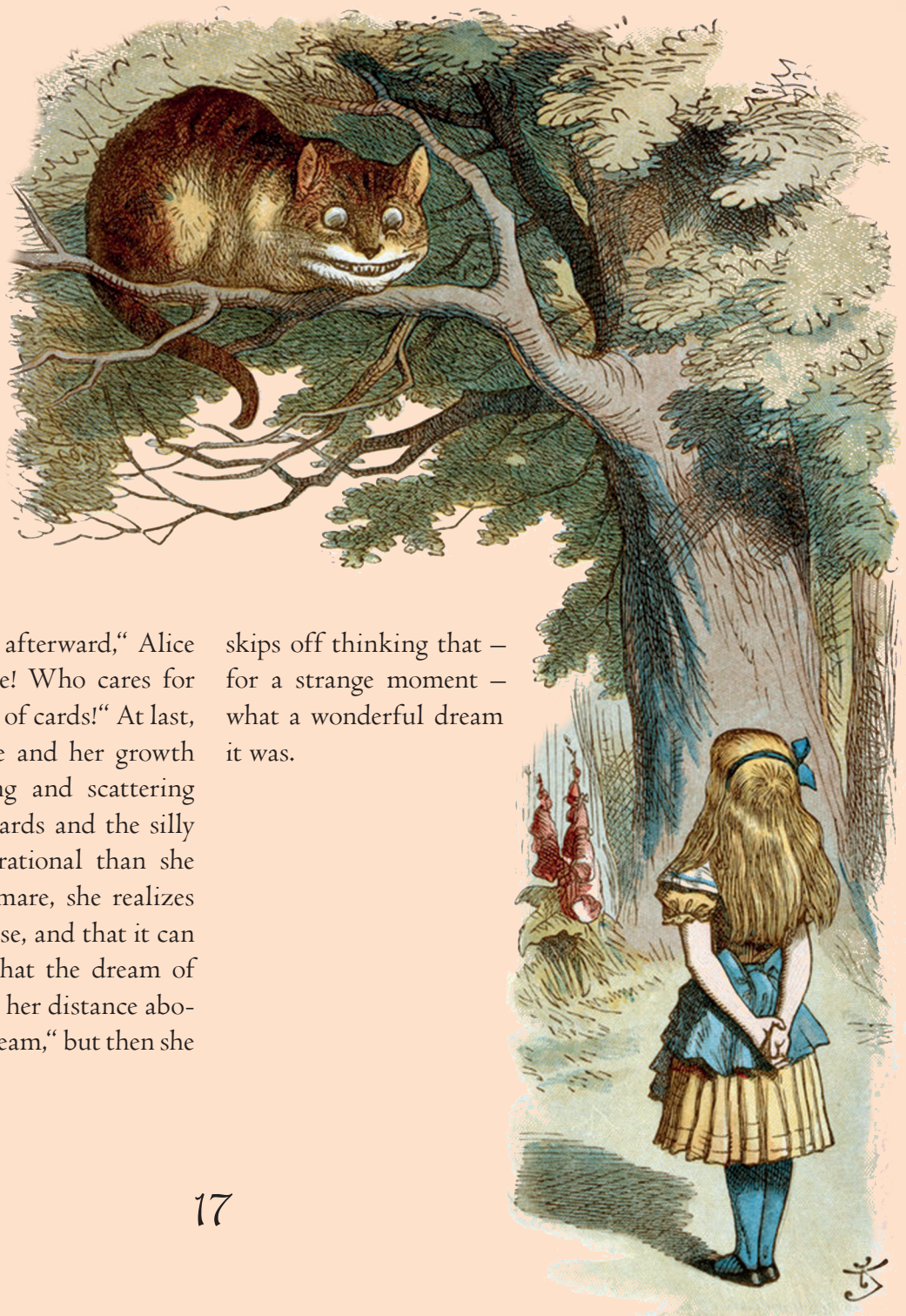
jumping down the rabbit-hole, an act which is at once superhuman and beyond human experience – but Alice does it. And once we accept this premise, we are ready for the rest of the absurdities of Wonderland and Alice's attempts to understand it and, finally, to escape from it. Confusion begins almost immediately because Alice tries to use her world of knowledge from the adult world above-ground in order to understand this new world. Wonderland, however, is a lawless world of deepest, bizarre dream unconsciousness, and Alice's journey through it is a metaphorical search for experience. What she discovers in her dream, though, is a more meaningful and terrifying world than most conscious acts of intelligence would ever lead her to. Hence, „Who in the world am I?" is Alice's constant, confused refrain, one which people „above-ground" ask themselves many, many times throughout their lifetimes.

Throughout the story, Alice is confronted with the problem of shifting identity, as well as being confronted with the anarchy and by the cruelty of Wonderland. When Alice physically shrinks in size, she is never really small enough to hide from the disagreeable creatures that she meets; yet when she grows to adult or to even larger size, she is still not large enough to command authority. „There are things inAlice," writes critic William Empson, „that would give Freud the creeps." Often we find poor Alice (and she is often described as being either „poor" or „curious") in tears over something that the adult reader finds comic. And „poor Alice" is on the verge of tears most of the time. When she rarely prepares to laugh, she is usually checked by the morbid, humorless types of creatures whom she encounters in Wonderland. Not even the smiling Cheshire-Cat is kind to her. Such a hostile breakdown of the ordinary world is neverfunny to the child, however comic it might appear to adults. But then Wonderland would not be so amusing to us except in terms of its sheer, unabated madness.

One of the central concerns of Alice is the subject of growing up – the anxieties and the mysteries of personal identity as one matures. When Alice finds her neck elongated, everything, in her words, becomes „queer"; again, she is uncertain who she is. As is the case with most children, Alice's identity depends upon her control of her body. Until now, Alice's life has been very structured; now her life shifts; it becomes fragmented until it ends with a nightmarish awakening.

