

The Art of 'Alice': Illustrators of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice' Books in Britain and the United States 1865-2015

By David Lockwood

Introduction

I consider the *Alice* books in the context of the history of the illustrated book and of children's literature. I defend a fairly traditional approach to the history of art, assuming that the fundamental aim of an art historical investigation is to explain why a certain image is just as it is. Any answer will involve establishing the origins of the artist's style, and attempting to discover his or her intentions. I discuss the notions of interpretation and influence, taking account where necessary of deconstructionist, Freudian and feminist theory. I also argue that in this field history cannot be divorced from criticism, for the historian of book illustration cannot avoid assessment of how well the pictures discussed do their job.

My justification for including discussion of intentions, interpretation and artistic influence is that many commentators, in avoiding these issues, seem to me to make indefensible claims. They propose arcane readings of images when far more straightforward and plausible interpretations are available, or they assert (or deny) 'influence' in the absence of any solid evidence for doing so. Likewise, some discussion of the aesthetics of the illustrated book seems to me indispensable for attempting to understand what Carroll was trying to achieve.

I aim to correct (or at least draw attention to) not only conceptual errors but also factual ones. Unfortunately, commentators on Carrollian matters tend to repeat the same mistakes concerning such issues as Carroll's relationship with Tenniel, Tenniel's technique and his use of Carroll's own sketches, Carroll's attitude to evolutionary theory, and so on.

PART I: LEWIS CARROLL AND SIR JOHN TENNIEL

Chapter One: Contexts: Publishing and Book Illustration in Mid-Victorian Britain

This chapter investigates general issues involving publishing, the book trade and book and periodical illustration in mid-Victorian Britain. I discuss social and technological factors, the relationship between fine art and book illustration, and the evolving nature of the relationship between author and artist – stressing in particular the role played by Charles Dickens in Victorian book illustration. Finally, I discuss the aesthetics of the illustrated book, responding to Henry James's criticism of the genre.

Chapter Two: Lewis Carroll and *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*

In Chapter One Carroll's own drawings for *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* are examined. I discuss the genesis and publication of the book, Carroll's interest in the visual arts and the various influences that may be discerned in his sketches: principally those of Edward Lear and of various Pre-Raphaelite painters. I examine Neo-Freudian interpretations of the drawings, including those by Donald Rackin and Roderick McGillis, and discuss Nina Auerbach's claim that the drawn Alice provides evidence that Carroll viewed women simultaneously as angels and whores. Much of my research is original, such as that tracing the sources of the King and Queen of Hearts and my identification of Pat the Gardener with both the ape and the stereotypical Irishman of *Punch* cartoons.

Although I focus on the visual sources of Carroll's (and, in Chapter Five, of Tenniel's) illustrations, in both chapters I also mention elements of Carroll's *text* that seem independently to have been influenced by visual imagery.

Chapter Three: The Making of Tenniel's *Alice*

I first investigate the publication and reception of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. I provide a brief account of the life and career of Sir John Tenniel, discuss the evolution of his style and examine in detail his wood-engraving technique. I pay particular attention to Tenniel's relationship with Carroll, correcting many frequently repeated errors and misconceptions, and analyse his (sometimes disputed) indebtedness to the author's illustrations for *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. Carroll had clear preconceptions of how he wished incidents and characters to be depicted, as his letters to Harry Furniss and other artists indicate. I argue that there is direct evidence that Tenniel followed the author's drawings from *Under Ground* for some of his illustrations, and circumstantial evidence that he was provided with further sketches and detailed instructions for many others. I assess the extent of Tenniel's independent contribution to the books, asking whether he significantly influenced the content of the illustrations or merely provided the technical drawing skills which Carroll lacked. Roger Lancelyn Green's judgement – that Tenniel was treated as 'a piece of machinery hired for the purpose' – is exaggerated. The artist did not merely execute, he refined and embellished, and occasionally commented on and interpreted, the author's ideas. Some changes were made both to the illustrations and to the text at Tenniel's suggestion. Nevertheless, I conclude, Lewis Carroll was the prime inspiration behind the illustrations as well as the text of the original *Alice* books. I also compare the illustrations to *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* and conclude with a discussion of *The Nursery 'Alice'* and of early adaptations approved by Carroll.

