

“And What Is the Use of a Book... without Pictures or Conversations?”: The Text-Illustration Dynamic in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

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Abstract This paper examines the relationship between the narrative text and illustrations in Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, as illustrated by John Tenniel, and Dodgson’s self-illustrated manuscript of *Alice Under Ground*. By situating *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as a text in dialogue with Darwinian economics and theories of evolution, this paper argues that Tenniel and Carroll’s illustrations depict the impossibility of maintaining innocence and the state of childhood in a world overrun by consumption, riddled with unstable Darwinian economics and theories, and corrupted by inefficient and arbitrary authoritarian institutions. Indeed, the interplay between text and image ultimately suggests that these systems regulating Victorian England will inevitably force the child to enter an absurd world where everyone is mad, or adopt an adult rationalist view, both choices curtailing the possibility of the carefree, innocent child.

Key words Lewis Carroll; John Tenniel; illustration; Darwinian evolution; capitalism; Consumerism; children’s literature

Author **Jessica W. H. Lim** is studying her PhD in English literature at the University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on eighteenth and nineteenth-century children’s literature, and her PhD thesis explores the reception and influence of Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s children’s works in nineteenth century England.

Perched atop the title “Chapter 1”, John Tenniel’s checked-jacket clad rabbit towers over a dandelion and peers sternly at a pocket-watch, parasol tucked under one arm. Dominating the upper half of the page, his presence generates questions

concerning human-animal relationships, social behaviours and cultural norms, and the role of illustrations in novels. Thus, when Alice muses in the opening sentence, “And what is the use of a book [...] without pictures or conversations?” (Carroll 9), her question has already been prefaced, and in part answered, by Tenniel’s rabbit. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* suggests that a book is most complete and engaging when it combines different forms of communication in concert and in counterpoint with each other.

Discussion concerning the text-illustration dynamic in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* remains underdeveloped, in spite of the fact that Carroll conceived of his novel as an illustrated text. This essay explores the synergistic operation of text and image as a mode of engaging the novel’s dual readership, by performing a comparative analysis of Tenniel’s and Carroll’s illustrations of key moments in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and in Carroll’s self-illustrated manuscript *Alice Under-Ground*. Tenniel and Carroll’s illustrations operate in dialogue with Carroll’s text to critique Victorian paradigms of consumption, Darwinian theories of evolution, and arbitrary and unjust authority systems that threaten the innocence of the child.

While Tenniel’s illustrations of Alice have generated critical attention, the relationship between illustrations of Wonderland and Carroll’s text invites further exploration. Mark Sinker describes Tenniel’s gravitational pull over the cultural image of Wonderland (Sinker 35), but does not adequately discuss the implications of Tenniel’s illustrations as interpretations of key themes and concepts explored within Wonderland. F. J. Harvey Darton notes that artists depicting Alice tend to shy away from creating new White Rabbits or Cheshire Cats which “are essentially [...] the creation of the first artist and of the author” (cited Hopper 63), a claim striking first for its insistence that the “first artist and [...] the author” possess equal ownership over the appearance of those iconic Wonderland inhabitants, and for its apparent unawareness that there were *two* simultaneous “first artists” of Wonderland. Even Michael Hancher’s valuable work on Tenniel and Carroll’s illustrations provides minimal discussion regarding page layouts and text-image interactions. Yet Carroll was interested in the different effects of broader centre-page illustrations and border images, and sometimes specified whether images should be placed on the left or right margin (Hancher 125). Indeed, the production history of *Alice in Wonderland* reveals that Carroll and Tenniel designed the Alice books so that text and illustration would be “significantly juxtaposed on the page” (Hancher 120). In June 1864 Carroll requested his publisher to alter the size of the book’s pages to make adequate space for Tenniel’s illustrations (Hancher

171); on 13 September 1864, Carroll completed a hand-printed manuscript of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* with 37 illustrations; one month later, Carroll's diary records his opinion of Tenniel's initial sketches of Alice (Hodnett 171). It was not until 26 November 1864 that Carroll gave Alice Liddell his self-illustrated manuscript of *Alice Under-Ground*, by which stage *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was ready to be printed.

As illustrated novels, the images in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Under-Ground* interpret and foreshadow the narrative text, enriching the reading experience by providing readers with multiple thematic interpretations of a single incident within the physical boundaries of the individual printed book (or manuscript). As Edward Hodnett notes, images create the possibility for multiple reading experiences, as readers may encounter illustrations as they occur in the text, or may see the illustrations while they are flipping through a yet-unread book. In the latter instance, the presence of illustrations can shape a reader's mood before a single word is read (Hodnett 13). The importance of pictures in the published novel is signalled by Tenniel's full-page frontispiece, an image illustrating the court trial in the penultimate scene of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The dais upon which the King and Queen sit is a vector dividing the upper and lower half, signifying an unequal division of power. The King, flanked by the scowling Queen and White Rabbit, stares upon a set of parrots in judges' wigs, a parodic comment on the inefficacy of the ostensibly non-prejudicial adversarial justice system. Tenniel's illustration has been compared to his drawings for Martin Tupper's "Of Estimating Character" (Hancher 35), suggesting that Tenniel used his illustration to criticise the chaotic injustice rampant in Wonderland. Thus, the idea that images may interpret narrative themes is implicit before the narrative text commences. Hodnett's concept of illustrations as "parallel pictorial statement[s]" therefore places too much primacy upon the text (Hodnett 15). If pictures are mere reinforcements of authorial intent, one must conclude that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is primarily concerned with the inefficacy of the adversarial justice system, where Kings are advised by rabbits, and parrots are employed as judges.

