

Lewis Carroll's, *1865,*
Alice's Adventures in
Wonderland:

The Adventure from Victorian Fantasy
to Modern Cultural Icon

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Grace O'Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the text.

Grace O'Sullivan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the significance of Lewis Carroll's novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Having originated as a Victorian fantasy the research will reveal how it has sustained a significance and relevance in the modern world. Equally our response to it as a literary work and possibly something beyond that will be examined with reference to the cultural, social and political environment in which it was interpreted.

This study seeks to consider the original intent of Carroll when he wrote this novel. His motivation in writing a children's novel that was so drastically different to any of its contemporaries is still a matter of dispute amongst academics and literary authorities 160 years later. The differing aspects and elements of the novel draw a broad range of criticism and opinion which will be commented on in this thesis.

What is indisputable and which will be demonstrated is that the complex layers and the subsequent dilemmas and conundrums posed afford each generation the opportunity to respond based on their own life experiences. This thesis will appraise why it is that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* remains relevant, accessible, and symbolically rich in modern discourse.

References from Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are referenced to daily, with phrases such as 'down a rabbit hole', 'the white rabbit theory' and Alice in Wonderland syndrome. These amongst others demonstrate how deeply embedded the narrative has become in everyday language, digital culture and psychological discourse. These are recognised cultural reference points known commonly by people many of whom may have never have read the novel and possibly not even understanding from where they have been derived.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to question why it is that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (AAIW)*, 1865, by Lewis Carroll has remained a cultural zeitgeist.

It will examine the time in which it was published returning to the Victorian period. Exploring the origins of the novel and the remarkably open minded and forward thinking freedom demonstrated by its author, Lewis Carroll, he himself was a idiosyncratic individual. His unorthodox approach to life and his failure to adhere to social conventions will be explored. All of this will be done in the context of how he came to be one of the Victorian eras most successful authors upon his publication of AAIW 1865.

Alice was an instant cultural phenomenon from when the novel was first issued. The nature of her character was so atypical of her generation and her social stature that it provoked a huge reaction, largely positive, that has persisted to this day. Her ability to capture the imagination of so many is a testament to Carrolls craftsmanship as an author. It is also a demonstration of his willingness to defy convention in his betrayal of Alice as an independent, free-thinking, young female heroine who lies at the center of his novel. The qualities that he imbued Alice with and his reasoning for doing so will be examined and discussed during the course of this thesis. Both the immediate impact of his work and its longevity that as persisted and prevailed over several generations will also be investigated. It is a thematically rich and deceptively complex tale that enables the reader to interpret it as they will.

Chapter one will delve into the historical context in which the book was conceived and developed from. There will be a particular emphasis on its author, Lewis Carroll, from both a personal and professional perspective.

In chapter two the disparity between male and female children's literature that was prevalent during the Victorian era will be reviewed. The impact that Alice had because she did not conform to expectations and was unlike her contemporaries will also be discussed in the context of gendered literature.

Chapter three the unique nature of Alice as the principle character of the book will be analysed. In addition the extraordinary character of the book itself be highlighted with particular reference to the language used, the illustrations and its cultural legacy.

The methodology undertaken for this thesis included extensive online research from articles, video lectures, documentaries and previous dissertations related to AAIW.

Information was gathered which covered an extended period however there was limited critical evaluation of his work available from the time it was first published. Not unexpectedly therefore the times that were in it,

there was a restricted capacity for widespread opinion about any literary events. As interest in the book grew over the years this has naturally generated a large volume of material that has spawned numerous theories and conversations around the novel and its author.

Obviously more recently, particularly, regarding the internet, there is an open platform for the dissemination and discussion of an authors work. With regard to AAIW there has been a persistent and ongoing exploration of the themes and underlying theories surrounding the book. This thesis will review some of these such as the abuse of power by those in authority, the desire to find personal identity, the manipulation of individuals, the denial of a child's voice or imagination, and an acceptance of social or moral boundaries. As times have changed, especially in terms of personal freedom and thinking from Victorian to modern times there is a new appreciation for the novel and this is something that will be considered during this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

VICTORIAN LITERATURE

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (AAIW) was a children's book conceived in 1864 and later published in 1865 during Victorian times when moral superiority, propriety and poverty dictated the lives of many. The Victorian era spanned Queen Victoria's reign from 1837–1901. Britain was at the height of British imperialism as a result of economic and political exploitation, trade, military and naval power and scientific and technological advances. All of this was underpinned by intense national fervour. The wealthy and elite prospered during this period as could be expected. It also facilitated the emergence of a new middle class that was socially and financially secure within Victorian society. This distinct social class acknowledged the individual and rewarded their efforts with material comfort and stability. There was recognition of the private self and affiliation with this new middle class was deemed to be desirable. This new and relatively affluent group reaped the rewards of changes in education policy, technical advances in printing and increased leisure time. This led to a dramatic increase in literacy rates which in turn created a huge demand for literature in all of its forms.



Fig. 1. *British Novelist Lewis Carroll* [online photograph]

Lewis Carroll was one of those authors who was to benefit, most notably with his production of AIW in 1865. It was an anarchic take on stereotypical and gendered norms that distinguished it from its

contemporaries. I intend to explore the significance of AAIW both then and now in an attempt to understand why it has endured one hundred and sixty years after it was first published

THE AUTHOR: LEWIS CARROLL (1832 – 1898)

Carroll, one of eleven children, was born in Cheshire. He was said to have been somewhat of a Renaissance man as he was a mathematician, a poet, a photographer, a satirist, an inventor, a writer, and an illustrator. His parents were devoutly religious and conservative in their thinking. Despite the hopes of his parents that he would become a fully ordained Anglican priest he pursued a career as a mathematician. He had a natural fascination for storytelling, often curating short pamphlets for his siblings and inventing amusing adventures. In part this may have been a coping mechanism that allowed him to escape from his medical issues e.g. stutter, partial deafness and a weak chest resulting from childhood illness. In a society that was wary of any obvious disability he found solace in the creation of complex unconventional characters. The children of his friend and colleague, Henry Liddell, were a willing audience for his imaginative stories. Allegedly it was the middle daughter of Liddell, named Alice [pictured below], who encouraged him to commit his stories to paper. Carroll worked for three years on the book of AAIW before its initial publication in 1865. Revealed *Sincerely Yours: A Film About Lewis Carroll (2004)*. (2004) [documentary].



Fig. 2. Carroll, L. (1858). *Alice Liddell* [photograph by L.Carroll].

The limitations imposed on him by his external world didn't exist within his own imagination. Carroll had an infatuation with the concept and psychology of dreaming. At first, he viewed dreaming as a negative and the opposite of reason, as a betrayer of the awake mind. To 'Wonder' is something during the tale we all feel as the story unfolds which qualifies

his book as an adventure. In Wonderland the aspect of the nonsensical means that anything can happen even if it only exists in an individual's imagination e.g. animals behaving like human beings.

His dexterity in using nonsense language, word play, mathematical formula amongst numerous other literary techniques is clearly on display. He appreciated the innate purity of a child's thinking and how they approach the world in a different way to that of adults. Education could only do so much and there after the child's own responses and resourcefulness would be at play. The Victorian Web, (1990). *Lewis Carroll (1832-1896)* wrote on this, 'he had a fascination with the perspective of a child'.