Chapter Four: Text and Illustration in Tenniel's *Alice*

Here I investigate the relationship between text and Tenniel's illustrations. The *Alice* books, I argue, are distinguished by a peculiarly intimate relation between word and picture, with illustrations playing an essential role in elucidating the text. Topics include the function of illustration; its indispensability in the *Alice* books; the 'moment of choice'; the positioning and spacing of illustrations; the role of illustration in narrative structure (some illustrations substituting for text); illustrations as framing devices; the size, shape and borders of illustrations; and the role of illustrations in establishing continuity, the passage of time and point of view. I pay particular attention to differences in content between illustration and text, distinguishing between supplementation of the text, inconsistencies and omissions, and discrepancies. In one respect text and pictures are not in harmony, for Tenniel's drawings of a relatively immobile Alice conflict with Carroll's presentation of his lively and curious heroine. I return to this important issue in Chapter Six. I also ask whether nonsense writing makes particular demands on the illustrator, and analyse two synoptic illustrations from *Looking-Glass*: the White Knight frontispiece and the Sheep's Shop picture. I conclude with a discussion of the typography and design of the *Alice* books.

Chapter Five: Tenniel's Sources

This chapter considers the sources of Tenniel's illustrations, demonstrating their comprehensive indebtedness to both earlier and contemporary visual culture. Topics discussed include whether a model was used for Alice, costume, Tenniel's earlier book and magazine illustrations, the legacy of *Punch*, political caricatures and social stereotypes, theatrical, ballet and pantomime themes, the origins of the chessmen and playing cards, and the influence of photography and various optical devices. I discuss several paintings that were

probable sources of Tenniel's imagery, including Quinten Massys's *A Grotesque Old Woman*; Augustus Egg's *The Travelling Companions*; J E Millais's *A Dream of the Past: Sir Isumbras at the Ford*; and Paolo Uccello's *The Rout of San Romano*. I analyse Tenniel's use of Anglo-Saxon and medieval imagery and discuss at length the attitude to Roman Catholicism that is revealed in some of his illustrations. (Specifically, Tenniel draws the White Queen as the Pope and the King's Men as the Swiss Guard.) Finally, I provide a detailed account of the origins of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. I distinguish here between conceptual and visual sources. The former include a verse by John Byrom, a nursery rhyme, the Cheeryble brothers in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*; the latter include pictures of the Siamese Twins Chang and Eng and stylised fat men such as Tenniel was accustomed to draw in his *Punch* cartoons.

Chapter Six: *Alice* and the Natural World I: Tenniel's Flora and Fauna

Here I discuss the pervasiveness of animal motifs in *Alice* and defend the claim that the texts can be viewed as 'natural histories' in which Tenniel adopts the style of natural history illustrators. I also discuss the fauna and gardens of Wonderland, and the sources and function of some of Tenniel's animals: including the Dodo, the Mock Turtle and Gryphon and the Jabberwock. I also discuss the influence of Grandville, and the Victorian fascination with prehistory.

Chapter Seven: *Alice* and the Natural World II: The Influence of Evolutionary Theory

I continue examining the natural history theme by examining *Alice* as a response to Darwinian theory. Virtually all commentators agree that the *Alice* books are permeated by references to evolutionary matters: to natural selection and the 'survival of the fittest', predation, speciation and bodily transformation, and to mankind's place among the animals. However, there is much disagreement as to Carroll's attitude to the debate surrounding evolution, and hence on the significance of these references. Rose Lovell-Smith and Ruth Murphy consider that Carroll uneasily accepted many of Darwin's claims, while Laura White argues that he used *Alice* to launch a wide-ranging satirical attack on the new theory – which, she believes, he wholly rejected.