Critical discussions of picture books provide more nuanced approaches to the communicative and interpretative potential of images. Perry Nodelman's insightful study of picture books suggests that visual representations draw upon viewers' foreknowledge and are always more than a literal evocation of objects (Nodelman 10). This is significant for a study of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as even the first readers would have approached the text with some visual familiarity with Tenniel's style, for Tenniel was the lead cartoonist for the Large Cut of the

Punch magazine (Hancher 3). Nodelman's research indicates that pictures change a readers' reception of the meanings of words, demonstrating that image and text achieve a "unity on a higher level" (Nodelman 196–99). While Nodelman's study concerns picture books, not illustrated texts, he describes Tenniel's illustrations as "active pictures" that balance Carroll's "slow-moving text," making his assertion that illustrations add another level of play between expectation and surprise to the reading experience particularly crucial with regard to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Nodelman 70). In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll's placement of images plays upon readers' foreknowledge and visual expectations. The text and illustrations operate synergistically, to borrow Lawrence Sipe's term (Sipes 11), as the images are placed to foreshadow events that have not yet occurred in the text, shaping readers' narrative expectations. This act is comforting, providing a framework of expectation in a narrative shaped by unexpected twists and events; it is simultaneously terrifying in its illustration and mimicry of Wonderland's instability and non-linear progression.

Carroll's opening sentence of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* insists upon the centrality of illustrations to a certain type of book:

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?' (Carroll 9)

The novel is focalised through Alice, through whom childhood is presented as a time free from responsibility or industry. She has the luxury of being bored and "having nothing to do," and is the new child reader who prescriptively demands that books should contain pictures and conversations. Through the free indirect discourse that flows into her rhetorical question, the narrator implicitly supports Alice's view, positioning readers to share Alice's textual expectations. Ironically, Alice is initially bracketed outside her sister's book, into which she can only peep; she becomes a guide navigating readers through a new book, the illustrated book.

Tenniel and Carroll's illustrations of this opening scene highlight aspects of social expectations challenged by the narrative text, but Tenniel and Carroll emphasise different aspects of these challenges. Tenniel's half-clothed humanoid rabbit precedes the text, provoking questions about the boundaries between human and animal before the reader encounters the first sentence. Illustrated in the French tradition, Tenniel's rabbit is drawn with realist shading and proportions. Although

Gwen Vredevoogd states that Tenniel’s illustrations emphasise whimsical qualities in Carroll’s text (Vredevoogd 17), the use of the French tradition of half-clothed animals connotes satire (Hodnett 176), suggesting that there is a cultural, and not merely an aesthetic, statement in Tenniel’s rabbit. Early reviews praised Tenniel’s “truthfulness [...] in the delineation of animal forms,” which Rose Lovell-Smith compellingly argues reflected the heightened interest and anxiety surrounding natural history discourse following Darwin’s publication of *Origin of the Species* (Lovell-Smith, “Animals of Wonderland” 395). Thus Tenniel’s mix of realism and absurdity mimics Carroll’s humour, foreshadowing questions about the dichotomy between animals and humans. Carroll’s illustration in *Alice Under-Ground* depicts Alice leaning against her older sister, absorbed in her book. It is nestled on the upper right side of the page, interrupting the text and visually enacting and foreshadowing the White Rabbit’s interruption of Alice’s reverie (see fig. 1). Its content also challenges eighteenth century concepts of reading as a sociable activity, as Alice stares blankly ahead while her sister fails to recognise Alice’s emotional needs due to her focus on the book in her hands.

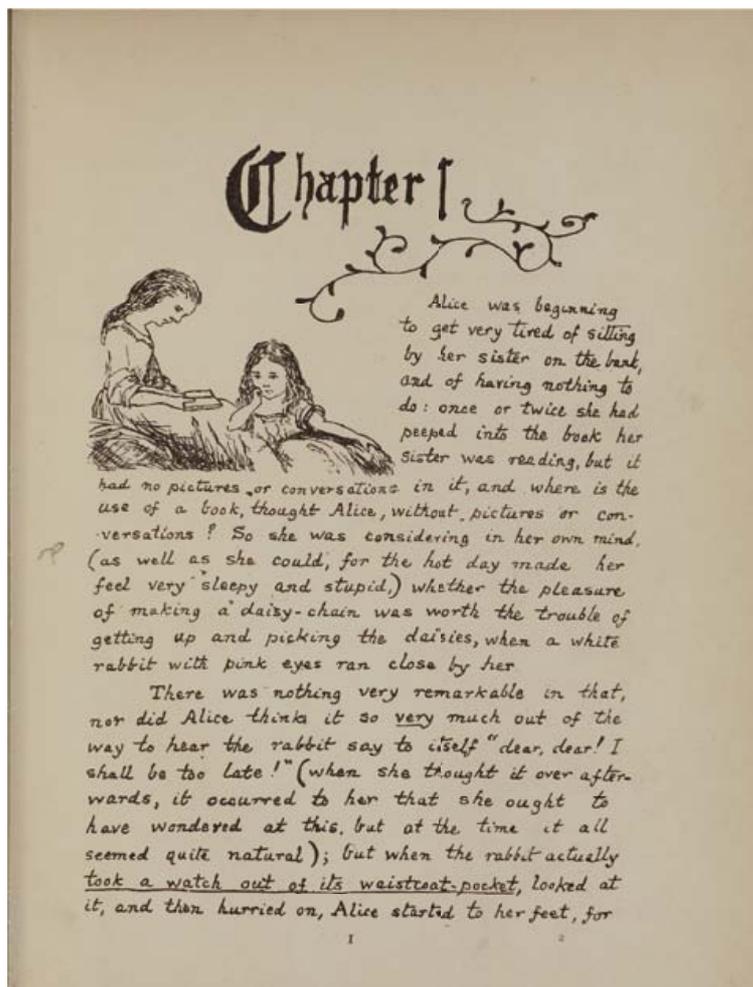


Fig.1 ¹

Following Alice's (literal) fall into Wonderland, Alice consumes objects that alter her bodily form, and Carroll's and Tenniel's illustrations highlight the text's concern regarding the dangerous instability of human identity in a world where people are encouraged to pursue insatiable desires. Alice consumes food and changes size or shape eight times. One quarter of Tenniel's remaining illustrations in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* depict Alice in the moments immediately preceding or following these size changes, suggesting the thematic and visual significance of these episodes. Alice's eating habits and the centrality of food in Wonderland have drawn critical attention; Michael Parish Lee summarises the main critical camps as those who see eating in terms of predation, either the author preying upon Alice, or Carroll exploring the Darwinian struggle for survival; or those who see eating as a comment on the anxiety of control (Parish Lee 490). Parish Lee suggests that eating in Wonderland merges the human character with "things," destabilising human identity (Parish Lee 490). Parish Lee's insistence that Carroll complicates "thing theory" (which differentiates between humans as subjects and non-human objects) is supported by the fact that the objects Alice consumes affect her size, transforming Alice into an acted-upon object. As Alice first drinks the bottle labelled "DRINK ME" then eats the cakes that spell "EAT ME", Dennis Denisoff's definition of consumer culture as a phenomenon reliant "on small-scale act of identity formation [... in] a society defined by desire and consumption" becomes paradigmatic for Alice's size changes in Wonderland (Denisoff 1).