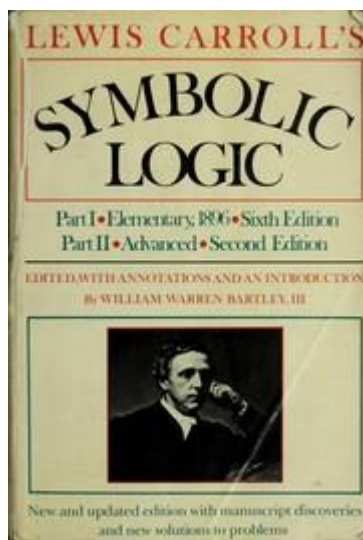


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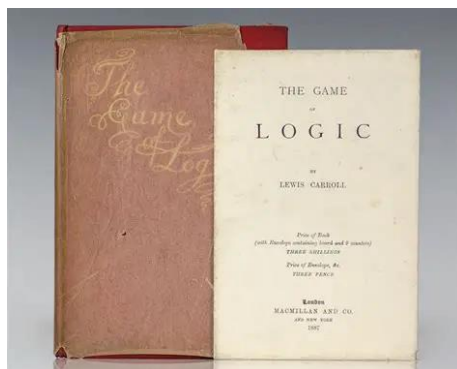


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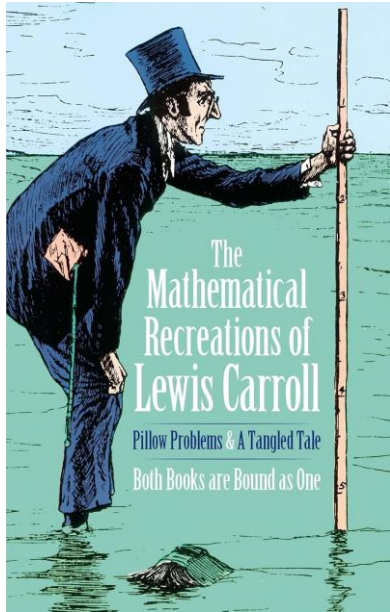


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Carroll was an astute observer of society and a critic of its strict and rigid formalities. He masked his critical evaluation and observations of Victorian society behind his work. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* being the classic example as was his later work *Alice through the looking glass*. As an author, he had no interest in being a publicly recognised face even refusing pictures of himself. He said, 'nothing would be more unpleasant for me than to have my face known to strangers' and that any letters addressed to L. Carroll were to be returned to the sender with the endorsements 'not known'.

In fact, this was the pseudonym he used when publishing material so that he could retain his anonymity and avoid personal criticism. His real name was Charles Ludwig Dodgson, which he translated into Latin as 'Carolus Ludovicus', then anglicised and reversed it so it became Lewis Carroll. This is the perfect example of how he played with words.

Carroll often took his cue to write based upon a remark or a question that would prompt him to explore an issue or a subject further. With a naturally inquisitive mind he was receptive to new ideas and exploring boundaries. He supported and encouraged the concept that a child's own imagination had an intrinsic value. In rejecting the formulaic and predictable literature that was typical of the time he made the morals and taxes of obedience, a large part of a Victorian upbringing, nonsensical but also entertaining and commercially successful.

LITERATURE AND ACCESSIBILITY TO IT

The ability to read was a highly regarded skill that represented personal intellectual advancement and signified an elevated status. The act of reading was seen as a privilege and only a select minority were given the opportunity. It proved to be only truly available to those who could afford and therefore access it. Before children had informal stories, they primarily had etiquette, educational or religious books to read. In an act of service, the churches positively encouraged education and literacy as a means for religious salvation. Every storybook of this period was written with a fixed perspective from a didactic or instructive angle using conventional concepts.

Fairy tales typically conveyed strict moral codes and warnings, laced with caution. The intention being to inform and guide the child on how to become a compliant, obedient and therefore valued individual within British social structures. Generally Victorian children's literature stayed far from adventures of the obscure or unpredictable and adhered to a narrative that would sell.

The child was to be moulded within strict boundaries as to best reflect on their parents and the adults around them. The older generation had the instinct to teach, improve, warn and rebuke, these were striking features of many early books. Adults found comfort in conformity and rule-bound childhoods as it gave the child the recipe it needed to become a productive and valued member of society. Moral and religious teachings, social ideals and morbid consequences blended together in the hope of avoiding social unrest or uncertainty. The Victorians are sometimes credited for having invented childhood, when this is clearly untrue. It would be more accurate to say that it was during this period that people were observing childhood more closely than ever before.

Your class determined how much liberty to be a child you had. Many young children of the poor simply did not have free time as they worked long days in labour intensive factories. Sociologist Henry Mayhew in the London Labour and the London Poor said, 'children of the poor had not the time nor the headspace for entertainment. A small girl-child I came across selling watercress who had entirely lost all childish demeanour and what being a child was indeed in thought and in manner a woman'.

PRINTING

The industrial revolution supported a new wealthier middle class, meaning that more people could purchase books not only for themselves but for their children too. Authors and illustrators were required to think creatively and in new ways for this newfound demand for books solely intended for children.

Publications were being mass produced at a lower cost and higher rate than ever before. Innovations in printing technologies, such as the rotary

machine allowed content to be made on an industrial level. Engraving techniques also developed which allowed illustrations to be added to books. This increased their desirability since even if you couldn't read you could still enjoy the visual story. With the availability of the novel increasing in tandem with increased literacy rates new audiences could be reached. Authors and publishers sought to identify and create new markets for their work, an easily identifiable market being the rising middle classes. Even though many of the tales had been tailored in the mid 18th and early 19th century, they were considered more violent than the versions exposed to today. Tusan, M.E., (2004), *Performing work: Gender, class, and the printing trade in Victorian Britain. Journal of Women's History*, 16(1), pp.103–126 affirm this discussion.

Both Dime novels in the USA and Penny Dreadfuls in the UK were sold at low prices and had widespread availability. These stories were formulaic, developed a reputation as degraded literature, and were less than enlightening. They were an attempt to encourage the working class to adopt the sensibilities of the middle class. Penny Dreadfuls were issued weekly and were both affordable and accessible even to the lower classes. They were highly sensational and highly popular. Typically, writers were compelled to depict life as it affected them e.g. the developing field of science and exploration and through this their social reality was represented. Popular categories of literature among children were science fiction, detective fiction, and fantasy, although adventure stories held the highest demand.

EDUCATION

Education and its importance are a constant theme in AIW, and it contributes to the characterisation of Alice and our perception of who she is and where her place is in Victorian society. Despite her pride in the education, she has received it becomes clear that Alice has limited knowledge e.g. her attempt to guess how far it is to the centre of the earth. The focus of education was an emphasis on Greek and Latin, house systems, school spirit, improving character, with the ultimate goal of moulding a student into a young Christian gentleman. The system as it was, did not foster an inquiring mind across a broad range of topics. Alice's principal education consisted of instruction on morals, obedience and safety and this is her approach to these fantastical situations in Wonderland. Kathy Szoke, in discussing the Victorian audience, asserted that authors sought to make their audience consider issues related to their own lives.

CARROLLS ATTITUDE TOWARD AUTHORITY

Carroll's depiction of the relationships between child and authority reveal the power dynamics and struggle that is repeatedly echoed through Alice. Unprompted, the creatures she lives among constantly comment and

criticise Alice's actions, leading her to question what she previously thought she knew. As she is a young Victorian child, we learn a lot about her life experiences as she tries to apply them. The authoritative figures in Wonderland are portrayed as completely indifferent as they have little care for things younger or smaller than themselves. As her adventure continues Alice grows tired of attempting to understand Wonderland's logic, so she begins to assert herself. The inhabitants of Wonderland, human or animal display no empathy and are driven by their own egos and eccentricities. They are impulsive, irresponsible and indulgent, qualities often seen in children. The Queen of Hearts, Humpty Dumpty and The Duchess are all particularly harsh in their treatment of Alice and those around them.