Throughout the novel, Alice is filled with unconscious feelings of morbidity, physical disgrace, unfairness, and bizarre feelings about bodily functions. Everywhere there is the absurd, unexplainable notion of death and the absolute meaninglessness of death and life.

Alice's final triumph occurs when she outgrows nonsense. In response to the Queen's cry at the Knave's trial: „sentence first – verdict afterward," Alice responds: „Stuff and nonsense! Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!" At last, Alice takes control of her life and her growth toward maturity by shattering and scattering the absurdity of the playing cards and the silly little creatures who are less rational than she is. In waking from her nightmare, she realizes that reason can oppose nonsense, and that it can – and did – win. And now that the dream of chaos is over, she can say, from her distance above-ground, „It was a curious dream," but then she skips off thinking that – for a strange moment – what a wonderful dream it was.



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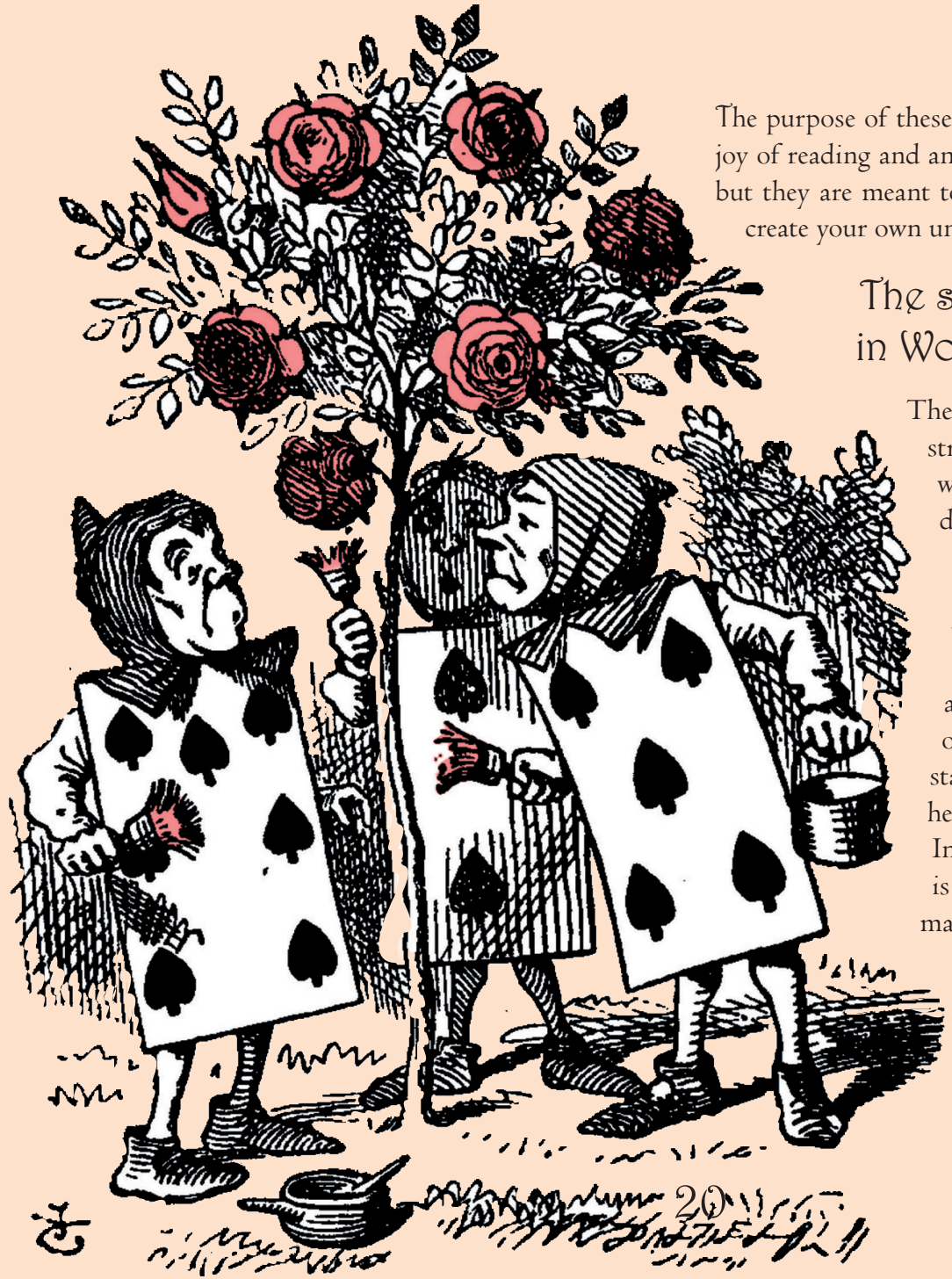


The purpose of these pages is not to replace the joy of reading and analysing the books yourself, but they are meant to be a helpful guideline to create your own understanding of the stories

The setting of Alice in Wonderland

The setting is Wonderland, a strange and seemingly crazy world that is entered by dropping into a rabbit hole. Animals act as normal people. Physical size as well as time are relative.

However, the story also partly takes place in our ‚real' world, where Alice starts in by sitting next to her sister, and wakes up in. In the story, Wonderland is a dream world. But thematically, Wonderland is not really another world. It is in fact our own world, only seen through the eyes of a child.

Conflict and resolution, protagonists and antagonists

Alice is the protagonist of the story. She is the main character and everything evolves around her. We follow her during her trip through Wonderland and know what she is thinking.

The antagonists are all characters who Alice encounters during her trip through Wonderland. They try to baffle her, confuse her, order her about and even behead her. Even the ones who are not directly mean to her are antagonists, as their strange behaviour confuses Alice.

Conflict is happening every time Alice meets a new character and is being confronted with its strange rules and behaviour. The main conflict occurs in the last chapter, during the trial, when Alice is called to give evidence. She calls the creatures by their name: ‚nothing but a pack of cards' and they all come flying down on her in rage.