Chapter Eight: Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Tenniel's Illustrations

In this chapter I examine Tenniel's illustrations in the light of psychoanalytic interpretations. I discuss the artist's responses to the menacing aspects of Carroll's text, his depiction of adult women, Auerbach's interpretation of Alice as a would-be adult, and Tenniel's depiction of the 'beamish boy' as Alice. I also suggest reasons why the heroines of the text and of the illustrations diverge so markedly, a divergence that fortuitously lends credibility to the more arcane psychoanalytic interpretations.

PART II: BRITISH ILLUSTRATORS OF *ALICE* 1907-2015

Chapter Nine: The Early Twentieth Century, 1907-1945

Following the expiration of copyright on *Alice's Adventures* in 1907 virtually every major British publisher issued a newly illustrated edition: or, in some cases numerous editions. (For example, Collins published hundreds of editions illustrated by at least twenty different artists.) In this chapter I examine publishing culture in the early twentieth century and the role of the gift book. I describe contemporary artistic trends, including the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, Walter Crane and the 'Book Beautiful', and the Japanese print. After discussing various minor illustrators (Millicent Sowerby, Thomas Maybank, W H

Walker, Mabel Lucie Attwell and George Soper) I analyse in detail the work of Arthur Rackham, Charles Robinson, Harry Rountree and, more briefly, Margaret Tarrant. Throughout I emphasise the continuing influence of Tenniel on subsequent illustrators.

Chapter Ten: The Mid-Twentieth Century: Mervyn Peake and Ralph Steadman

My discussion up of post-Tenniel illustrators up to this point is primarily descriptive, and concentrates on tracing sources and influences. With later artists I vary the tone by adopting a more thematic approach. I start this chapter by asking why there were few noteworthy *Alices* between 1918 and 1967, and mention some of the lesser-known illustrators of the period: including Gwynedd M Hudson, Patricia Morriss, David Walsh and Philip Gough. I next discuss in detail Mervyn Peake's *Alice* illustrations, particularly in the context of the writing of the *Gormenghast* trilogy. I look at Peake's career, style and technique, the publication and reception of his *Alice*, his indebtedness to Tenniel, and his treatment in particular of the heroine and of the White Knight. I suggest that certain pictures owe something to Peake's visit to Belsen at the close of the Second World War.

After discussing Ralph Steadman's career, style and technique I offer a detailed account of his *Alice* illustrations. *Alice's Adventures* is a satirical study of the 'Condition of England' in the 1960s, one deeply informed by the artist's political cartoons. The illustrations to *Looking-Glass*, in contrast, have less overt political and social content, and are most profitably viewed as an extended meditation on the themes of mirrors, doubles and reversals.

Chapter Eleven: Contemporary British Illustrators

After discussing the 1970s as the start of a new 'Golden Age' of British children's literature and of book illustration, I discuss recent trends in the illustration of *Alice*. I focus primarily on Anthony Browne in the context of Surrealism. After discussing Browne's career and picture books I investigate why his Surrealist approach to *Alice* is so apposite. I trace the sources of his imagery, much having been borrowed from Magritte. I also defend Browne against accusations that he does not engage directly with Surrealism and has merely appropriated its trappings. In the second part of the chapter I discuss ten further contemporary illustrators: Justin Todd, Malcolm Ashman, Peter Weevers, Tony Ross, Helen Oxenbury, Michael Foreman, Peter Blake, Rodney Matthews, Emma Chichester Clark and John Vernon Lord. The heterogeneity of style and subject matter of these artists clearly demonstrate that *Alice* is virtually unrivalled in its capacity to generate new interpretations.

PART III: ALICE IN THE UNITED STATES

Chapter Twelve: *Alice* in the United States 1865-1950

This chapter investigates the first publication of the *Alice* books illustrated by Tenniel in the USA. I discuss Carroll's dealings with American publishers, and copyright issues. I ask why what seems to be a quintessentially English tale has been so popular in a culture that has traditionally been somewhat suspicious of fantasy and the fairy tale. I also consider whether there is anything distinctly American about artists' treatment of the books. For example, do artists Americanise the characters: perhaps through costume, perhaps by drawing an outgoing, self-confident heroine with something of the 'glad girl' about her? Do they Americanise the settings, perhaps by paying more attention to landscape than do British artists? Do they show fewer signs of being influenced by Tenniel? None of the illustrators discussed consistently meet these criteria. For example, although Willy Pogany transformed Alice into an American flapper, many of his compositions come straight from Tenniel; and

although Barry Moser borrows very little from Tenniel, his books are thoroughly English in mood and setting.