Carroll manipulated these prejudices through judgement and mockery and demonstrated how words hold power when referring to adults and the establishment. His advice to us was that authoritative figures such as parents, teachers and even royalty are also fallible and therefore open to question or ridicule. His observations of the rigid systems of the Victorian period and our compliance are at the crux of many of the scenes within the book. This nonconformity justifiably gives Alice reason to question the structures of authority and human reasoning that lies at the heart of Alice in Wonderland. The folly and limitations of our man-made ideals are explored at several levels by Carroll. His own expertise in the discipline of mathematics, recognised as an area of formidable rules and restrictions, doesn't escape. He is fearless in his scope of questioning.

The Limits of logic, human desire for truth, to find an outcome, answer the riddle, satisfy our curiosity and give closure and comfort is undeniably within us all. The psychological and philosophical ideas Alice faces are intended to jar with us at a very fundamental level. Alice is seeking the truth as she makes the difficult transition from childhood towards adulthood. Her question 'who you are' is a universal search for self-identity. Initially overwhelmed and uncertain as the book continues, she begins to resist control and the authority imposed on her. The fluctuating dimensions of her surroundings and her own physical changes inside mirror this. Originally the book was titled 'Alice's adventures in underground' pointing to an exploration of the subconscious and a philosophical approach to life. Identity formation and the critical importance of imagination and play for a child are clearly reinforced throughout. Alice is confronted by the difficulties and absurdities of the adult world with all of its structures and strictures. Objectivity and a curious mind is called for.

CHAPTER 2:

GENDERED LITERATURE AND ITS EFFECTS

SOCIETAL PHILOSOPHY

Historically literature created specifically for children was not thought to be of significant cultural or economic importance. What was available was primarily based on easily digestible parables from the bible or old folk tales and fairy stories. Before the 1800s fantasy was guarded and guided to protect children. The character and narrative were developed in support of the socially accepted norms that prevailed. The fantastical was often used as a device to give insight into the perils of non-conformity. In contrast there was safety and security within the familiar. The illusion of fantasy was exposed as untrue, somehow harmful, and reaffirmed the value of remaining in reality. Miller, A.H., 2002. Reading thoughts: Victorian perfectionism and the display of thinking. *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 35(2), p.79, discuss the extremities of these rigidities.

In 1744, *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* is an example where both protagonists, Master Tommy and Miss Polly, were both addressed with no major conflicting gendered ideals and Robinson Crusoe, for his adventure is simply an adventure for all to enjoy

Books asked drastically different things of each of the sexes and therefore it was easy to categorise them by gender. Heteronormative gender structures and proper behaviour was laid out as per gender. This sparked questions in the childlike; Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected to me in the faces and voices of my teachers and neighbours? How am I represented in the cultural image around me? Literature was intentionally divided and serialised with a stark difference in values and morals depending on its intended audience. Literature demarcated by gender communicated to those it was aimed at how they were expected to behave and sought to instil values accordingly. It closely aligned itself to the traditional understanding of the form and function of specific genders.

In an 1894 catalogue of the New York publisher, Charles Scribner's catalogue, *popular books for young people* separates reading by sexes and Scribner's selection of book reviews highlights the unique way boys and girls were to enjoy their reading. Alice is the first young girl to go on an adventure, unlike her contemporary female lead characters. Much of

her adventure invites interpretation rather than direct instruction because much of it is illogical and nonsensical in the formal sense.

Literature played a role in the child's life in helping them to process this idea of identity formation, conceptualisations about gender, accepted behaviour and an understanding of themselves as both individuals and their role in society. Through these tales they are taught how to act and react. The history of children's literature is inseparable from the history of childhood according to Seth Lerer 2021. He went on to say that literature of this particular era taught children to behave like adults. Books written specifically for boys and distinct from that for girls became increasingly popular.

Different or alternative was not to be explored or celebrated in terms of an individual's private or personal choices. Observation and confirmation of the accepted social mores of the time was standard literary practice. Carroll deftly critiques and exposes Victorian anxieties and bias around gender in AAIW.

LITERATURE AIMED AT A YOUNG MALE READERSHIP

Titles and book covers had to draw in young audiences and their parents buying for their child. The vast majority of titles included the word boy or for boys so that their intended readers could readily identify them. The boys' story books were reflections of the imperial pride of Britain, war and adventure. Examples of titles are *Boy Tinker among Turks*, *The Old Flag* (tale of American war of independence), *The King of the Golden River*, *Children of the New Forest*, *Young Pretenders*.

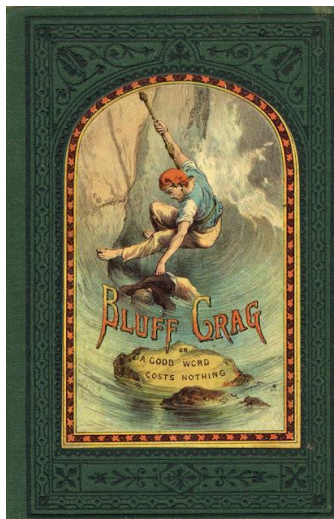


Fig. 6: Bluff Crag or a Good Word Costs Nothing (1872)

[book cover].

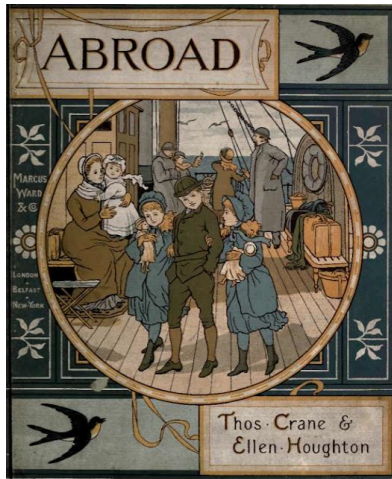


Fig. 7. 1882 *Abroad* Thomas Crane & Ellen Houghton cover illustration by Thomas Crane

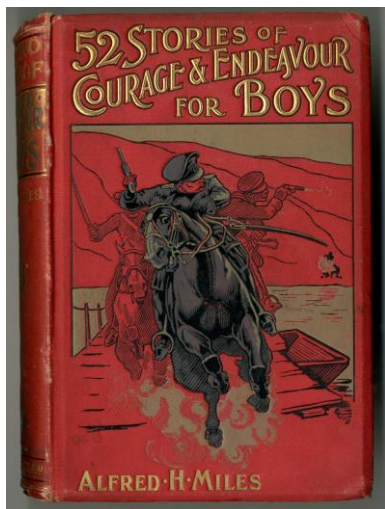


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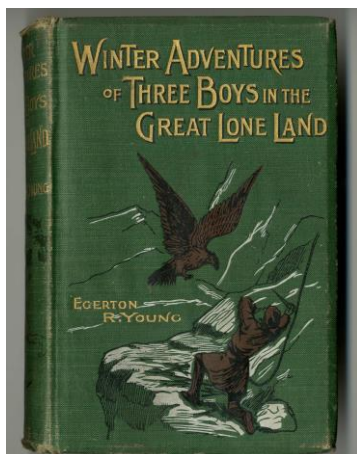


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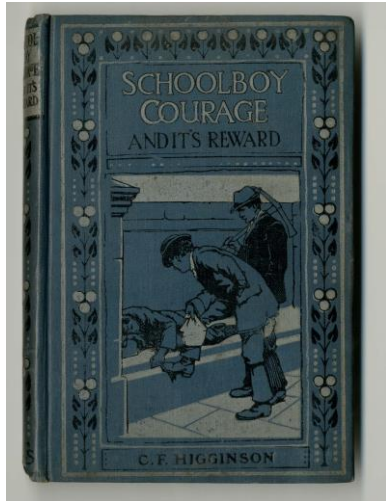