The resolution of this conflict occurs when Alice wakes up and finds she no longer is in Wonderland. She realizes it was just a dream. When Alice tells her dream to her sister, she understands that Alice is growing up.

Themes in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland provides an inexhaustible mine of literary, philosophical, and scientific themes. Here are some general themes which the reader may find interesting and of some use in studying the work.

Abandonnement/Loneliness

Alice's initial reaction after falling down the rabbit-hole is one of extreme loneliness. Her curiosity has led her into a kind of Never-Never Land, over the edge of Reality and into a lonely, very alien world. She is further lost when she cannot establish her identity. Physically, she is lost; psychologically, she also feels lost. She cannot get her recitations right, and she becomes even more confused when her arithmetic (a subject she believed to be unchanging and solid) fails her. Every attempt to establish a familiar basis of identity creates only the sense of being lost – absolutely lost. Alice becomes, to the reader, a mistreated, misunderstood, wandering waif. Trapped in solitude, she finds herself lapsing into soliloquies that reflect a divided, confused, and desperate self.

The Child-Swain

Alice is the most responsible „character" in the story; in fact, she is the only real person and the only „true" character. At most, the other creatures are antagonists, either a bit genial or cruel, depending on how they treat Alice at any given point in the story. Alice's innocence makes her a perfect vehicle of social criticism a la Candide. In her encounters, we see the charmingly pathetic ingénue – a child whose only purpose is to escape the afflictions around her. By implication, there is the view that a child's perception of the world is the only sane one. Conversely, to grow and mature leads to inevitable corruption, to sexuality, emotionalism, and adult hypocrisy. The child as an innocent, sympathetic object has obvious satirical utility, but only to the point that the child must extend sympathy herself – and Alice fails to do this when she describes her cat Dinah to the Mouse, and later when she confesses to having eaten eggs to the frightened mother pigeon.

Children and Animals

In an age such as our own, where philosophers earnestly debate the rights of animals, or whether machines can „think," we cannot escape the child's affinity for animals. And in Wonderland, except for the Gryphon, none of the animals are of a hostile nature that might lead Alice to any harm. (And the Gryphon is a mythical animal so he doesn't count as a „true" animal.) Most of the Wonderland animals are the kind one finds in middle-class homes, pet shops, and in children's cartoons. Although they may not seem so in behavior, most of them are, really, pets. Alice feels a natural identity with them, but her relationship ultimately turns on her viewing them as adults. So her identity with the animals has a lot to do with her size in relationship to adults. Alice emphasizes this point when she observes that some ugly children might be improved if they were pigs. In her observation lies the acceptance of a common condition of children and animals: Each is personified to a degree. Thus, it is not surprising that in the world of the child, not only animals, but dolls, toys, plants, insects, and even playing cards have the potential to be personified by children (or adults).

Death

Growing up in Wonderland means the death of the child, and although Alice certainly remains

a child through her physical changes in size – in other ways, death never seems to be far away in Wonderland. For example, death is symbolized by the White Rabbit's fan which causes Alice to almost vanish; death is implied in the discussion of the Caterpillar's metamorphosis. And death permeates the morbid atmosphere of the „enchanted garden." The Queen of Hearts seems to be the Goddess of Death, always yelling her single, barbarous, indiscriminate, „Off with their heads!"

Nonsense

One of the key characteristics of Carroll's story is his use of language. Much of the „nonsense" in Alice has to do with transpositions, either of mathematical scale (as in the scene where Alice multiplies incorrectly) or in the scrambled verse parodies (for example, the Father William poem). Much of the nonsense effect is also achieved by directing conversation to parts of speech rather than to the meaning of the speakers – to definitions rather than to indications. When Alice asks the Cheshire-Cat which way to go, he replies that she should, first, know where she's going. The Frog-Footman tells her not to knock on the door outside the Duchess' house; he can only open the

door when he is inside (though Alice, of course, manages to open the door from the outside). And some of the nonsense in Wonderland is merely satirical, such as the Mock Turtle's education. But the nature of nonsense is much like chance, and rules to decipher it into logical meaning or sense patterns work against the principal intent of Carroll's purpose – that is, he wanted his nonsense to be random, senseless, unpredictable, and without rules.

Nature and Nurture

The structure of a dream does not lend itself to resolution. A dream simply is a very different kind of „experience." In this sense, Alice does not really evolve into a higher

understanding of her adventure. She has the memory of Wonderland but she brings nothing „real" from Wonderland – only her memory of it. This is a powerful testament to the influence of her domestication. In Alice's case, good social breeding is more important than her natural disposition. But if Alice leaves Wonderland without acquiring any lasting, truly worthwhile knowledge, neither can she give any wisdom to the creatures whom she has met there. Nature, in each case, sets limits on the ability to assimilate experiences.

In the Caucus-race, for instance, the race depicts the absurdity of democracy. Yet, Alice's critical attitude – a product of her class education – is also satirized. The object of the race is to have everyone dry off; so it doesn't matter who wins or loses, and clearly the outcome of the race is irrelevant. To think otherwise, as Alice does, is absurd. The point of the running about is to dry off, which, incidentally, makes it equally absurd to call moving about for that purpose a „race."

Wonderland offers a peculiar view of Nature. For one thing, all the animals have obviously been educated. There is literally not a „stupid" one in the bunch (unless it is the puppy or the pig/baby). In general, the basic condition common to all the creatures is not ignorance – but madness, for which there seems to be no appropriate remedy. A Victorian reader must have wondered how the animals were „trained"; after all, the assumptions that Alice makes all rest on her „training." On this point, however, the reader can only speculate.

In Wonderland, much of the fun depends on the confusion of „training." Nature and natural feelings seem to more often than not mean danger or potential violence. (But except for the puppy and the pig/baby, there are no natural creatures, however much natural feelings are expressed.) The Duchess, for example, seems to be only the epitome of rage; she conveys a kind of sadistic delight in digging her chin into Alice's shoulder; anger even seems to motivate her didactic morals (that is, „Flamingoes and mustard both bite").

