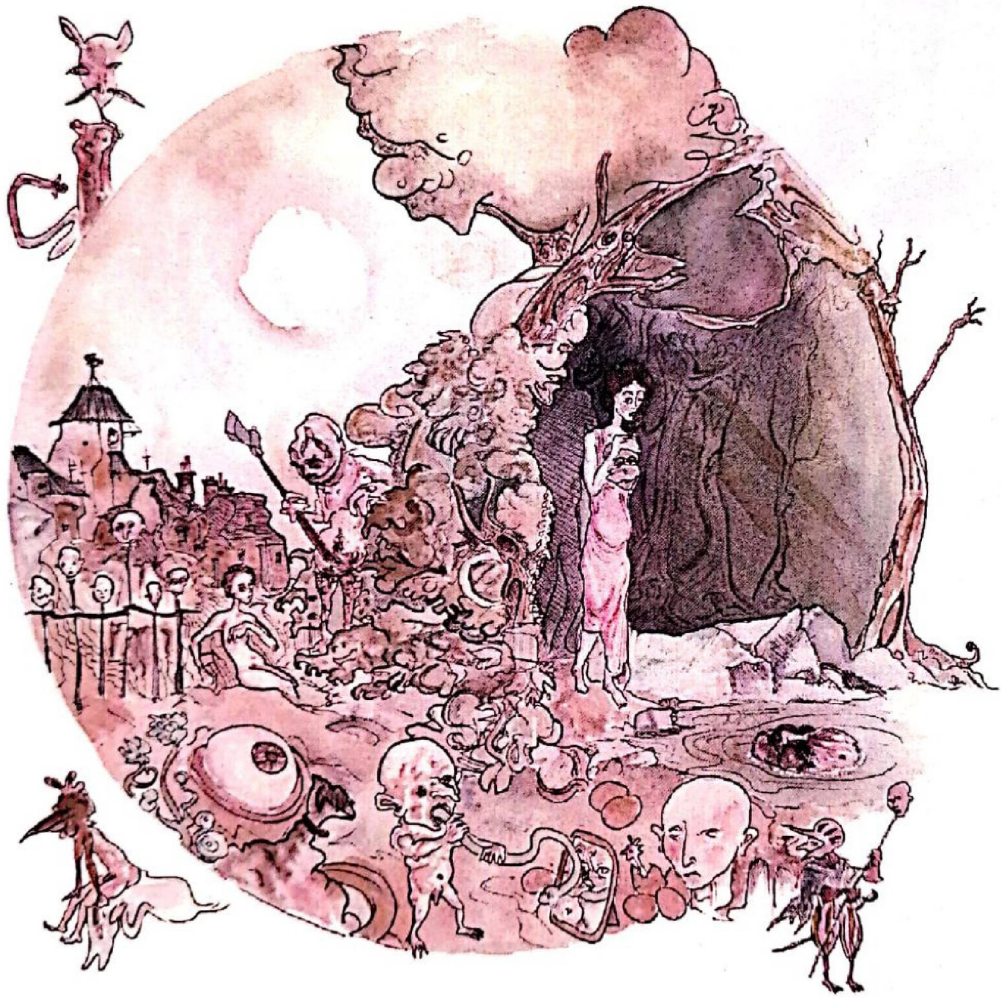


Anti-Tales

The Uses of Disenchantment



edited by

Catriona McAra and David Calvin

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WONDERLAND LOST AND FOUND?
NONSENSICAL ENCHANTMENT
AND IMAGINATIVE RELUCTANCE
IN REVISIONINGS OF LEWIS CARROLL'S
ALICE TALES

ANNA KÉRCHY



Figure 1: John Tenniel, Illustration for *Alice Through the Looking Glass and What She Found There*, 1871.