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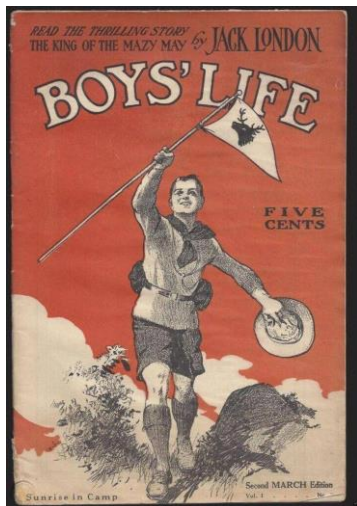


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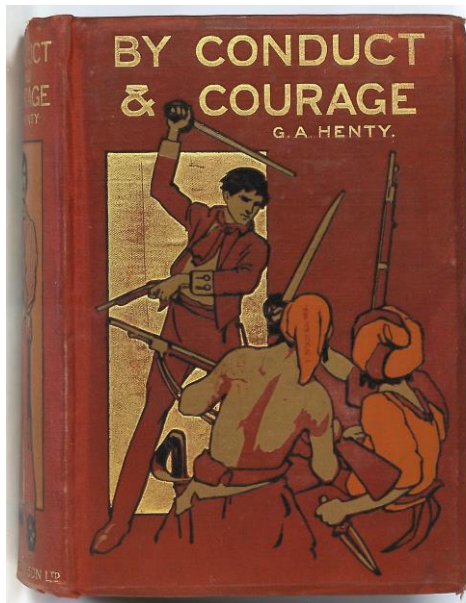


Fig. 12. Henty, G., (1902). *By Conduct & Courage*.

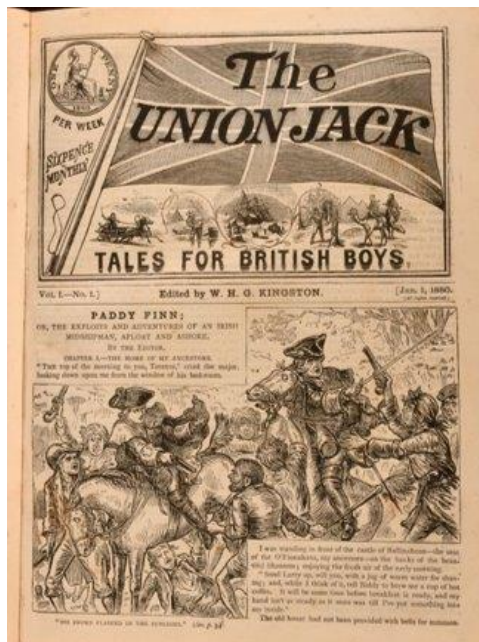


Fig. 13. *The*

Union Jack: Tales For Boys. New York, Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati, Curts & Jennings.

As a general rule books with leading male characters were for everyone while books with female leads were for girls. With this comes the assumption that stories for girls are only niche and interesting if you yourself are a girl. It sent the message that girls were reliably less interesting as a subject matter and therefore less worthy of any great attention, Dunae, P.A., 1980. *Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870–1914. Victorian Studies*.

Authors of boys' children's books tended to be priests, historians, teachers or writers of imperial literature and generally white British men. Popular adventure story authors include R.M. Ballantyne, G.A. Henty and William H.G. Kingston. School story book authors include Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, F.W. Farrer, Charles Jingles and Thomas Huges. Author Hugh Cunningham centred his stories around young men with the females as peripheral characters ready to exert a good influence on the boys as referenced in Bristow, J., 2015. *Empire boys: adventures in a man's world*.

One of the most highly regarded authors of the time, William Henry Giles, was famous for his weekly periodicals and founder of *The Union Jack paper for Boys*. Prior to being a children's author, he was chief editor of *The Colonialist Magazine* and *East India Reviews*, published a manual on *How to Emigrate* and gave college lectures on colonisation. His main interest and focus was to extoll the superiority of the British empire. These tales repeatedly centred on British men experiencing different countries, landscapes and characters. The lessons embedded in these adventures came back to learning about how great the imperial order was when imposed on everybody else. The first issue of *The Union Jack paper for Boys* stated, 'there will be nothing of the dreadful type in our stories and no tales of boys rifling their employers cash boxes', referring to

Penny Dreadfuls. They actively distinguished themselves from pre-existing mundane literary fiction. Westerns had some of the most thrilling themes and grossed the most income from *The Union Jack paper for Boys*. A central point of the periodicals was a change in setting from the United States to British territories like South America and Canada. *Silver Arrow* is an example of a story where a hero faces trials in the Mexican terrain, fights off red-Indians thereby saving his wife-to-be. Bristow, J., 2015. *Empire boys: adventures in a man's world*. Routledge.

Adventure and school stories were short and gripping, suited to the active young British boy who hadn't the time to read at length because they had to divide their time between education and sports. *****ref*****Rotherham in her survey of British children's periodical notes that boys' magazines led by Samuel Bretons *Boys Own Paper* along with offerings from secular competitors, enthusiastically propagated the schoolboys' maxims to, 'never seek, never weep, never lie and never trust foreigners'. Among other magazines like *Boys of England* the honour and pride of the British boy was upheld and celebrated. Whether in the exploits of more wholesome Talbot B. Reeds *Schoolboys* or the less salutary adventures of *Jack Hark-Away. Sou'Wester and Sword* by Hugh St. Leger, including six pages of illustrations by Hal Hurst. This was reviewed by Athenaeum magazine as, 'racy a tale of life at sea and war adventure as we have met with for some time. It is from the first to last plain-sailing, straightforward narrative, alive with incident and character, and stamped with a veracity that suggests actual experience by the author of the things he describes ... altogether it seems the sort of book that boys will revel in'. A review of *The Sea Kings*, a tale of Lord Nelson's days, written by F.H. Winder, including six pages of illustrations by W.S. Stacey, The Academy reviewed as, 'Just the book to put into a boy's hands. Every chapter contains boardings, cuttings out, fighting pirates, escapes of thrilling audacity, and captures by corsairs, sufficient to turn the quietest boy's head. The story culminates in a vigorous account of the battle of Trafalgar, as told by the victorious winner. Happy boys!'. In boy's periodicals reviewer S. Hardly, illuminated the content and tone of what was deemed suitable for aspiring British gentlemen.

These reviews were recommendations and allowed guardians to ensure reading material was appropriate by gender. Through published feedback from boys' literature, we can see their stories are of a proactive and vigorous nature. The tales contained mainly stories of young white men who would travel or had been called to an adventure. This narrative was one of the most popular at the time and thus grew as a classical narrative.

This direct reflection of how men in power acted in Britain, reinforced that outsider and otherness was a threat. Derogatory language was frequently used in the stories and used terms like 'street Arabs' to describe people of a perceived lower class. In doing this it created a barrier between the young boys and those deemed to be 'outcasts.

Treasure seeking and obtaining status was valued and as younger boys became interested in material items publishing companies capitalised on this. From these stories boys were given the impression that they had more societal freedom and more room to dream because of their gender and status. Portrayed repeatedly were young mischievous boys with good hearts. These tales consisted of imperial conquest, colonial values and aimed to inspire these notions among the youths. Typically embedded in these publications was an idyllic man with virtuous values that the young reader would aspire to become.

David Cody wrote in his analysis of *The Victorian Child* that gentlemen encompass status, high moral codes and meet John Ruskin's definition of a gentleman as a man with the following characteristics: 'perfectly bred, after that, gentleness and sympathy, or kind disposition and fine imagination'.