Finally, nature seems superior to nurture in Wonderland, as the personification of beasts seems to be no improvement on the actual beasts themselves. The pig, for example, is a more content creature as a pig, for the baby was not happier when it was a baby.

Justice

Although there are plenty of „rules," the laws of Wonderland seem a parody of real justice. The Queen of Hearts, for example, thinks nothing of violating the law which protects people from illegal prosecution; she seeks the head of the Knave of Hearts for having been only accused of stealing the tarts. Thus, the Queen violates the spirit of the law against stealing to satisfy the logical necessity that every trial must have an execution. The spirit of the law is, so to speak, sacrificed to satisfy the reversibility of the symbolic letter of her logic. In the croquet game, anyone can be executed for reasons known only to the sovereign Queen, who acts as though she is a divinity with the power to take or give life. Under a monarchy, the monarchs are above the law. In Wonderland, however, the monarch's will is flaunted when the command is to execute someone. Ignoring the Queen's command to behead someone is a matter of survival as well as justice.

The trial of the Knave of Hearts satirizes both too much law and law by personal edict. Someone may have stolen the tarts, and it may well have been the Knave. But the offense is trivial, and the sentence is only a joke. One of the problems with the law in any context is its application. When the law ceases to promote harmony, then its purpose as a regulator of human affairs is subverted. In Wonderland the idea of a law seems ridiculous because the operative principle of Wonderland is chaos. Injustice, then, is a logical consequence of living in Wonderland. The rule of the strongest person must be the law – that is, the law of anarchy. The trial of the Knave is proof of this woeful state of affairs. Fortunately, Alice is the strongest of the lot, and she overthrows the cruel Queen's sentence of execution and the savage kangaroo court. There is no way to change the law because no „law" exists. By her rebellion, Alice serves both the cause of sanity and justice.

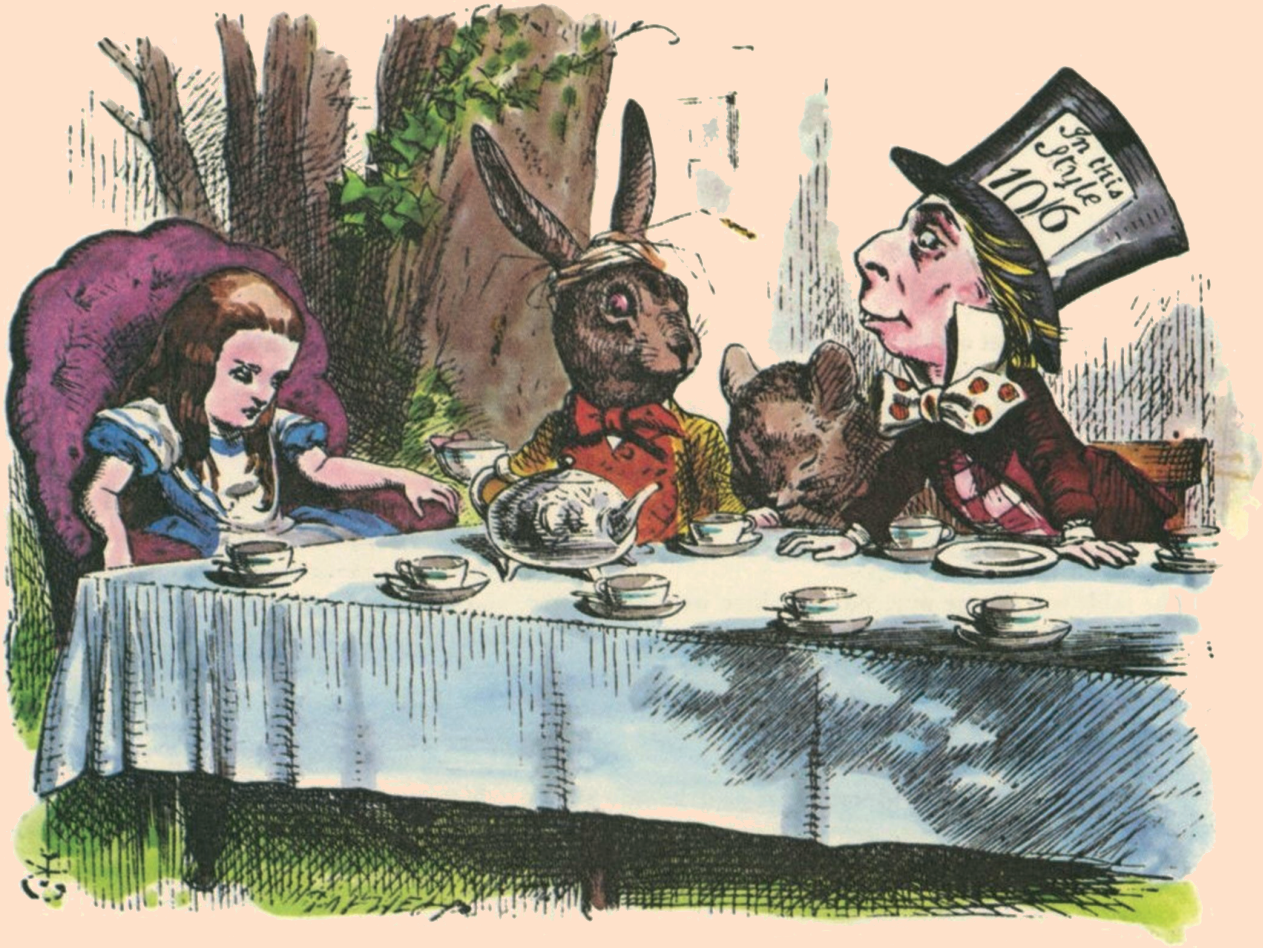
Time and Space

Time, in the sense of duration, exists in Wonderland only in a psychological and artistic sense. When we ordinarily conceive of time, we think of units of duration – that is, hours, minutes, and seconds; or days, weeks, months, and years. We may also think of getting older and having lived from a certain date. We assume that the time reflected on a clock and our age are essentially the same kind of process. But a clock may

repeat its measure of duration, whereas we have only one lifetime. Our age is therefore a function of an irreversible psychological sense of duration. We live in the conscious knowledge that we can never return to a given point in the past, as we might adjust a clock for daylight savings time. Our personal, psychological time is absolute and irreversible. And that is the kind of time that creatures like the Mad Hatter employ in Wonderland. (We never know whether the White Rabbit uses a mechanistic time, only that he has a watch.)