Lewis Carroll's Victorian children's classics, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871)¹ fascinate readers by the ambiguous evocation and subversion of fairy tale fantasy narrative conventions. The dynamic interaction of strategies of familiarisation and defamiliarisation² results in a "curiouser and curiouser" intellectual-imaginative turmoil of meaning-de/formations and reconceptualisations. I wish to argue here that these self-destabilising textual dynamics, increasingly foregrounded by postmodernist rewritings, and canonically attributed to literary nonsense, can be equally associated with the dissident notion of "anti-fairy tale/fantasy." Immersed in the Carrollian universe, we are invited to become childlike readers, willingly suspending our disbelief to interpret Alice's make-believe tale in a literal, referential way. We embrace the fairy tale fantasy's alternate reality, where even the most bizarre things – from grotesque anthropomorphic animals to shape-shifting metamorphoses – can come true, to be accepted as natural simply on account of being "elsewhere," in an unknowable, consistently illogical, fictional realm meant to exercise our imaginative capacities. Yet the illusion created is deliberately *disillusioning*. Alice's adventures seem oddly non-(con)sequential, almost static; instead of a teleological progress of trials, tribulations, and triumphs, they are disorganised by an aimless wandering between nearly-interchangeable dream-like-scenes/states. Meetings fail to establish a real contact or communication with characters that confound the archetypal poles of good versus evil, and rather proliferate as mad trickster figures, misguiding the slightly amnesiac protagonist, who is particularly forgetful about her own self-identity and whereabouts. Alice remains solitary all the way through, embarking on a quest that questions its own validity, as it has no real aim apart from a vague desire to get back home to the calculable safety of Victorian England's "dull reality"³ of rattling five o'clock tea-cups, books without pictures, and rainy afternoons. Her adventures imply a shift from predictable bourgeois boredom to a predictably eccentric, proto-surrealist nonsensical madness and then back. In the one world of historical referentiality "we

¹ Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, Martin Gardner (ed.), (London: Penguin, 2001).

² Familiarisation allows for the recognition of a fantastic but feasible fictional universe, reinforcing interpreters' expectations concerning the knowability of (an imaginary) reality, while defamiliarisation fosters the recognition of misrecognition, the awareness of illusion's disillusioning potentials, as well as the succeeding delightful-disturbing "forgetfulness" of ontological, epistemological, linguistic regularities.

³ Carroll, 131.

are not [that easily] amused," as the legendarily detached Queen Victoria famously claimed;⁴ in the other, imaginary one, "we are all mad" as the Cheshire Cat puts it in a witty conundrum that undermines its own truth value to illuminate the very illogics of Wonderland. Since the two worlds are alike in their uncertainty and their lack of a solid reality status, limits between fictionally conceived reality and unreality become blurred. According to the typology of Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy*,⁵ the Alice-books are "portal quest fantasies" in so far as an alternate universe is entered upon the fall down the rabbit hole, and then a passing through the looking glass. But here the protagonist does not gain any radically transformative knowledge in/from the other world that could help her in somehow changing that world and maturing in her own reality too. The unchanging Wonderland only teaches Alice that the sole rule is that there are no rules (of chess, card, or language games alike) that cannot be transgressed, no homely knowledge that cannot be defamiliarised as uncomfortably incomprehensible *unheimlich*, and no dislocations that cannot be regarded as journeys worth a story.

We get no real *sense* of transgression, though. There is no conflict to initiate the adventures, "once upon a time" is set *in medias res* in a "dull reality" that Alice is "tired of," or "half asleep" in, and there is no resolution by either a happy or tragic ending. On the contrary, the finales seem to further trouble the genre of children's literature itself by explicitly introducing metafictional considerations into the open endings. Alice's sister dreams about Alice's past dream and likely future as a storyteller inspired by that dream at the end of Wonderland. An omniscient narrative voice questions readers about the complicated interconnections and much-relativised authenticity or reliability of dream, fantasy, and reality at the end of *Through the Looking Glass*. The closure is marked by a practically unanswerable rhetorical question: "Who dreamed whom/it?"