John Henry Newman suggested that the quintessential gentleman should, 'submit to pain because it is inevitable, to bereavement because it is irreparable, and to death because it is his destiny', as he must accept his pain without excessive emotion. However, Lewis Carroll through the looking glass questioned Victorian propriety and even the concept of a gentleman. The white knight to whom Alice meets in the seventh square attempts to hold himself in Newman's requirements with complacent dignity and as a romantic representation of a chivalric hero. With his complete lack of riding ability and failed inventions his attempts at maintaining a gentlemanly air fall short and are a source of amusement. Alice sees through this and pities him for his measly efforts, but she accepts his general incompetence as a chivalric effort represented as satire. According to Carroll such actions lead to tragic isolation as they think too much of the social reaction rather than the doing. Alice's conclusions at the end of both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass*, reveal confusion since she had expected the male characters to have been better educated and more competent than herself although she is still only a child.

Young wealthy Victorian boys of America and Britain had been given an advantage at birth. They were treated as children worth investing in and their education was prioritised over that of females. The wealthier the boy was the more educational resources he was provided with, such as being taught Latin which was a clear marker of elevated social status. To young males this was further confirmation of their superior value.

LITERATURE AIMED AT A YOUNG FEMALE READERSHIP.

The literature directed at young girls served them poorly and was rarely concerned with anything other than domestic tales. Many young girls in the Victorian period secretly read their brothers' books recognising the thrill and excitement contained within. Publishers began recognising this

and feared that the young girls would grow dissatisfied with their insipid stories after reading rousing adventure books. Following this realisation publishers began to emphasise creating more inviting stories for girls. Girl's stories took the form of hearty tomes, since they had more free time than boys their age. They were largely tales of mothers, husbands and chores and always with the understanding that complaints or not adhering to expectations would have consequences. The young girls were to be drawn to the Gorham, D., 2012. *The Victorian girl and the feminine ideal*. Routledge.

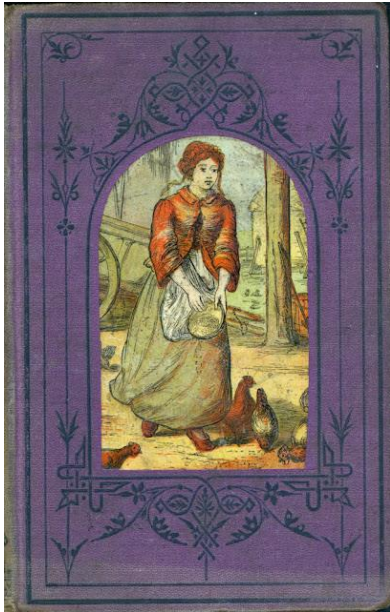


Fig. 14. Better Than Rubies, (1871).

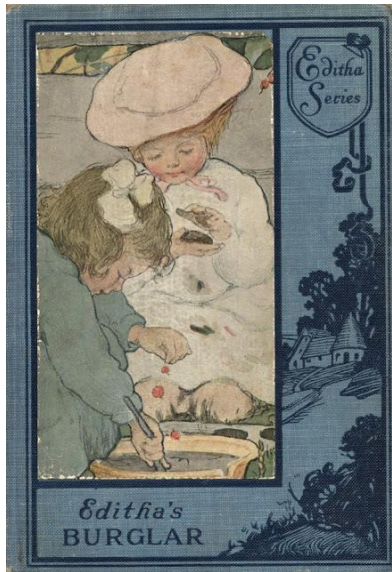


Fig. 15. Edith Series Edithia's Burglar, 1888.

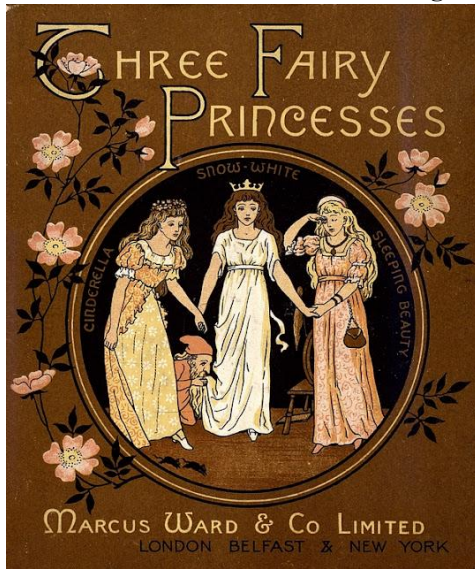


Fig. 16. *Three Fairy Princesses*, 1980

Marcus Ward & Co. Ltd. London, Belfast & New York

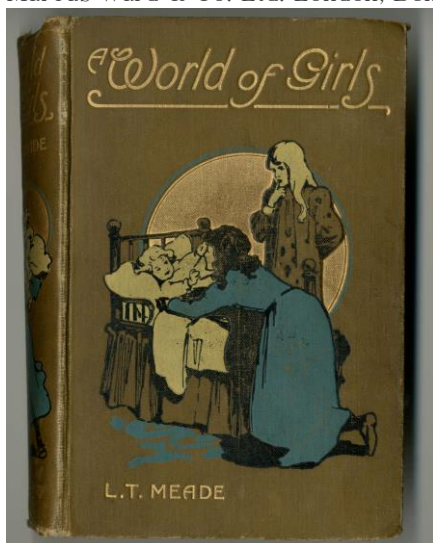


Fig. 17. *A World of Girls: The Story of a School*

(1867).

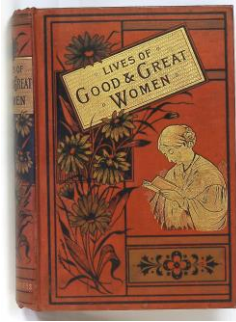


Fig. 18. *Lives of Good and Great Women* (1891).

Etiquette books were a popular purchase for girls particularly so that their manners and demeanour could be maintained and improved. AIW challenges this because even though Alice abides by codes of Victorian decorum, she is still constantly critiqued e.g when she sat down for the tea party without being invited the mad Hatter mocked her for it. As a character she carried herself with such a purpose of politeness, but it is never well received by the creatures around her. This confuses Alice as she would have been taught that there was a value and respectability in good manners. Her class position is revealed by her frustration that her spoken knowledge of mathematical prowess and adherence to social etiquette is subject to criticism. Proudly she tells the mock turtle she attends school every day with lessons in both French and music. Prior to drinking the potion, she notes 'it was all very well to say drink me, but the wise little Alice was not going to do that in a hurry. No I'll look first ' she said 'and see whether it is marked poison or not' for she had read several stories about children who got burnt, eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simplest rules their friends had taught them i.e. a red hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long, if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife it usually bleeds and she had never forgotten that if you drink much from a bottle marked poison it is almost certain to disagree with you sooner or later'. Here she brings to attention her knowledge and education that has been informed by cautionary tales she has heard and read before.

The mistreatment suffered by Alice due to the poor etiquette of the inhabitants of Wonderland possibly reflected Carroll's own relationship with adults when he was a child. From the moment Alice arrives in Wonderland the perspective is skewed as her inner thoughts are revealed. This would have been at odds with the Victorian understanding that children were to be seen and not heard.