Tenniel and Carroll's illustrations emphasise the grotesqueness of Alice's rapid size changes and suggest that these are the unnatural effects of extravagant consumption. Her consumption of a prettily packaged bottle leads to her sudden and potentially fatal bodily changes, which result in Alice nearly drowning in a pool of tears, suggesting the dangers of unchecked participation in commercial consumption. Tenniel's second and third images in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* depict Alice discovering the impossibly small door through which she spies the Edenic garden, and the moment when Alice picks up the bottle labelled "DRINK ME" in an attempt to enter the garden. The image of Alice picking up the bottle pre-emptively illustrates her act of drinking from the bottle, forewarning the reader of a not-yet-narrated event. In the image, Alice lifts the bottle halfway to her lips, a serious and un-childlike expression on her face. Her un-childlike facial features are significant. Jacquelyn Spratlin Rogers notes that illustrators are important indicators of society's interpretations of childhood (Spratlin Rogers 43), and Peter Hunt identified a shift in the 1840s in which illustrators drew children

as children (Hunt, *An Introduction* 54), but Alice’s severe frown contradicts the narrative’s presentation of Alice as a dreamy and distracted child. Of further significance is Tenniel’s background with Punch, for Tenniel’s Alice had been introduced to the British public in a June 1864 cartoon as the embodiment of pacifist non-interventionist Britain (Hancher 20). Tenniel’s Alice, therefore, is not an image of “beauty, wit, charm and sexless purity [...] through which the adult chooses to envision childhood” (Hemmings 60); or she is not merely that, for Alice has always been visually implicated in the adult world of politics and mass media (Leary 160). For all that critics insist that Victorian authors tended to shy away from economic or monetary discourse when describing children, frequently depicting children as spiritually pure (Denisoff 8), Alice is drawn to the bottle, around the neck of which “was a paper label, with the words ‘DRINK ME’ beautifully printed on it in large letters” (Carroll 13). The detailed description of the label’s material, the size of the printing, and the adverb “beautifully” highlight Alice’s materialist gaze, and the capitalisation of the instruction ‘DRINK ME’ emphasises the scene’s consumerist elements. When Alice drinks from the bottle, it has “a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast” (Carroll 14), and the cumulative listing of luxurious food items emphasises the extravagance of her act of consumption. William Empson identifies the rich foods as symbols for grown-up luxuries (Empson 264), further suggesting that Alice’s act of drinking is an engagement with the adult world of market-based consumption.

Alice’s extravagant act of consumption fails to facilitate her entry into the garden, and Tenniel’s illustrations highlight the effects of an economy based upon constant consumption. Having shrunk to the size of the door, Alice realises she has forgotten to carry the garden key with her. After crying, she discovers

a little glass box... she opened it, and found in it a very small cake, on which the words ‘EAT ME’ were beautifully marked in currants. ‘Well, I’ll eat it,’ said Alice, ‘and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door: so either way I’ll get into the garden, and I don’t care which happens!’ (Carroll 15)

Alice displays a materially focused gaze, as emphasised by the description of the “little glass” box and the “very small” cake. The intertwining of materialism and physical consumption is highlighted by the edibility of the words “EAT ME” — which are, the consumerist Alice notes, beautifully rendered. Alice’s

logic of impulse further reveals the extent to which her thoughts are shaped by consumerism. Her colloquial conclusion begins her reasoning: "Well, I'll eat it", and her syllogism is focused around entering the garden, either by key or by creeping under the door. An element of her childish impulsiveness creeps into her non-rational declaration, "I don't care which happens!" but her single-minded desire again results in a grotesque body change as her neck lengthens to an impractical height. Both Tenniel and Carroll illustrate the uncomfortably long-necked Alice, who occupies the majority of the page margin. In Tenniel's illustration, Alice occupies the left margin of the page, splitting the page into equal portions of image and text, intensifying the intimated struggle between two forces or modes of communication (Carroll 16). Her shadow prominently colours the left side of the image, interrupting the border of white space, suggesting barriers or entrapment, intimating the cycle Alice falls into in the next four chapters of unexpected and unwelcome size-changes that prevent her entry into the desired garden. In Carroll's manuscript, the ill-proportioned Alice stares sadly at her feet from the right margin, physically pushing the text aside (see fig. 2). The illustration highlights Alice's discomfort in response to her bodily changes, and the placement of the image intimates a power struggle between image and text; perhaps, allegorically indicating tension between 'adult' means of communication (words) and the visual world of the child.