As Jack Zipes notes, the fairy tale fantasy of the Carrollian kind emerges in the Victorian era, inspired by German Romanticism, as an antidote to the barren, bourgeois realist novel. It enchants by its non-

⁴ The line "we are not amused" was first attributed to Queen Victoria in the anonymously published *Notebooks of a Spinster Lady* (1909), and recounted with further details in the memoirs of Lillie Langtry. The Queen's comment on a poor parody of her royal persona in a risqué joke of an equerry was soon misinterpreted as demonstrating her lack of a sense of humour, an epitome of the presumed prudishness of the entire Victorian era. See Helen Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 402.

⁵ Farah Mendlesohn, *The Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 1.

mimetic frenzy of imagination and inventiveness transforming even familiar topoi and themes of tales into mysterious, symbolical landscapes and nonsensical configurations that “lure readers to question the former secure worlds of conservative fairy tales and the very real world of their immediate surroundings.”⁶ However, fairy tale fantasies are also often interpreted as “cracked mirrors”⁷ endowed beneath the fantastic filter with a cultural critical potential and latent referential strata of historical, social and biographical data. Accordingly, Alice’s adventures are telling of Carroll’s own lifestyle, and the broader social circumstances of Oxford Christ College, and Victorian England. Their meticulous decoding uncovers hidden, subtextual meanings, as Martin Gardner’s annotations⁸ demonstrate. Early rewritings, Victorian authors’ didactic, parodic or political *Alternative Alices* collected in Carolyn Sigler’s anthology⁹ support this latter aspect and function as “cracked mirrors” on enacting Wolfgang Mieder’s definition of “anti-tale:” they stress more negative scenes and motifs as more realistic reflections of their own society’s problems, including socio-political issues, economic worries, marital problems,¹⁰ and especially limitations by engendering. These are fictionalised via claustrophobic spaces, abortive plotlines, and scenarios of misogynistic abuse, part and parcel of a harsh reality that is clandestinely criticised within the tale’s presumably secure (because primarily child-reader oriented, thus canonically insignificant) realm by dissatisfied women-writers, such as Christina Rossetti or Jean Ingelow.¹¹

This twisted realism can of course be easily traced in later adaptations too: ever-mutable cultural anxieties and aspirations are projected upon Alice’s imaginary figure by means of metaphorical re-readings that associate with the mythified character self-reflexive, abstracted meta-takes on “real-life” phenomena. Interestingly, Alice keeps embodying the iconic artist persona of each era: in the eyes of the fellow Victorians she is the mystified, idealized, pure-hearted Dream-Child, for Freudians the agent of

⁶ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 108.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸ see Carroll, 2001.

⁹ Carolyn Sigler, *Alternative Alices. Visions and Revisions of Lewis Carroll’s Alice Books* (University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

¹⁰ Donald Haase (ed.), *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* (Greenwood Publishing 2008), 50.

¹¹ Further outstanding female artists are anthologised in U.C. Knoepfelmacher and Nina Auerbach, *Forbidden Journeys. Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Womenwriters* (Chicago University Press, 1992).

infantile drives and neurotic fantasies, for the Surrealists a traveller of dreamscapes and an alchemist of the word sprung from the systematic derangement of the senses, for the 1960s' counterculturists a rebel toying with hallucinogenic experiments, for postmodernist scholars a veritable language-philosopher "putting meaning and subject on trial/in process"¹² amidst epistemological and representational crises.

Even if fantasies' referentially subversive capacities are limited due to their interrogating real problems retrospectively and allegorically, as Rosemary Jackson argues,¹³ Alice rewritings still preserve a non-didactic, non-moralizing, and an ultimately troubling non-finalising quality. Alicetales clearly refute the traditional Bettelheimian therapeutical function of tales¹⁴ as affirmative means of disciplinary ideological normativisation in the bourgeois public sphere. Instead of bedtime stories of socialisation reinforcing finite set scenarios of being and teaching children to mind their manners, these are rather "wake up stories," inviting to our recognition of misrecognition in identity positions prescribed by culturally assigned master-narratives "meant to preserve status quo and hegemonic privilege of those in control of dominant discourse."¹⁵ Beyond finite choices, a fairy tale fantasy represents the world as an "exemplification of a possibility to be embraced or avoided"¹⁶ – or rather of possibilities to be embraced and avoided in a sort of Many-Worlds model of reality.¹⁷

¹² Julia Kristeva, "Le sujet en procès," *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 55-106.