Girl's serials emphasised lady-like behaviour, religious conviction, cheerfulness under adversity and familial obedience. Instead of bracing adventures in exotic locales, girls' stories concentrated on realistic depictions of domestic scenes. Sometimes the narrative would encroach on boy's adventures but there were always repercussions. In *The Wide*

Wide World by Susan Warner for example, Ellen Montgomery, the heroine suffers from similar adversities reminiscent of those experienced by the male hero. Her character is abandoned by her parents and travels from the old world to the exotic new, although she is chaperoned the entire time by an uncaring guardian as she repeats to her that this adventure is simply a domestic fantasy. Upon her journey Montgomery fails to become a pirate or to pursue a life of adventure at sea or otherwise. Although remaining staunchly faithful she asserts her independence through her ability to find friends even in unlikely situations, similar to Alice. When the day comes where she is finally old enough to marry, the book ends, and Ellen says softly, 'I am satisfied', nestling against his side, 'that is enough. I want no more. This encapsulates the presumption that it is ultimately Ellen's ambition to be married, and she has no ambition beyond this.

In contrast to the heroics and dynamism of male characters, the young Victorian girls were portrayed as vulnerable, gullible or in danger and therefore needed to be saved. The resilience, bravery and ability of the female is a storyline denied to female audiences. Tomboys are reformed and the vulnerable girl is always saved in her place. This belief system was ingrained, females were submissive, introspective and very accommodating to any male in their lives. They lived in a patriarchal society that failed to recognise their independence and autonomy.

In 1886 Edward G Salmon wrote an article titled *What Girls Read*, in it he suggested that reading gave women and girls the opportunity for independent thought. Likewise, Joan Acocells wrote for the *New Yorker*, 'A big worry was that reading was something women could do alone without anyone to guide their thinking. They would thus learn to do this independently'. There was a lot of discourse around a girl's independence and what could happen, but the fear of the unknown and the power of male dependence allowed this belief system to persist.

Jessica's First Prayer & Jessica's Mother was a Victorian story where a young street beggar lived with her neglectful, non-religious, alcoholic mother who eventually finds her faith in Christianity, her hope is revived and then she finds a man to marry. This symbolises the importance the Victorians believed of following by example and regularly attending church and you will be rewarded with the safety of a family. *Countess Kate and Aunt Judy's tales* are family-oriented stories by Charlotte Younge that ask the child to reflect and pass on the values of the time to the next generation, namely the goal of stability and family. Ophelia: *Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, notes that preadolescence is a beautiful time in a girl's life when she is not held to gender constraints, and that they are marvellous company because they are interested in everything like sports, nature, people, music and books. This was their brief respite from the female role.

CHAPTER 3

Characteristics of Alice, The Language and Cultural Legacy

ALICES ADVENTURE

Alice's adventure is unlike any of her contemporaries in that the narrative arc of the story constantly strays from the classic hero's journey. It is written so that the Victorian reader sees it as a dream narrative where she goes to seek revelations before returning to the waking world. The device of starting and ending the story in the real world serves to frame the entire story.

Alice, in a state of abject boredom where the world around her is recognisable, familiar and safe, falls into a deep sleep and soon begins to dream. Immediately tempted by the curious sight of the rabbit and having arrived in Wonderland, she instinctively tries to reach the beautiful garden because it resonates with her comfortable life in England.

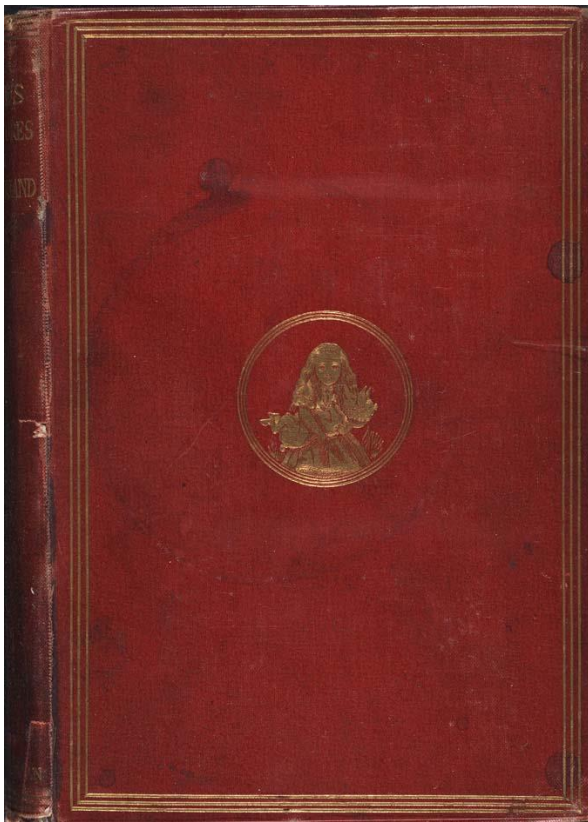


Fig. 19. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Illustrator: Tenniel, 1865) cover [Public Domain] by the Toronto Public Library

In Wonderland the usual conventions of Victorian life were neither recognised nor productive. While liberating since she and the peripheral characters can operate without the constraints of societal norms it is also fraught with uncertainty and bewilderment. Alice has to doubt who she is constantly, frequently struggling to maintain her sense of self. Both her character and the nature of her journey is striking in its originality. She breaks rules, is brilliantly curious and represents the first female lead in children's literature to challenge stale and conservative morals and expectations.

Her adventure represents a bold alternative to a stable world of proof, logic, and rationality and she develops a complexity of character not demonstrated previously. Rather there has been a fundamental shift in her thinking and a deeper philosophical appreciation of the possibilities of life that most Victorians would never attribute to any child let alone an eleven-year-old girl. Alice gains a victory that is not tangible in the traditional meaning.

Alice has a profound sense of where she and those around her stand as a societal group. Equally she has a certainty of what child she does not want to be, 'I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she oh, she knows such truly little' among adults she knows the difference between servants and mistresses, 'he took me for his housemaid, she said to herself as she ran. How surprised he will be when he finds out who I am. 'The governess would never think of exhausting me lessons for that. If she couldn't remember my name, she would call me 'miss' as the servants do.'

The story also contains no clear moral lesson; thus, it was deemed nonsensical by comparison to other children's books of the Victorian age. Typically, these storybooks stayed far from adventures of the obscure or unpredictable and adhered to a narrative that would sell. It lessened the confusion of childhood for the reader and was an introduction into adulthood that bypassed the difficult years of adolescence.

Alice's adventures deviate from the mundane by the use of complex literary methods e.g. metaphors, paradoxes, puns, wordplay, symbolism etc. The story was shunned by some in an attempt to preserve the dreamer's world as a scary and dangerous place. This is an account of the child's plight in Victorian society, and what unfolds when the child lives in a world where rules are not applied. Alice's Adventure is something that truly belongs to her. As exclaimed in essay Universtia Ovidius (2018), *The Deconstruction of Language and Logic in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Wonderland is a fantastical experience that unveils a distorted reflection of Victorian society, with broken cracks within its culture. Reality is constantly questioned in Alice's adventures although her subconscious thoughts are intrinsically bound to her real life. Tweedle Dum says outright, 'You know very well you are not real,' Alice responds, 'I am

real!' and begins to cry. This provokes the reader into actively having to read, process and ultimately decipher the interchange at either a superficial level or with more depth. The actual and fantastical intertwine throughout the story.

Alice's encounters and conversations are commonly fractious, without sequence and in unfamiliar settings that add to the sense of the surreal. Fragments of ordinary Victorian life are dispersed throughout but twisted into new strange patterns, like versions of familiar poems.