I move on to discuss Peter Newell's and Pogany's illustrations and (more briefly) those of Blanche McManus, Bessie Pease Gutmann, Franklin Hughes and Leonard Weisgard. The latter two artists are among the first *Alice* illustrators to reveal familiarity with Modernist art movements: respectively, Constructivism and Cubism.

Chapter Thirteen: Disney and Comic Book Versions of *Alice*

Chapter Thirteen examines the two most distinctly American contributions to the art of *Alice* in the twentieth century: the work of Walt Disney, and the comic book. I examine Disney's animation *Alice in Wonderland* and its pervasive influence on illustrators, and the unused but subsequently published work of David Hall. I suggest that comic book versions of *Alice* merit serious discussion on the grounds that the genre offers graphic possibilities unavailable in any other medium. Since the conventions of comic book art will be unfamiliar to most readers, I include a history of the genre and a discussion of its techniques. I conclude with a detailed comparison of two of the most widely-known comic book versions of *Alice*: the *Classics Illustrated* and *Marvel* editions.

Chapter Fourteen: Barry Moser and Recent American Editions of *Alice*

Here I turn to recent American illustrators of *Alice*. The chapter includes an extended analysis of Barry Moser's *Alice*. Among other issues, I ask whether his decision to omit the heroine from his illustrations can be justified. I also briefly discuss editions illustrated by Abelardo Morell, S Michelle Wiggins, Greg Hildebrandt, Michael Hague, DeLoss McGraw Maggie Taylor and David Delamare.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: *Alice* in Europe

Here I abandon the chronological framework of previous chapters, presenting instead a personal selection of important European illustrators, arranged by country. This section offers the only opportunity for exploring cross-cultural differences between illustrated editions for, as noted above, the American vision of *Alice* differs little from the British one. We can make some broad generalisations. In particular, European illustrators are less likely than their British or American counterparts to be constrained by the iconic images created by Tenniel. Indeed, their frequent ignorance of British history and traditions and their lack of exposure to Tenniel's cultural ascendancy have often had a liberating effect. As a consequence, foreign illustrators have often been more innovatory than British artists. They are significantly more likely to display the influence of Modernist art movements, above all of Surrealism. Several French illustrators have a painterly, 'impressionistic' way of working; while artists from Eastern Europe tend to emphasise the fantastical, the disturbing and the grotesque elements of the books, and to draw inspiration from folk-art forms, such as puppetry.

Artists discussed include (from France) Nicole Claveloux, Alain Gauthier, André Pécoud, Adrienne Ségur and Anne Bachelier; (from Germany) Max Ernst; (from Austria) Lisbeth Zwerger and Uriel Birnbaum; (from Sweden) Tove Jansson; and (from Eastern Europe) Jan Švankmajer, Iassen Ghiuselev, Marketa Prachatická and Dušan Kállay. However, by far the most famous European artist to have been inspired by Carroll's tales was, of course, Salvador Dali. I present an original and detailed analysis of Dali's *Alice* pictures, tracing the sources and suggesting interpretations of his imagery.

Appendix II: Movable *Alice*

Here I tackle a topic that is barely mentioned in histories of children's literature and book illustration: the movable or pop-up book. I first discuss the history, aesthetics and technical features of movable books before examining some notable examples of *Alice* movables. I focus on Julian Wehr, Vojtěch Kubašta, Jenny Thorne and James Roger Diaz, Robert Sabuda, J Otto Seibold, and Alex Vining and Nick Denchfield.

Appendix III: Some speculative interpretations of Tenniel's illustrations

Appendix IV: List of Illustrated English Language Editions of *Alice* 1865-2015

With bibliographical essay

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