¹³ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), 91. See also Zipes, 107.

¹⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Vintage Books, 1977). For a critique of Bettelheimian interpretation see Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 160-82.

¹⁵ Jackson, 43 in Zipes, 2006, 91.

¹⁶ Jackson, 35 in Zipes, *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Many-Worlds* is a postulate of quantum physics that argues that all possible alternative histories and futures are *real* on accounts of their representing a *potentially actual* world or universe. And this already leads us to the Cheshire Cat disappearing, always elsewhere, leaving only a grin behind, here and there – eerily reminiscent of the early twentieth century (1930s) physics thought-experiment, a favourite example for the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum-mechanics, called the "Schrödinger's Cat paradox." It argues for the simultaneous coexistence of multiple, parallel realities' potentialities, where the actualisation of any of the superpositioned states depend on the human observer, whose experience/cognition/interpretation literally realises the abstract concept of truth/reality, and calls into life one actuality out of the spectrum of multiple possibilities, which continue to exist unactualised.

One of the most important features of the postmodern reinterpretations of Alice-tales is precisely that they inhabit multiple alternate universes' (un)realities at the same time on various grounds. First of all, the original always lurks beneath the adaptation as its primordial subtext, but here the two-volume set of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* already constitutes a dialogic unit of Genettian hypotext,¹⁸ almost necessarily eliciting further polylogic variants, that frequently con/fuse the episodes, characters and puns of the two books within the new retelling. Apparently, among adaptations of Alice, we rarely ever find "duplications," in the Zipesian sense of the term, simply because of the difficulty to define the original's canonical form, plot or moral that the duplication could perpetuate. Similarly, the impressive number of "revisions" do not so much necessarily question, challenge, or subvert the story by incorporating new values, perspectives, aesthetics, or politics, as Zipes claims "critical revisions" do.¹⁹ Rather, they gain inspiration from the original, to reimagine the same fantasy patterns with a different manifest dream content, and thus could be called "creative revisions."²⁰ The familiarity with Carroll's original is not a prerequisite of comprehension but certainly helps in enriching the interpretation by providing a background, a relational realm of reference, already contrasted with the canonical Perraultian, Grimmian fairy tale tradition it subverts. Sometimes, in a Chinese box- or Russian doll-like structure, the Carrollian original's fictional realm might be involved as make-believe within the revision's fictional realm constituting the story-world's truthful reality. This is the case when a character of the adaptation's alternate universe is seen reading or enacting *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: the original is fictionalised within the factualised rewrite.

¹⁸ According to Gérard Genette's notion of *transtextuality*, a text never stands on its own, but in an obvious or concealed relationship with other texts. *Hypotext* is a text that refers to its sources, previous editions or versions. It is immediately connected to *paratext*: the apparatus that surrounds the main textual body with extra information, such as illustration, preface, introduction, bibliography, or even typography. See Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (trans.) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/ Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 8-10.

²⁰ Tim Burton calls his film adaptation of Alice neither a sequel, nor a reimagining, but an extension, in Christopher Ryder, "Alice in Wonderland – Press Conference with Tim Burton," *Collider.com* (23 July, 2009)

<http://www.collider.com/2009/07/23/alice-in-wonderland-press-conference-with-tim-burton/> accessed 30/08/2010.