Alice frequently interacted with the creatures and objects that inhabit the wonderland world. However, these creatures and objects mimic the appearance and behaviours of humans which increase the absurdity and contradictions within the novel. The characters in Wonderland hold the capacity to speak and direct Alice's behaviour. In the final scene, in sheer frustration with the inhabitants of wonderland she finally speaks up against their ridiculous ways and demands. It is at this moment she stops accepting their behaviour and recognises that they are not behaving as they should in Victorian society. 'Nothing but a pack of cards' she says and then wakes up. She has learned to take things into context both as they appear in wonderland and her lived experience of reality. Alice has chosen to regain control of her own choices and destiny rather than allow external forces to control her. There is a realisation that fantasy is not viable in the reality of the world.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN AAIW

'What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations' said young Alice. John Tenniel (1820-1914) was selected as the illustrator for AAIW because Carroll appreciated the exaggerated caricatures he drew for Punch magazine. He used his talents to professionally mock social and political icons popular in the Victorian period which appealed to buyers. His illustrations are an exploration and celebration of visual and verbal play used to aid a child in their understanding of the verbal text.

The phantasmagorical images add a creative texture to the novel that can't be reached solely through words. Tenniel's drawings are the literal and metaphorical core of Alice's adventure. The narrator often points the reader to the illustrations for guidance, 'If you don't know what a gryphon is, look at the picture'. This renders the illustrations inextricable from the text as they are an integral in its telling. Helen Groth notes 'The visual meditation of John Tenniel's illustrations create a more porous surface between Alice and her readers; an intimate synchronous connection.'

During his forty-three-year career with Punch Magazine, he was promoted to principal cartoonist. Knighted in 1893 by queen Victoria it represented a figurative seal of approval for the cartoonist's profession. This honour was an important sign of changing times, especially in printing and publishing. Between King George VI and Queen Victoria as Alice A. Carter states, "His [Tenniel's] discretion yielded a half-century

with Punch and resulted in a knighthood for his moderating influence on political discourse.”

George Cruikshank (1792–1878), a fellow illustrator of the 1800s commended the formatting and the book's design, ‘Whose pictures appear in simple harmony with the prose, as if words and images were created by one hand to form the perfect vision.’ He was another British caricaturist and illustrator whose work began as a political satirist but later included topical and children’s books. He leaned more towards naturalistic figures over theatrical and was well known for his humorous and often anthropomorphised animal caricatures.



Fig. 20. John Tenniel, *Mad Hatters Tea Party*, 1865 [illustration].

The visual aspect aided in introducing a playful way to engage the child into fantastical literature rather than the solely educational. The 18th century was a time for political cartoonists to openly poke fun at controversial leaders and the drama of the royal family. The British cartoonists had far more freedom in this regard than their foreign counterparts. Visiting Europeans were astonished by the outright mockery of political leaders and the liberties the British had in doing so. Print shops could be found next to the royal palace, remorselessly displaying caricature cards in their front window often ridiculing the wealthy and elite. The patrons of their work were the upper echelons of society themselves. British caricature would not have been so successful if it was not supported, both financially and socially by the genteel classes. These depictions were routinely to be found where they could be

viewed by the public e.g. In windows of print shops, barbers, taverns and coffee houses. Full editions and hand-coloured cartoons came at a cost most couldn't afford.

LITERARY TECHNIQUES USED BY CARROLL

Almost every story followed a 10 act structure that was devised by John Campbell i.e. a call to adventure/the refusal of the call/meeting the mentor/crossing the threshold/tests, allies, enemies/innermost cave/the ordeal/the reward/the return (with knowledge or something physical).

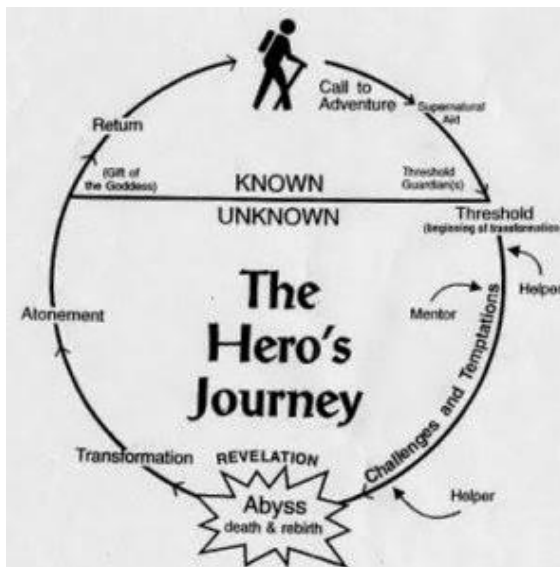


Fig. 21. John Campbell, *The Hero's Journey* [chart].

Lewis Carroll argued that his structure in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* allowed the narrator's input to be the voice of common sense, as they addressed Alice's actions and guided us on this tour of an unnatural world. His novels do not follow the typical hero format as the closest thing to a formal structure is that of a card game or in the case of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* that of a game of chess. Carroll encouraged the reader to investigate unusual and irrational ways of thinking. Even when it was uncomfortable, confusing or unsettling he asked us to question. He emphasises the wealth of possibilities in the fantasy world and encourages us to enjoy our time there rather than fear it. Described as literary nonsense AAIW allowed Carroll to let his imagination roam without any of the limitations of recognised literary rules. However, at its core these scenarios dealt with logic, reason and philosophical conundrums. Nurdiana, N. and Evyanto, W., (2019). *The Hero Journey of Alice in "Alice's Adventure in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll; Archetypal* [online] confirms this notion.

This particular literary technique became a genre in its own right and multiple authors have adopted this subconscious, almost dream-like approach in their own writing. It has been suggested that Carroll was himself under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs at the time he wrote

AIW. It is acknowledged that he took Laudanum for medical purposes, a component of which is opium. Opium smoking dens were not uncommon in Victorian London and were openly frequented by its population because there were no negative connotations, unlike today.

Carl Jung theorised that character archetypes resulted from innate behaviours shaped by our collective subconscious which we recognise across all cultures. They are universal images and thought patterns often found in dreams, myths and stories e.g mother and child. Carl Goldens went further and curated a concise summary of infographics of each character. These infographics allow complex text, data or details to be minimised. Instead, visual depictions are provided to convey the information in its simplest form, not dissimilar to a modern 'mind map' routinely used by neurodivergent learners. W.H. Auden wrote in his *Victorian versus Wonderland Values in Alice Books*, 'One of the most important and powerful characters is not a person, but the English language.'

Carroll blurred the lines of reality and fiction with anchor points of recognisable truths, so readers had to actively engage with the text.

Nonsense has to be processed by an accepted series of facts in order for it to function. Carroll is a master in presenting this nonsense both visually and in word so that it appears to be equally bizarre and preposterous at times to the reader. It is counterintuitive precisely because it does not follow an expected order or familiar outcome. The world as he presents it to Alice is at variance with all she knows to be true as a child of Victorian times. As events unfold the contradictions increase so that a disconcerting reality of a world with no observance of social etiquette or boundaries is revealed. This disruption of conventions, situations, behaviour, and attitudes is what finally leads Alice to attempt to regain control. The use of language itself is also disrupted. The spoken word is subject to interpretation and does not depend on any universally accepted meaning eg. Humpty Dumpty 'who will be master? it is his personal choice as to the meaning of the word and the context in which he uses it. Carroll recognises that words and the structure of language are a unifying force in helping individuals to understand their role.

The world where Alice and her readers are from is that of the British empire. Translations of the book haven't always fared well because it is dependent on an understanding of the nuances of the British social system. In some instances, adaptations had to be made to account for this, and jokes were tailored to the audience. These changes were not made at the expense of keeping Alice's story relatable on the superficial level or denigrating the complex subliminal messages within the text. W.H. Auden (Soss Efram Melik, 1972) wrote of the two Wonderland books, 'One of the most important and powerful characters is not a person, but the English language'. Carroll was interested in when and why sentences make sense and he was unafraid to explore the building blocks that underlie language. 'Humpty, when I use a word, it means just

what I choose it to mean, neither I more nor less. Lyth and slimey to make slithey, miserable and flimsy to make mimsey.