When Alice looks at the Mad Hatter's watch, she sees a date, but she sees neither hours nor minutes. Because Time and the Mad Hatter do not get along, Time has „frozen" the tea-party at six o'clock. But it turns out that time is also reversed so that a year has the duration of an hour and vice versa. Reckoned in hour-lengths, the tea-party must go on for at least a year (unless Time and the Mad Hatter make up their quarrel). But because of psychological time, the creatures are able to leave and return to the tea-party. And because of psychological time, Wonderland's experience comes to an end, and just as our uniquely, individual lives will one day end, so will our nightmares and dreams.

Main characters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Alice

Alice is the main character of the story „Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and the sequel „Through the Looking Glass and what Alice found there". She is a seven-year-old English girl with lots of imagination and is fond of showing off her knowledge. Alice is polite, well raised and interested in others, although she sometimes makes the wrong remarks and upsets the creatures in Wonderland. She is easily put off by abruptness and rudeness of others.

In the article 'Alice on Stage', Carroll gives the following description of her: „Loving, first, loving and gentle: loving as a dog (forgive the prosaic simile, but I know no earthy love so pure and perfect), and gentle as a fawn; then courteous - courteous to all, high or low, grand or grotesque, King or Caterpillar, even as though she were herself a King's daughter, and her clothing of wrought gold: then trustful, ready to accept the wildest impossibilities with all that utter trust that only dreamers know; and lastly, curious – wildly curious, and with the eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when Sin and Sorrow are but names – empty words signifying nothing!"

Alice is a sensible prepubescent girl from a wealthy English family who finds herself in a strange world ruled by imagination and fantasy. Alice feels comfortable with her identity and has a strong sense that her environment is comprised of clear, logical, and consistent rules and features. Alice's familiarity with the world has led one critic to describe her as a "disembodied intellect." Alice displays great curiosity and attempts to fit her diverse experiences into a clear understanding of the world.

Alice approaches Wonderland as an anthropologist, but maintains a strong sense of noblesse oblige that comes with her class status. She has confidence in her social position, education, and the Victorian virtue of good manners. Alice has a feeling of entitlement, particularly when comparing herself to Mabel, whom she declares has a "poky little house," and no toys. Additionally, she flaunts her limited information base with

anyone who will listen and becomes increasingly obsessed with the importance of good manners as she deals with the rude creatures of Wonderland. Alice maintains a superior attitude and behaves with solicitous indulgence toward those she believes are less privileged.

The tension of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland emerges when Alice's fixed perspective of the world comes into contact with the mad, illogical world of Wonderland. Alice's fixed sense of order clashes with the madness she finds in Wonderland. The White Rabbit challenges her perceptions of class when he mistakes her for a servant, while the Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Pigeon challenge Alice's notions of urbane intelligence with an unfamiliar logic that only makes sense within the context of Wonderland. Most significantly, Wonderland challenges her perceptions of good manners by constantly assaulting her with dismissive rudeness. Alice's fundamental beliefs face challenges at every turn, and as a result Alice suffers an identity crisis. She persists in her way of life as she perceives her sense of order collapsing all around her. Alice must choose between retaining her notions of order and assimilating into Wonderland's nonsensical rules.

Caterpillar

The Caterpillar is sitting on a mushroom while smoking a hookah, when Alice first meets him. Although he is rather strict and not very friendly, and corrects Alice‘s recitation of a poem, he does help her by advising her to eat from the mushroom if she wants to change her size. In the end, he crawles away. In the Disney movie, however, he changes into a butterfly.