Curiously, this gradation between intra-textual fictionalisations is already taking place in Carroll's original, as Alice distinguishes between *this story* she is partaking in and *other fairy stories* she could safely distance herself from in the past on accounts of their being clearly "unreal," fabulous inventions, belonging to the Todorovian pure marvelous,²¹ likely inviting metaphorical readings to deduce their moralising, didactic contents. On the contrary, the Wonderland adventures she is metatextualising about on the spot while she is being involved in them do have real stakes related to her lived experience of hunger, confusion, disillusion, anger, humiliation, and overall curiosity, and thus formulate a story that should be read *referentially* as "real."²²

On the other hand, the intermedial shifts accompanying transmissions of a preexisting literary text to a stunning variety of different media bring about changes in dominant modalities of experience affecting our perception of realities. However, contemporary multimedial artistic adaptations like American McGee's gruesome computer game where Alice loses her mind along her way in a strange insane asylum,²³ or Annie Leibovitz's highly stylised *Vogue* fashion-photographs combining the symbolism of late nineteenth century *tableaux-vivants* with a mockingly kitschy camp aesthetics²⁴ are closer to the Carrollian original than one would perhaps presume at first, exactly on accounts of their multimediality. The Alice tales are conceived from the very beginning as picture books. The manuscripts first illustrated by Carroll's own then Tenniel's grotesque drawings both enhance the nonsensical plot and facilitate the understanding of neologisms' referentless signifiers like the Jabberwocky or the "slithy toves" described as "something like badgers," "something like lizards," and "something like corkscrews."²⁵ Carroll's novels, authentic image-texts, are most frequently associated with immense visual powers and nonsensical language games. The mere mentioning of Wonderland

²¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 50.

²² "It was much pleasanter at home," thought poor Alice, "when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole – and yet – and yet – it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what *can* have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!" Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 40.

²³ American McGee, *American McGee's Alice* (Rogue Entertainment. Electronic Arts, 2000).

²⁴ Annie Leibovitz, "Alice in Wonderland Fashion Editorial," *Vogue USA* (December 2003).

²⁵ Carroll, 226.

almost consensually evokes the mental image of a blonde little girl in a blue pinafore, who is unable to make sense in a world, where logic and language turn topsy-turvy. Her disorientation – shared by readers – is partly due to the pre-eminence of linguistic representation's pictorial quality. This is foregrounded by literalised metaphors, mirrored verses, typographical play, and picture poems or figured verse, the “visual analogue of poetic onomatopoeia,” and “artistic chirography,”²⁶ (when a tale may take the form of the mouse's tail it describes). Our understanding of Carroll's original fantasies as image-texts foregrounds the significance of applying different interpretive attitudes adjusted to different media, and helps us to appreciate less efficient adaptations, such as Tim Burton's recent filmic one (2010). Although in Burton's *Alice* the nonsensical language and philosophical games are lost for the sake of a more coherent, didactic, moralising plotline, the celebration of the 3D spectacular visual style's supremacy over dramaturgic sophistication can be regarded as the filmic equivalent of literary nonsense's celebration of “sound's supremacy over sense,” with the form still predominating the content, only transmitted to a different medium.

Another important characteristic of postmodernist nonsense fantasies approaching the anti-tales' counter-tradition is their already mentioned metafictional aspect. The suspension of disbelief allowing for an absorption into the alternate fictional reality's elsewhere (no matter how eerie) is often complemented by more or less explicit biographical contextualisations, and allusions, tying fantasy to a factuality, that ironically proves to be just as unknowable. A surprising number of sequels in the recent collection *Alice Redux* edited by Richard Peabody²⁷ comment on the necessary fictionalisation of reality and the realistic ‘life-likeness’ of fictionality. They intertwine (life)stories of the real-life writer-mathematician-photograph Charles Dodgson, his self-pennamed authorial persona Lewis Carroll, the actual muse Alice Liddell, and the make-believe Alice characters. Their narrative play primarily concerns contradictory speculations, facets of the myths: Carroll as saint, weirdo or paedophile, Alice troubled by drug-abuse, senility, or her writer's artistic crossdressing. Along similar lines, Jeff Noon's book-length cyberpunk sequel *Automated Alice* (1996) ingeniously exploits the idea of time-travel to create within parallel universes parallel imaginations, tracing a neo-Victorian retro-future, inventing a contemporary fantasy about past fantasies about a future, that is already our present. Past, present, and

²⁶ Gardner in Carroll, 35.