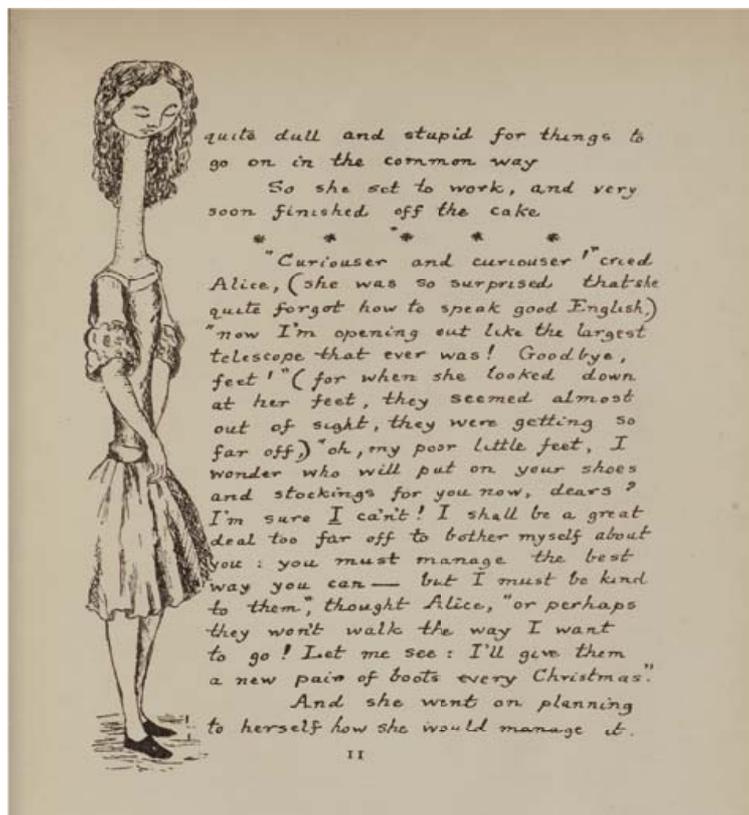


Fig. 2

As if to emphasise the dangers of market-based consumption, Alice’s next act is to pick up the pair of gloves she spies on the table, an act that leads to her rapid shrinking and near-drowning in the pool of her own tears. As Carol Mavor insightfully notes, Alice literally drinks and eats words, and Alice’s excessive growth leaves Alice unfulfilled (Mavor 102). Alice does not reach the garden until the end of Chapter 7, and for all the food she encounters and meetings she has with characters in kitchens or banquets, she never eats a full meal in Wonderland. However, Mavor fails to account for Alice’s perpetual dissatisfaction and desire as an engagement with nineteenth-century economic discourse. As Catherine Gallagher explains, Victorian bioeconomics was an organicist economic model that focused upon modes of production and exchange, where ‘Life’ was understood to circulate through organic and inorganic matter (Gallagher 3). Its partner theory, somaeconomics, was built around a discourse of bodily sensations. Alice’s cumulative acts of consumption do not allow her to attain her goal, and are literary enactments of somaeconomics, in which “the pursuit of even imaginary convenience of riches [...] that can never be realised, is productive of an intensity of gratification” (McCulloch, cited in Gallagher 56). It is difficult to ignore Carroll’s engagement with consumer culture in the nineteenth-century, and while Peter Hunt insists that it is “unquestionable and important” that the books were written for children, with adults intruding upon a conversation (Hunt, “Introduction” to Carrollxliv), it seems more reasonable to understand the books using Barbara Wall’s concept of the dual audience (Wall, 1991).

The novel’s interest in addressing its dual address becomes more marked as the text and illustrations enter into conversation with Darwinian concepts of evolution and animal food chains. In illustrating the Caucus race, and Alice’s interactions with the Caterpillar and the mother pigeon, Tenniel and Carroll suggest that the Darwinian model threatens the human identity by placing it in a precarious position within food chains and changing evolutionary patterns. Carroll’s invocation of Darwinian theories has been noted: William Empson describes Alice’s pool of tears as “amniotic fluid” transforming the subsequent caucus race into a question of breeding where Carroll “supports Natural Selection [...] to show the absurdity of democracy, and supports democracy (or at any rate liberty) to show the absurdity of Natural Selection” (Empson 255), but this thought remains underdeveloped. Alice’s encounter with the Mouse in the pool of tears, immediately followed by the Caucus race, signals the beginning of a serious dialogue with the animal food chain. Encountering the Mouse, Alice initially addresses it using formal Latin: “A mouse — of a mouse — to a mouse — a mouse — O mouse!” (Carroll12), though

her redundant address parodies educational systems by suggesting the redundant uselessness of rote-learning systems. She then makes the social *faux pas* of asking where her cat is, in French. The multiplicity of languages initially suggests the impossibility of adequate inter-species language-based communication, but the Mouse's fear and comprehension imply that language is not the main barrier. Rather, Alice is unable to communicate adequately. This casts into question the Herderian assumption that language makes humans superior to animals (Herder 80, 84, 90). Moreover, the fact that Alice recalls sentences from her brother's Latin grammar-book and her French lesson-book concerning animals foreshadows the Caucus race, in which Tenniel and Carroll use their illustrations to explore the implications of the Darwinian model of natural selection.

Alice repeatedly invokes concepts of predation and food chains, continually referencing her cat, Dinah, even mentioning a terrier that "kills all the rats" (Carroll 23). Tenniel's illustration of this moment is surrounded by text, encroaching upon the narrative mid-sentence, enacting the predation invoked by Alice's discussion of cats and dogs. The Mouse flees from Alice, who is swimming after the Mouse, and Tenniel's illustration emphasises their similar sizes. The image thus highlights the irony of Alice's invocation of predators; Alice's smallness is emphasised, and the shading used to signify water obscures Alice's lower body and the Mouse's hind legs, such that Alice's legs seem to extend from the Mouse's lower body. Thus, Tenniel's illustration emphasises Alice's likeness with the Mouse, suggesting that humans are like animals: creatures that must eat or be eaten.

Immediately following this is the Caucus race, and Tenniel and Carroll provide several illustrations for this scene, each emphasising Alice's unstable human identity and raising questions about natural selection. The second chapter ends with an image of a crowded pool: "there was a Duck and a Dodo, a Lory and an Eaglet, and several other creatures. Alice led the way, and the whole party swam to the shore" (Carroll 23). The cumulative listing of animals, and the movement of the animals from the water to the shore, indicates an engagement with Darwinian concepts of evolution. Hunt discusses the animals as signifiers for real-life figures associated with Charles Dodgson and Alice Liddell, and there is a clear suggestion of this correlation when one considers Dodgson's correspondence with the Reverend Duckworth, the phonetic similarity between "Lory" and "Lorina" Liddell, and the Eaglet and Edith Liddell (Hunt, "Explanatory Notes", in Carroll 261). However, to simply see the animals as Carroll's set of acquaintances is to read the novel as a manuscript written solely for Alice Liddell, whereas the production history of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (and its publication under a different

title!) suggests that Carroll composed the published text for multiple sets of readers. Alice Liddell may have been the original reader and recipient of Carroll’s manuscript, but she was merely one reader of many. To other readers, Carroll wished to signal his interest in questions of natural selection: the alliteration of “Duck” and “Dodo” suggests a relationship between the two animals—the common duck, and the famously extinct dodo. In *Alice Under-Ground* Carroll illustrates this particular moment in a full-page sketch (see fig. 3). Alice is physically separated from the pack of animals, suggesting her superiority as a human, but body of water suggests fluidity of identity. The identifiable dodo is at the head of the animals, strategically positioned beside an ape. The inclusion of the ape is of paramount importance, for it is not described in the narrative. However, its imagistic placement indicates an interrogation of the process of natural selection: the extinct creature paddles alongside the creature from which Darwin posited humans evolved. In this struggle of species, how dependable is the human position at the head of the chain?