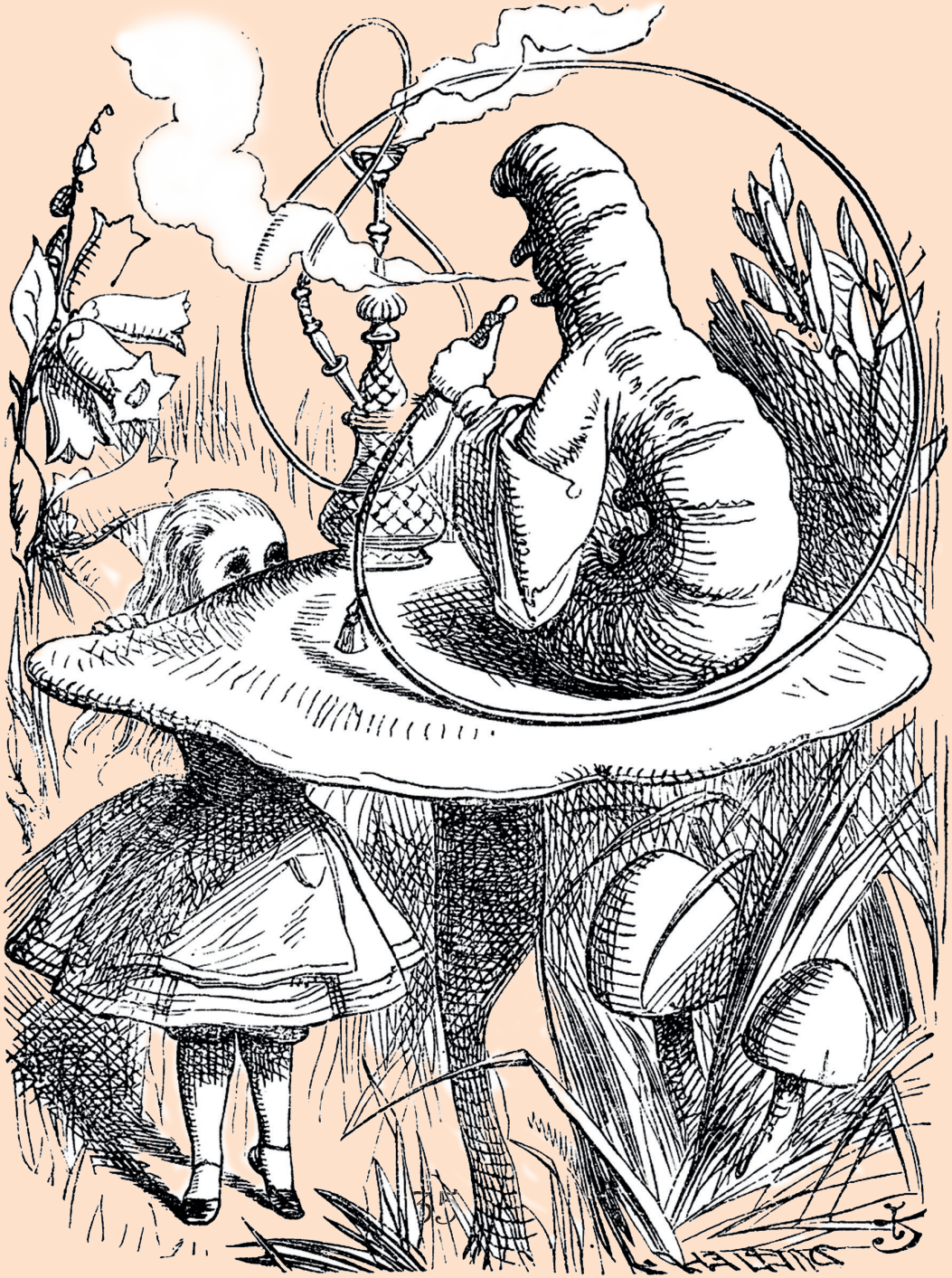
The Caterpillar actually teaches Alice how to cope with the difficulties she encounters in Wonderland. He teaches her how to change size by eating the mushroom and thereby to adapt to her environment when needed.

Although the original illustrations are black-and-white, in Alice‘s Adventures Under Ground and in The Nursery Alice, the Caterpiller is described as being blue (‚a large blue caterpillar‘).

When you take a close look at the picture of the Caterpillar, you‘ll see that his nose and chin are really two of its legs!

The Caterpillar doesn‘t actually have a name; he is just being referred to as ‚the caterpillar‘. In Tim Burton‘s 2010 movie, he has been named Absolem.

Because the Caterpillar is smoking a hookah, and advises Alice to eat from a mushroom, he is they main reason why many people think that the story of Alice in Wonderland contains hidden meanings to drug use, or that the author was on drugs when writing the book.



The Cheshire Cat

The Cheshire Cat is the cat of the Duchess. Alice meets it when she leaves the Duchess house, and finds it in a tree. It constantly grins and can disappear and reappear whenever it likes. Sometimes it disappears and leaves its grin behind.

The Cheshire Cat is unique among Wonderland creatures. Threatened by no one, it maintains a cool, grinning outsider status. The Cheshire Cat has insight into the workings of Wonderland as a whole. Its calm explanation to Alice that to be in Wonderland is to be "mad" reveals a number of points that do not occur to Alice on her own. First, the Cheshire Cat points out that Wonderland as a place has a stronger cumulative effect than any of its citizens. Wonderland is ruled by nonsense, and as a result, Alice's normal behavior becomes inconsistent with its operating principles, so Alice herself becomes mad in the context of Wonderland. Certainly, Alice's burning curiosity to absorb everything she sees in Wonderland sets her apart from the other Wonderland creatures, making her seem mad in comparison.

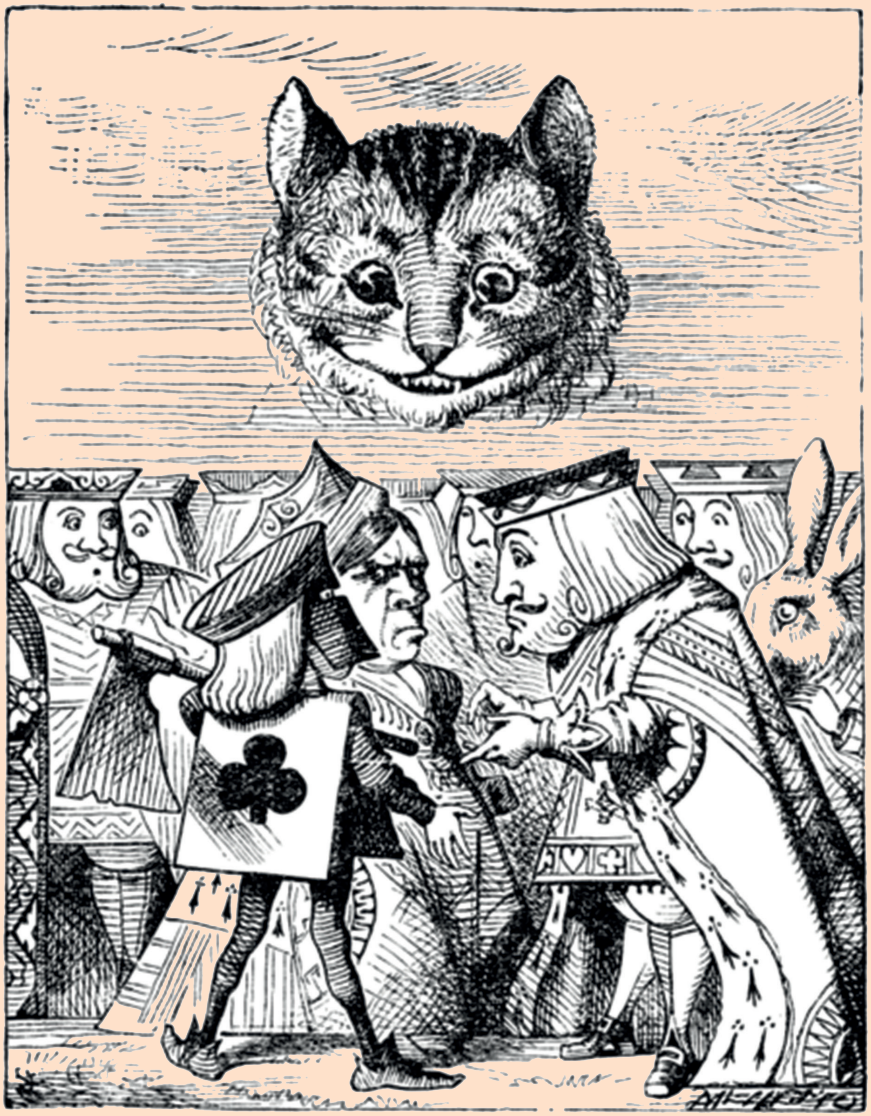
It is not 100% clear why Carroll named this character ‚Cheshire Cat'. „To grin like a Cheshire Cat" was a common phrase in Carroll's day. Its origin is unknown, but it may have originated from a sign painter in Cheshire, who painted grinning lions on the sign-boards of inns in the area.