CRITICAL REACTION TO AAIW

Alice's adventure differed from other books as it touched on unique themes e.g. introspection, the impossibility of controlling the act of growing up, a celebration of nonsense, assumptions and precautions on the social workings of the world, identity (race, class, sexual orientation), our desire for truth, mortality, rationality, certainties of routine life and the distinction between reality and dreamscape. Deep thinker Plato poses the question, 'How do we know what is real? How can we prove what we think is true?'

AIW was a sensation when it was released in 1865 and seemed to have been almost universally well received, following a sell-out, a new edition was released in 1866. The 1871 sequel, 'Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There' was an equal success. Queen Victoria enjoyed the original so much she herself asked that Carroll dedicate the second to her which he did. Despite the conservatism of the Victorian period there was clearly an appetite for progression and change.

Magazines like Atheneum harshly reviewed his tale of Alice as 'stiff, overwrought story'. The Illustrated Times said, 'The author possessed a fertile imagination, declaring that Alice's Adventures are 'too extravagantly absurd to produce more diversion than disappointment and irritation.' These reviews favoured and praised the traditional simple stories with clearly defined arcs of good and evil and where the gender of the protagonists is clearly in line with social expectation. This served to reinforce the public's view on gender itself.

CONCLUSION

It is accepted that as a spiritual text, the bible is the most widely referred to book in the world. What may not be so well known is that Alice in Wonderland is only superseded by the more recent Harry Potter series in terms of worldwide popularity. The success of the latter was without doubt helped by its exposure using the machine of modern media and marketing techniques. Carroll, being an astute man, had recognised the value of exposure in promoting AAIW even in 1865 and designed biscuit tins, postage stamps etc in an era when that was not standard practise. That makes it all the more remarkable that Alice has held its place in the hearts and minds of so many.

The novel emerged during an era of exacting moral, social, cultural and political convictions. These were exposed through the story of a young girl who found herself in a dystopian world. It can be read as a fantasy novel whose intent was never meant to be more than entertainment. However, its subtext, the juxtaposition of what we understand to be true and our blind acceptance of it is tested. The reader's willingness to see beyond the irrational and to be open to an alternative way of being is entirely subjective. While originally the novel was seen as no more than a children's book this changed with the development of modern psychological theory in the 20th century. It was in most part a post Freudian movement that led to theories of darker undertones in AIW. Critics and biographers alike reassigned a deeper significance to the novel. At its extreme the book was banned e.g., Huan province, China 1931. By 1960 religious and academic groups in the USA had sufficient concerns to get the book banned there. This followed an early prohibition of the book in American schools in 1900. A decade after the 1951 Disney film it was again subject to examination because of a shifting culture as it was associated with the increasing popularity of recreational drug use.

As a literary work it has persisted despite scrutiny over the ethics of Alice's experience and continues to resonate with new audiences although questions around its content and its meaning prevail. It was not only a literary phenomenon in 1865 but continues to this day, never having been out of print since and translated into 174 languages. This is dissimilar to much of contemporary Victorian literature which hasn't fared well because of its reliance on observed behaviours and linear storytelling. Goodacre, S. (2025) *Publishing of Alice*.

Theatre adaptations (the first of which was 1886), fair rides, themed club nights, ballets, shows, raves, themed escape rooms, art, fashion, songs, architecture, comics, video games, three operas and forty film productions are all testament to that fact. The duration of its popularity reflects its pronounced effect on the audience who have either read or seen it. Artists and readers of literature describe the original novel as a 'creatives bible' because of its boundless imagination making it an invaluable source for future artistic efforts. People famous for their

artistry were inspired by the text e.g. James Joyce, Orson Wells, George Orwell, and in films such as *Minority Report*. More alludes to the text below. Lewis Carrolls' pertinence can be seen in the 1967 Beetles album cover, his significance in his selection can be seen as he is one of 58 people chosen.



Lewis
Carroll

Fig. 22. The Beatles, (1967). *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*.



Fig. 23: The Guardian, 2024. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Wheeldon Ballet*.



Fig. 24: Tim Walker Studio, 2018, *Alice: Curiouser and Couriouser*.

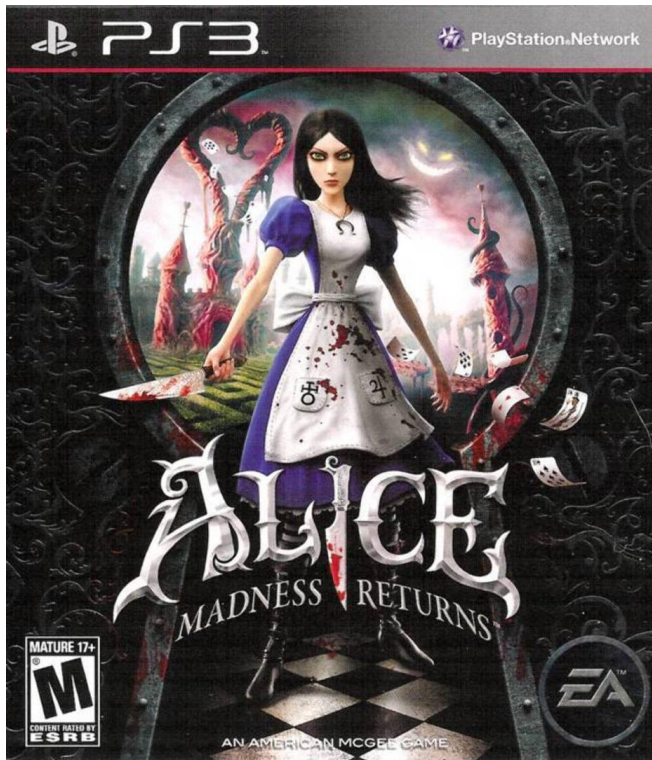


Fig. 25. American McGee Game, 2010, *Alice Madness Returns* [video game].



Fig. 26. Salvador Dali, 1969, *Down the Rabbit Hole*.



Fig. 27. R4Jose De Creeft, 1959, *Alice in Wonderland*, Central Park New York.

Alice's Question "who in the world am I" is a universal question of self-discovery. Her admonishment that 'you're nothing but a pack of cards' is a call to stand up to unjust systems and develop your own moral compass.

We live in a time of personal, social and political unrest where the rules of society are not as clear as they once were. How we navigate that as individuals, communities and nations is increasingly fraught with difficulty.

Alice in wonderland prompts us to actively think about who we are and what our expectations are. It's a basic human reaction to try to apply order as we understand it based on the conscious or subconscious principles that we have grown up with and which reflect our generation. At the core of AAIW we find Alice confronting these boundaries and expressing her self determination in a world she struggles to understand. We can relate to her at a very human level and increasingly so living in the pressure of the modern world.

Alice in wonderland syndrome also known as Todd's syndrome is a medically recognised neurological disorder that alters a person's perception of size, shape and time. This sensory distortion and overload was the essence of wonderland and its inhabitants. 'Falling down a rabbit hole' is a term in common usage even today and is understood without any great explanation. In regard to the confusing world within the internet and AI we can find ourselves in a position similar to Alice. Questioning reality, legitimacy and the logic of coming and goings of videos of white rabbits on trampolines. Anyone who has 'lost' time while browsing the internet or social media can appreciate the sense of detachment until they disconnect.

It is inescapable that each new generation, despite our supposed sophistication, still has to navigate the world they find themselves in. Are we really any better informed or prepared than our predecessors of Victorian times or have our lives become massively complicated precisely because we have free will and choice in so many areas.

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