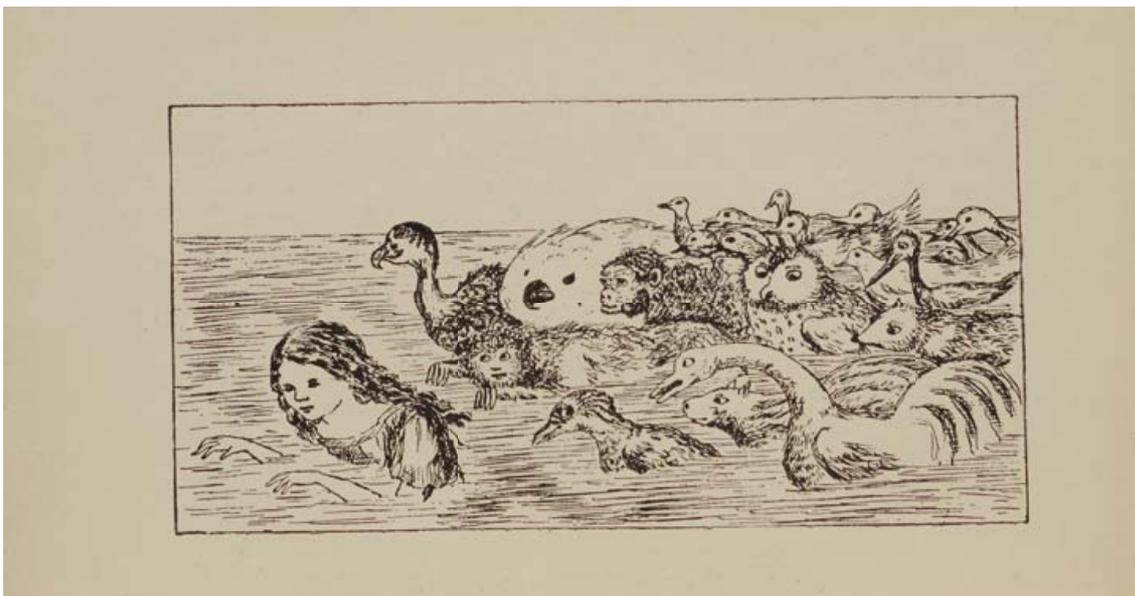


Fig. 3

Tenniel’s illustrations of the Caucus race further extend questions concerning humans’ position(s) within the animal chain, parodying the chaos of the paradigm of natural selection. His first image is an uncharacteristically framed sketch of the animals crowding around the Mouse. It sits above the third chapter title, and the border suggests a more objective viewpoint. In this apparently objective frame, Alice’s physical smallness, and her position as passive object, are foregrounded. She sits with her back to the viewer, the same height as the Mouse and significantly smaller than the Dodo, the owl, the Lorry, and the Ape. Tenniel’s realistic animals bear a striking resemblance to the birds and mammals illustrated in J. G. Wood’s

The Illustrated Natural History, a point Lovell-Smith emphasises (Lovell-Smith, “Eggs and Serpents” 33–34). Carroll’s animals’ meeting and their race thus engage with the scientific discourse concerning the struggle between the species, a topic which had stimulated the Oxford debates only five years before the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The Dodo sets up the Caucus race:

First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, (‘the exact shape doesn’t matter,’ it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no ‘One, two, three, and away!’, but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. ... the Dodo suddenly called out ‘The race is over!’, and they all crowded round it, panting and asking ‘But who has won?’ (Carroll 26)

The sequential clauses create a breathless effect, mimicking the adrenaline and confusion of the race. The course is a “sort of circle”; an image of endlessness and, hence, a lack of progression, and the qualifying “sort of” emphasises the lack of direction. The Dodo’s parenthetical comment that it “doesn’t matter” highlights the race’s illogicality. This invocation of the paradigm of natural selection climaxes in the pressing question of who has won: in other words, who has gained dominance in an unstructured struggle for life. The Dodo cannot answer this question, for in a world shaped by a paradigm of species struggle and natural selection, if animals are alive and uneaten, “Everybody has won, and all must have prizes” (Carroll 26). This chaotic, meaningless race with no clear beginning and no clear end, lacking winners and yet deeming every survivor a winner, contrasts with other paradigms such as the Christian paradigm that emphasises the order of creation and the fixed superiority of human beings (e.g. Wood vii). Carroll’s narration of the Caucus race suggests both that human superiority is a purely arbitrary designation and that the Darwinian model is absurd as a framework for considering humanness. Tenniel exploits the absurdity and arbitrariness when he illustrates the Dodo presenting Alice with her “prize” (Alice’s own thimble). The Dodo towers over Alice, occupying the right half of the image, while Alice, clearly the subordinate object on the left, accepts the thimble from his hand. The entire Caucus race scene is characterised by Alice’s lack of control; the Mouse initiates proceedings and the Dodo officiates the race. Alice only gains a position of superiority by mentioning Dinah — this time describing how Dinah eats mice and birds. However, Alice’s ‘power’ over the other animals comes with the loss of their company, as they flee

from her (Carroll 29), a moment which Tenniel leaves un-illustrated, but to which Carroll devotes an entire page. Thus the Caucus race and Alice’s abandonment suggest that society lacks an adequate paradigm for considering humanness: human attempts to ascend the food chain by positioning themselves outside the chain of predators overlook humans’ status as animal creatures.