²⁷ Richard Peabody (ed.) *Alice Redux. New Stories of Alice, Lewis and Wonderland* (Washington D.C.: Paycock Press, 2005).

future selves' potentialities are embodied by doublings: real Alice by fictional Alice, fictional Alice by a mechanical twin twister/sister Automated Alice, author by alter ego, alter ego Lewis Carroll by Zenith O'Clock standing for Jeff Noon, and so on.²⁸

On a much more abstract plane, the Alice-tales meta-narratively foreground the malfunctioning of our representational strategies and the insufficiency of interpretive methods in making sense of what we call our Reality, while illuminating language's rule-bound and ludic aspects, as well as its unspeakable traumatic kernel. I believe that the most exciting common denominator of various distinct postmodernist Alice tale repurposings is the complementation of the original's "enchantment by the unknown" – what C.S. Lewis calls the "longing for the [I] know not what"²⁹ – with the revision's "knowing disenchantment." Factuality and fantasy are intertwined, thus unmaking each other, resulting in the misbehaviour of bodies, discourse and truth/knowledge-claims, which provide readerly excitement through their playful destabilisation of significations. The "familiarily unfamiliar" wonders are paradoxically defamiliarised through disrupting the fairy-tale fantasy make-believe's illusorily safe, homogenised alternative fictional universe by introducing troubling realistic elements, frames or perspectives. This provokes imaginative reluctance,³⁰ a cognitive dissonance and interpretive hesitation within protagonists and spectators alike, upon being faced with the clashing of possibly referential, metaphorical and metatextual meanings demanding multifocal re-readings.

Recent filmic adaptations function exactly by these same means. Czech puppeteer Jan Švankmajer's 1988 stop motion animation *Alice*³¹ presents a pure abstraction of Wonderland reduced to a simple garden-shed, minimalistic props of lost and found objects, and the monologic voice of a solitary child at play. Terry Gilliam surrounds his Alice with drug addict parents, perverts, pseudo-paedophiles, detritus, and corpses to explore the shocking nature of infantile innocence that neglects the culturally conditioned, prejudiced system of normal/abnormal differentiations in *Tideland* (2005),³² a film that fuses fantasy with socio-drama. In Tim

²⁸ Jeff Noon, *Automated Alice* (London: Crown, 1996).

²⁹ C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 31-43. 35.

³⁰ Shaun Nichols, *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretence, Possibility, and Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

³¹ Jan Švankmajer (dir.), *Alice. (Něco z Alenky)* (Channel Four Films, 1988). See also Suzanne Keller's paper in this volume.

³² Terry Gilliam (dir.), *Tideland* (Recorded Picture Company, 2005).

Burton's latest fantasy adventure filmic adaptation,³³ a grown-up Alice constitutes a counterpoint to spectators ravished by 3D photorealistic simulation of wonders through her inability to remember, and unwillingness to believe in her childhood's Wonderland (devalued as "Underland"), which she abandons to accomplish the frame-story's rationalistic, pragmatic project of a dubious feminist and colonial empowerment.³⁴ These revisions are often troubling, disillusioning, or difficult to watch, yet we cannot avert our eyes from them; we are mesmerised by a surprising interaction of imaginative compulsion and imaginative reluctance, an urge to fantasise and an impossibility to believe as real.