Another source may be the following: when you take a good look at the ‚Alice Window' in Christ Church, Oxford, you can see 3 grinning animals at the top of the Liddell's family arms. Perhaps this is what inspired Dodgson.

Also, at one time, Cheshire cheeses were molded in the shape of a grinning cat.

Finally, the Cheshire Cat might be inspired by a carving in Croft Church.

„`Cheshire Puss,' [Alice] began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. `Come, it's pleased so far,' thought



Alice, and she went on. `Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'

`That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.

`I don't much care where--' said Alice.

`Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.

`--so long as I get SOMEWHERE,' Alice added as an explanation.

`Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, `if you only walk long enough.'"

„`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.'

Alice didn't think that proved it at all; however, she went on `And how do you know that you're mad?'

`To begin with,' said the Cat, `a dog's not mad. You grant that?'

`I suppose so,' said Alice.

`Well, then,' the Cat went on, `you see, a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad.'"

The Mad Hatter

The Mad Hatter is one of the members of the Mad Tea Party. Later he also appears as a witness during the trial. He occasionally is very rude and provokes Alice during the tea party. When he is called upon by the Queen, he is very nervous and frightened.

In ‚Through the Looking Glass', the Hatter returns in the form of the Anglo-Saxon messenger ‚Hatta'

Although everybody calls him ‚the Mad Hatter', Lewis Carroll never actually called him that in the story. He just referred to him as ‚the Hatter'.

In Tim Burton's 2010 movie, the Hatter's name is Tarrant Hightopp.

The phrase ‚mad as a hatter' was common in Carroll's time. ‚Mad as a hatter' probably owes its origin to the fact that hatters actually did go mad, because the mercury they used sometimes gave them mercury poisoning.

Carroll may have asked Tenniel to draw the Mad Hatter to resemble Theophilus Carter, a furniture dealer near Oxford. Carter was known in the area as the Mad Hatter, partly because he always wore a top hat and because of his eccentric ideas. It is also often suggested thatTenniel made the Mad Hatter resemble the politician Disraeli. Mark Davies arguments that it may have been Thomas Randall, an Oxford tailor.

Many people wonder about the tag on the Mad Hatter's hat. It is a price tag, displaying the price ‚ten and six': 10 shillings and 6 pennies.

The Queen of Hearts

The Queen of Hearts is one of the playing card characters Alice meets when she is finally able to enter the beautiful garden through the door in the hallway.

The Queen of Hearts rules over Wonderland and is a tyrant - violent, authoritative and dominant. She likes to play croquet with live flamingos and hedgehogs as mallets and balls (but only when she wins, and by her own rules) and constantly orders the beheading of people when something isn't to her liking (although these orders apparently never are actually carried out). She also has her own ideas about how trials should be conducted, and is feared by all other Wonderland inhabitants because of her lack of patience and explosive character.

As the ruler of Wonderland, the Queen of Hearts is the character that Alice must inevitably face to figure out the puzzle of Wonderland. In a sense, the Queen of Hearts is literally the heart of Alice's conflict. Unlike many of the other characters in Wonderland, the Queen of Hearts is not as concerned with nonsense and perversions of logic as she is with absolute rule and execution. In Wonderland, she is a singular force of fear who even dominates the King of Hearts. In the Queen's presence, Alice finally gets a taste of true fear, even though she understands that the Queen of Hearts is merely a playing card. The Gryphon later informs Alice that the Queen never actually executes anyone she sentences to death, which reinforces the fact that the Queen of Hearts's power lies in her rhetoric. The Queen becomes representative of the idea that Wonderland is devoid of substance.

Carroll wrote the following about the Queen of Hearts: „I pictured to myself the Queen of Hearts as a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion – a blind and aimless Fury."

The White Rabbit

The White Rabbit is the first Wonderland character Alice encounters. She follows him when he hurries into his hole and thereby enters Wonderland. He appears to be late for his job with the Duchess. While walking through Wonderland, Alice comes upon his house where the White Rabbit, still in a hurry, mistakes her for his housemaid Mary Ann, and orders her to get his gloves and a fan. When she grows and gets stuck in the house, the Rabbit orders Pat to get her out. In the end we discover that the White Rabbit is a herald in the Queen of Heart‘s court.