Two episodes that further extend the novel’s engagement with Darwinian theory include Alice’s encounter with the Caterpillar, and her encounter with the mother pigeon. The illustrations again emphasise the monstrous implications of a paradigm that destabilises human identity. Having escaped the White Rabbit’s house (wherein Alice experiences yet another series of size changes, instigated by her consumption of literal rock cakes), she meets a Caterpillar who informs her that the secret to controlling her size is to consume different sides of his mushroom (Carroll 46), affirming society’s association of the expression of selfhood with consumption practices. Alice’s kinship with the shape-changing Caterpillar is highlighted as the narrator reveals that both Alice and the Caterpillar are three inches high (Carroll 45). In Tenniel’s illustration, the un-bordered image sits at the head of the chapter title, and Alice faces the caterpillar. The mushroom obscures the majority of her face, emphasising her subordination to the Caterpillar. Carroll’s illustration of Alice’s encounter with the Caterpillar, meanwhile, is positioned in the centre of the page. As Alice reaches up to the Caterpillar atop the mushroom, her upward gaze and outstretched arms creating a vector that imply the Caterpillar’s superiority. In both pictures, Alice’s small size and the Caterpillar’s placement atop the mushroom illustrate the instability of the human identity in a world of species struggle, where humans attempt to control their position in the food chain through food consumption. In light of this, Empson overstates the case for the Caterpillar as the symbolic being who grants Alice control over her size (Empson 269); Alice’s control is tenuous, for she first finds herself rapidly shrinking, then monstrously reshaped as the mushroom lengthens her neck without proportionately increasing her body. It is in this misshapen human form that Alice encounters the maternal pigeon that mistakes her for a preying serpent. Lovell-Smith’s compelling interpretation of the scene as an engagement with the natural history discourse of predation and conflict is supported Carroll’s illustration of the pigeon attempting to peck Alice’s eyes (see fig. 5; Lovell-Smith, “Eggs and Serpents” 27–53). Carroll’s image is nestled amongst the text, as image and word battle for primacy of the page, mirroring the concept of predation discussed in the exchange. The pigeon is foregrounded in the centre of the illustration, and Alice’s head curves in from the upper right corner, seemingly disconnected from her elongated neck. Elwyn

Jones and J. Francis Gladstone's remark that the Passenger Pigeon was a "key Darwinian species [...] following the Dodo into extinction" further suggest Carroll was consciously invoking Darwinian concepts of predation, consumption, and extinction (Lovell-Smith, "Eggs and Serpents" 41). The visual foregrounding of a near-extinct species criticises a destructively consumerist, Darwinian-driven society where the strong prey upon the weak for survival.

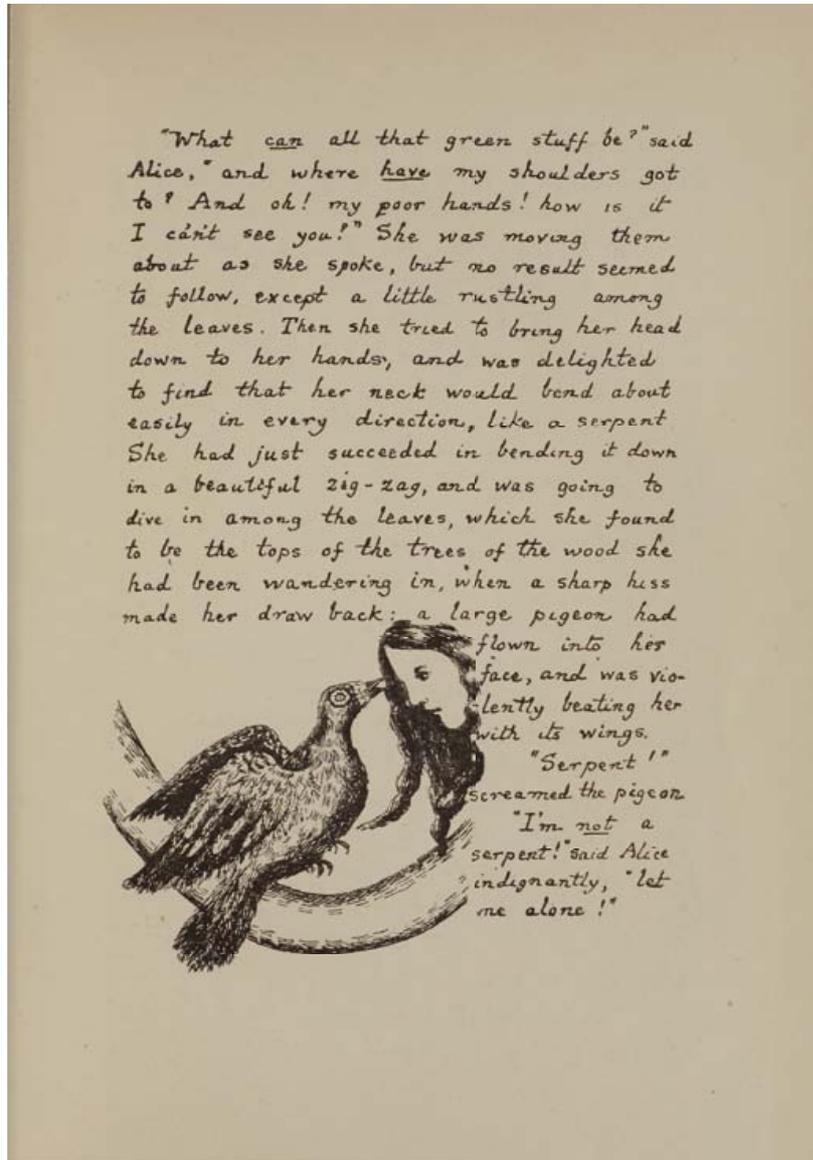
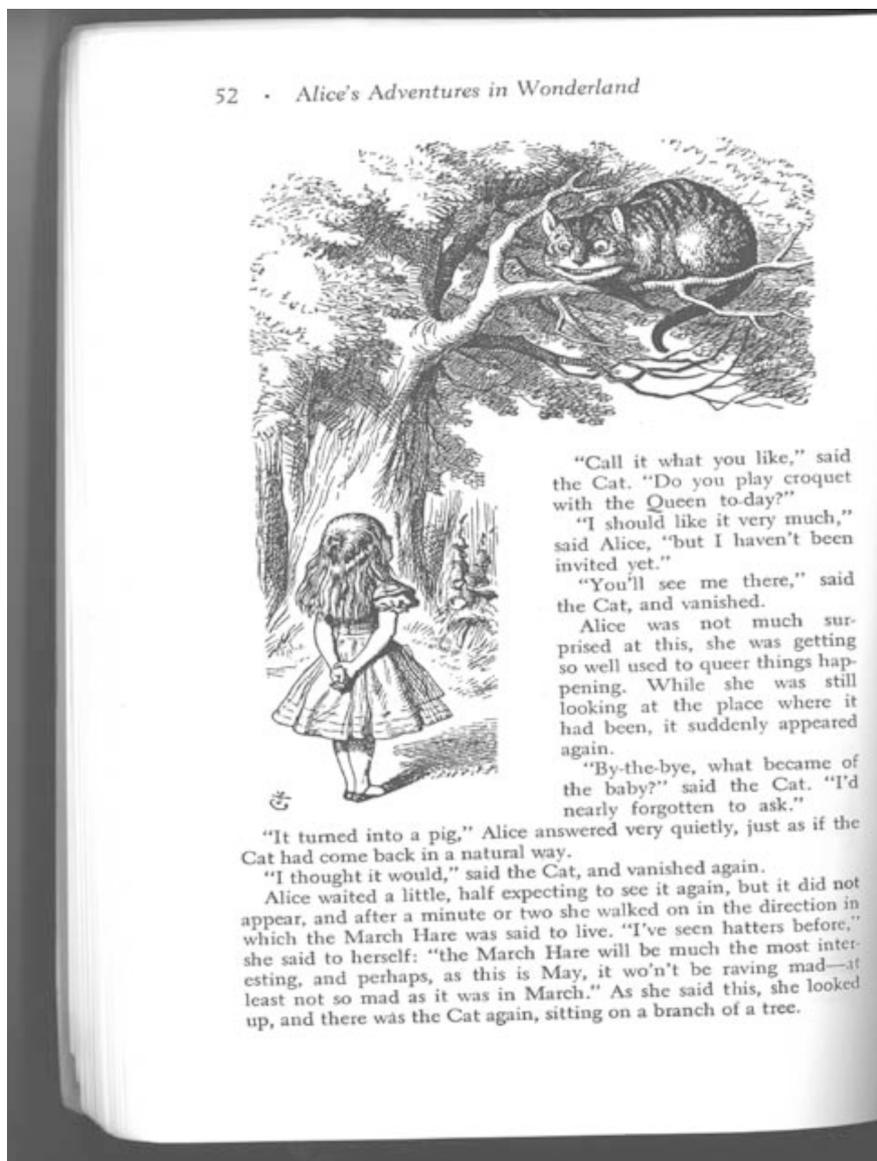


Fig. 4

At the novel's structural and thematic centre is Alice's first conversation with the Cheshire Cat, which brings to the fore the illogicality of the systems that govern Wonderland (and, by suggestion, the adult Victorian world). Alice's meeting with the Cat occurs after the Duchess' baby absurdly transforms into a pig, an event highlighting the tenuous boundary between animals and humans. Thus Alice's meeting with the Cheshire Cat forms the climax of a series of events that examine

how humans operate in a world driven by unsteady paradigms. Tenniel’s iconic illustration of Alice’s conversation with the Cheshire Cat frames the text on the upper and left margins of the page, telegraphing the importance of the dialogue (see fig. 5). The Cat’s insistence, “We’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad” (Carroll 58), becomes paradigmatic for *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as a pointed critique of a chaotic adult world. Wonderland, for all that Alice has stumbled from event to event and encounter to encounter, may be seen as structured upon the Victorian paradigms of consumerism and unfulfilled desire, and Darwinian evolutionary theory. The Cat’s comments reveal the ludicrousness of a world where such systems are sustained — everybody in Wonderland is mad, enabling the paradigms to remain unchallenged.



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“Call it what you like,” said the Cat. “Do you play croquet with the Queen to-day?”
“I should like it very much,” said Alice, “but I haven’t been invited yet.”
“You’ll see me there,” said the Cat, and vanished.
Alice was not much surprised at this, she was getting so well used to queer things happening. While she was still looking at the place where it had been, it suddenly appeared again.
“By-the-bye, what became of the baby?” said the Cat. “I’d nearly forgotten to ask.”
“It turned into a pig,” Alice answered very quietly, just as if the Cat had come back in a natural way.
“I thought it would,” said the Cat, and vanished again.
Alice waited a little, half expecting to see it again, but it did not appear, and after a minute or two she walked on in the direction in which the March Hare was said to live. “I’ve seen hatters before,” she said to herself: “the March Hare will be much the most interesting, and perhaps, as this is May, it wo’n’t be raving mad—at least not so mad as it was in March.” As she said this, she looked up, and there was the Cat again, sitting on a branch of a tree.

Fig.5

Following Alice's encounter with the Cheshire Cat, the madness and destructiveness of Wonderland's unfulfilled consumerism and competitive struggle for life escalate. Parting from the Cat, Alice encounters the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse. The Mad Hatter officiates a perpetual tea party where "it's always tea-time, and we've no time to wash the things between whiles" (Carroll 64), and the thinly veiled metaphor for over-consumption that fails to nourish or sustain is overtly rendered by Tenniel's three illustrations, where the empty tea cups and plates contradict evidence in the text that food is consumed (Carroll describes Alice helping herself to tea and bread-and-butter). Thus Tenniel's illustrations emphasise the unfulfilling nature of perpetual consumption. The tea party is a potentially destructive and vicious affair, and Alice leaves as the March Hare and the Mad Hatter attempt to force the Dormouse into the teapot, a moment Tenniel brutally and vividly illustrates (Carroll 67). While Carroll leaves Alice's interactions with the Cat and the Mad Hatter un-illustrated, Tenniel's multiple illustrations of the Cheshire Cat and of the mad tea party accentuate the narrative's implicit emphasis upon the chaotic dangers of living in a world based on tenuous consumerist structures.