The White Rabbit is nervous and always in a hurry. However, he is confident enough about himself to contradict the King of Hearts.

Because Alice follows him, he gets things moving again whenever he appears during the story. In a way, he is some kind of a guide through Wonderland for her, only unintentionally.

The White Rabbit doesn‘t have a name; he is just being referred to as ‚the white rabbit‘. In Tim Burton‘s 2010 movie, he has been named Nivens McTwisp.

Carroll himself describes the White Rabbit as follows: „Was he framed on the ‘Alice’ lines, or meant as a contrast? As a contrast, distinctly. For her ‘youth,’ ‘audacity,’ ‘vigour,’ and ‘swift directness of purpose,’ read ‘elderly,’ ‘timid,’ ‘feeble,’ and ‘nervously shilly-shallying,’ and you will get something of what I meant him to be. I think the White Rabbit should wear spectacles. I am sure his voice should quaver, and his knees quiver, and his whole air suggest a total inability to say „Bo“ to a goose!“

Dean Liddell, Alice‘s father, might have been an inspiration for the White Rabbit. The Dean was always running late as well; when Alice was a child, there was no west entrance to the Christ Church Cathedral and the Dean would normally have had to leave the Deanery, walk along Tom Quad, around the Cloisters and into the Cathedral through the south door. Therefore he was notorious for being late for services.

Other characters, in order of appearance:

Alice's sister (Chapter 1, 12);
in the beginning of the story she's reading a very boring book (according to Alice). In the end Alice wakes up in her lap and tells her her adventures. She is presented as a reasonable adult, who, in the end, recognizes Alice's own adult-like qualities.

Dinah (Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4);
she is Alice's cat. She isn't physically there in the book but Alice talks about her many times, especially about the fact that she is good at hunting and killing animals. Therefore she does play an important role.

Mouse (Chapter 2, 3);
this is one of the creatures that fell into the pool of Alice's tears. He tries to dry the others by telling them the driest story he knows.

Duck (Chapter 2, 3);
he also fell into Alice's pool of tears. He is said to be modeled after Canon Duckworth (see the Story Origins section).

Dodo (Chapter 2, 3);
another creature that fell into the pool. He suggests to do a Caucusrace to get dry. He is said to be modeled after Dodgson (Carroll) himself (see the Story Origins section).

Lory (Chapter 2, 3);
Also fell into the pool. She is said to be modeled after Alice's sister, Lorina (see the Story Origins section).

Eaglet (Chapter 2, 3);
Also fell into the pool. She is said to be modeled after Alice's other sister, Edith (see the Story Origins section).

Old Crab (Chapter 3);
with daughter, several birds (among them a Magpie and a Canary with kids)they are also part of the party that fell into Alice's pool of tears.

Mary Ann (Chapter 4);
the White Rabbit's housemaid. She isn't physically there in the book but the Rabbit mistakes Alice for her.

Pat (Chapter 4);
an employee of the White Rabbit. The Rabbit orders him to get Alice's arm out of his window.

Bill (Chapter 4, 11, 12);
he is a lizard and also employed by the White Rabbit. He has to go down the chimney to get Alice out. Later he is a member of the jury during the trial.

2 Guinea pigs (Chapter 4);
they are part of the group that tries to get Alice out of the Rabbit's house.

Puppy (Chapter 4);
very playful, and as Alice is very small he almost runs her over.

Pigeon (Chapter 5);
she mistakes Alice for a serpent because of her long neck. She tries to protect her eggs.

Frog-Footman (Chapter 6);
he serves at the house of the Duchess.

Fish-Footman (Chapter 6);
he brings an invitation from the Queen to the Duchess' house.

Duchess (Chapter 6, 8, 9);
she is very ugly and mistreats her baby. She is also fond of finding morals in things. She tries to be in everyone's good books (especially the Queen's one) by acting very complimentary.

Baby/pig (Chapter 6);
as a baby it constantly howls and sneezes because of the pepper. When Alice takes it outside it turns into a pig.

Cook (Chapter 6, 11);
she makes soup with too much pepper and throws things at the Duchess, the baby and Alice. Later she is a witness in the trial.

March Hare (Chapter 7, 11);
he is holding a tea party with the Hatter and the Dormouse.
The party will continue forever, as they live in a frozen time. Later on, the March Hare is a witness during the trial.

Dormouse (Chapter 7, 11);
another member of the tea party and witness. He constantly falls asleep and is mistreated by the Hare and the Hatter.

Elsie, Lacie and Tillie (Chapter 7);
they are three sisters in the Dormouse's story. They live in a treacle well. It is said that they represent the Liddell sisters (see Story Origins page).Five, Seven and Two (Chapter 8);
they are playing cards and the Queen's gardeners. They're painting roses red because they planted white ones by mistake.

Knave of Hearts (Chapter 8, 11, 12);
he carries the crown and is later accused of stealing tarts.

King of Hearts (Chapter 8, 9, 11, 12);
The Queen of Hearts' incompetent husband. She completely dominates him. The King doesn't have much notion of how a trial works, but is rather stubborn.

Flamingos and hedgehogs (Chapter 8, 9);
they are used as mallets and balls during the game of croquet.

Gryphon (Chapter 9, 10, 11);
he takes Alice to the Mock Turtle. With him he explains the Lobster Quadrille to Alice.

Mock Turtle (Chapter 9, 10);
he seems to be very sad and constantly sobs. He tells Alice about his schooldays.

Jurors (Chapter 11, 12):
twelve creatures act as members of the jury during the trial of the stolen tarts. Among them is Bill, the lizard.

2 Guinea-pigs (Chapter 11);
they are being suppressed during the trial for cheering.

Conclusion

‚We've had enough of that subject, and it would
be just as well if you mention
what you mean to do next,
as I suppose you don't mean to stop here
all the rest of your life'

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‚And what is the use of a book,' thought
Alice `without pictures or conversations?'