Carroll's narrative condemns consumerist, evolutionary structures by associating these paradigms with injustice and death: the death of the individual, and the death of innocents. The Queen of Hearts is the ruler of Wonderland, where consumerism and natural selection are the basic operating paradigms; she is also the embodiment of the relationship between the unjust systems governing the adult world, and death. She attempts to execute virtually every character she encounters for minor offences or mere impertinence. Alice first meets the Queen in the garden, where the Queen sentences her cards to death for planting white roses instead of red roses. Both Tenniel and Carroll illustrate the cards fervently attempting to paint the white roses red, visually reinforcing the artificiality and emptiness of the once-beguiling garden. Alice finds her sought-after garden a place of violence, mirroring the somaeconomic concept of perpetual unfulfilment generated by a consumer society built upon absence, and the need to fill the perpetual sense of lack. Both Tenniel and Carroll illustrate Alice's first meeting with the Queen. Tenniel atypically frames his illustration of Alice's first meeting with the Queen, freezing the moment in an apparently objective vision of arbitrary formality and horror. He depicts the moment when the Queen demands Alice's execution, and Alice sees through the arbitrariness of her authority:

"My name is Alice, so please your Majesty," said Alice very politely; but she

added, to herself, ‘Why, they’re only a pack of cards, after all. I needn’t be afraid of them!’ (Carroll 71–72)

The balanced sentence contrasts Alice’s outwardly courteous behaviour with her realisation that the Queen is “only a pack of cards.” This moment of absurd humour is profound; Alice’s realisation that she inhabits a fantastic, dream-like world as trivial as a pack of cards is amusing, but it also reveals the flimsy basis behind socially authoritative figures in whom Wonderland’s governing social paradigms are upheld. Tenniel’s highly orchestrated image depicts Wonderland as a fundamentally unappealing place. The border removes a sense of movement and freedom that characterises Tenniel’s un-bordered images, and reinforces a sense of boundaries and rigidity. Each of the characters stands in ritualised postures: the Queen’s accusative finger cuts across the King’s sceptre, and her head is tilted back to emphasise her unappealing face mid-bellow, and the page behind Alice carries a crown on a cushion, as if to remind viewers that authority is often in the hands of those who are unfit to exercise it. In his manuscript, Carroll devotes a full-page illustration to emphasise the Queen’s arbitrary exercise of power, depicting the Seven of Clubs bending prostrate, before the contrary Queen. Thus, when Hodnett accuses Tenniel of not depicting Alice’s feelings or expressions (Hodnett 177), and Sinker condemns Tenniel’s illustrations as “oddly mannerist and stylised for work directed at children” (Sinker 38), their assumptions about the purpose of illustration and Carroll’s readership overlook the illustrations’ interpretative function and their implicit address to its dual audience.

Alice in Wonderland comes to its climax and dénouement with the farcical trial of the Knave of Hearts in a resounding criticism of the dehumanising effects of consumer culture and arbitrary justice systems. The scene is a surreal extrapolation of the nursery rhyme “The King and Queen of Hearts,” a rhyme that depends upon excessive consumption and violence. In the rhyme, King “beat the Knave full sore” for stealing the Queen’s tarts (Opie and Opie 427). The Queen’s tarts are objects of consumption, and they are her possessions; thus the Knave’s act of thievery is an assault on capitalist consumerist models. Carroll parodies capitalist consumerist models of ownership and consumption by emphasising the farcical nature of the trial: the tarts are always present in the middle of the court. The Queen declares: “Sentence first—verdict afterwards” (Carroll 108), implying that rigid consumerism perpetually prevents individuals from attaining their goal and withholds possessions it artificially promises. The pageantry and ineffectuality of the arbitrary justice system in Wonderland is indicated by Tenniel and Carroll’s

illustrations of the White Rabbit calling everyone to court. Both men employ visual parody: Tenniel's Rabbit blows on an absurdly tiny trumpet that contrasts sharply with his formal court attire and archaic neck-frill (Carroll 97) while Carroll's Rabbit blows a comically oversized trumpet (see fig. 6).

This scene arguably is the most topsy-turvy of all scenes in Wonderland. The adult world is a haphazard affair, and the exaggerated outfits of the Rabbit, the King and the Queen connote children playing at being grown-ups. By contrast, Alice assumes an adult role, censoring the trial by relieving Bill the juror of his pencil so that he can only write ineffectually with his finger (Carroll 97). Alice contradicts the King and Queen, ultimately declaring, "Who cares for you?" ... (she had grown to her full size by this time.) "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (Carroll 109). Alice's articulation of the conclusion she formed upon first meeting the Queen of Hearts, her declaration that Wonderland's inhabitants are merely cards, is her vocal condemnation of the arbitrary, unjust world of adult authority. It coincides with her final size change as she rapidly grows taller, a metaphor for her moment of self-realisation and self-assertion. Tenniel illustrates Alice's moment of assertion as the pack of cards rise in the air and fly at Alice. Framed by an arch of cards, Alice towers above the animals of Wonderland. The White Rabbit, suddenly devoid of clothing, springs away behind her legs, and various birds, reptiles, amphibians, and rodents flee aimlessly around her feet (Carroll 109). Although Empson reads the dénouement as Alice's triumph and a rallying call for adults to unshackle themselves from arbitrary conventions (Empson 294), this is a highly ambiguous moment. Stripped of childishness and childlike qualities, Alice's voice is one of adult rationality, and she is illustrated as an adult: a towering human with animals scattering at her feet. The triumph and tragedy of Wonderland is that it has eliminated Alice's child-ness and transformed her into a rational adult: Alice's pyrrhic victory is her ability to condemn the destructive folly of the adult world that has changed her, grotesquely.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Under-Ground*, Tenniel and Carroll's illustrations interpret, foreshadow, and even compete with the text, enacting and emphasising the narrative's thematic concerns to address the narrative's dual readership. Thus, the illustrations regulate readers' relationships with language and image, immortalising the visual image of the child Alice while depicting the impossibility of childhood in an adult world overrun by consumption, riddled with unstable Darwinian economics and theories, and corrupted by inefficient arbitrary systems of authority. The interplay of text and illustrations in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Under-Ground* suggest that such

systems force the child to enter into the absurd world where everyone is mad, and to then adopt an adult rationalist view in order to survive. Ultimately, Tenniel and Carroll’s illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland* suggest that the Victorian-Romantic vision of carefree childhood is an unsustainable impossibility.



Fig. 6

Note

1. All images are from *Alice Under-Ground. Being a facsimile of the original ms. Book afterwards developed into 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,' by Lewis Carroll [pseud.] With thirty-seven illustrations by the author.* London: Macmillan, 1886 are reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

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