Whereas André Jolles' classic definition of *Anti-märchen* identifies the tragic ending as the authentic resistance to the fairy tale's idealistic perfection,³⁵ the Carrollian fictional realm is marked by an open-ending, or rather an open-endlessness that evokes a riddle-without-answer (of the "why is the raven like a writing desk?" type), the trademark wonderlandish nonsensical speech act, urging in what could almost be described as a postmodernist aesthetic, an epistemology of uncertainty where endings do not necessarily culminate in ultimate answer and final solutions, and where the cultural value of endless curiosity is redeemed.

The fluctuation of belief and disbelief, of tale and anti-tale, realised via transitions between different meta/layers of fictional ir/realities is perfectly illustrated by the changing anti/heroic status of Burton's Alice. In the first part of the film Alice denies her reality status in Wonderland, which she refutes as make-believe; as the creatures say, she has lost her "muchness," meaning her ability to believe in the authenticity of their fictional realm, and her belonging with them. However, by virtue of the implied readerly identification, she finally accepts the heroic place assigned to her, willingly entering a deeper layer of fiction-within-fiction, as the protagonist of an embedded nonsense anti-tale(within-tale) in Wonderland's fictional realm's mythology³⁶ about a beamish boy fighting the monstrous

³³ Tim Burton (dir.), *Alice in Wonderland* (Walt Disney Pictures, 2010).

³⁴ In the surprisingly simplistic finale, celebrating girl-power's dubious feminist empowerment strangely combined with entrepreneurial, pro-capitalist, colonising might and even a touch of Oedipal desire, pragmatic Alice instead of being married off to her wealthy, pedantic suitor decides to step in the footsteps of her father, undertake family business and embark on oceanic trade routes towards wonders of China, locus of exoticised otherness.

³⁵ André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 1965), 242 in Haase, 50.

³⁶ A more explicit celebration of the proliferation of fantasies against a rationalistic surface results from the numerous cross-overs and postmodern intertextual

Jabberwocky, intra-textually familiar as the mythical messiah from the famed Wonderland scrolls and extra-textually recognizable as a Jeanne d'Arc-ish feminist action hero-like re-embodiment of Victorian artist John Tenniel's original illustrations to Carroll [Fig.1]. Paradoxically, Alice's intratextual mythologisation results in her rejecting her belonging to the daily reality of Victorian England on her return, arguing that its bourgeois conventions are impossible phantasmagorias she is unwilling to believe in.

On the other hand, even the most disenchanting finales, are perhaps more enchanting than they seem. In the Burton movie's finale, Alice's concluding farewell remark to her crazy spinster Aunt (who is stuck in a Sleeping Beauty-like fantasy, waiting for her Prince Charming), is that, "There is no prince, Aunt Imogene. You need to talk to someone about these delusions." The line seems to suggest a forced normative rationalisation, but at the same time could imply that Aunt Imogene should keep on sharing the story, on talking towards a communal dreaming-on. Similarly, the closing image of the caterpillar-turned-butterfly may refer not so much to kitsch clichés of moral maturing, but rather to the destabilisation of the fantasy/reality divide and an opening up of multiple possible worlds and alternate realities' potentialities by invoking the Taoist maxim on human life's potentially being merely a butterfly's dream.

Thus imaginative enchantment, or rational disenchantment, might very well be a matter of two kinds of readerly attitudes, or interpretive positionalities that Hugh Haughton inventively associates with Carrollian characters, the Gryphon and the Queen.³⁷ On the one hand there are the

borrowings/allusions, ranging from a framing familiar from the *Wizard of Oz*, to a mighty mouse warrior resembling the *Chronicles of Narnia's* Reepicheep, to the two queen's resembling Queen Elizabeth from *Blackadder* and star-chef Nigella respectively, Johnny Depp's Mad Hatter, a fusion of Willie Wonka, Edward Scissorhands, and Sweeney Todd, or Alice's father bearing the name of Charles Kingsley, author of another Victorian fantasy best-seller, *The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (1863). The problem here is not so much the lack of originality one would be naive to demand, but the chaotic, unjustified confusion of different imaginings lacking a systematic pattern, and even more so the failure to benefit from the riches of the Carrollian fantasy. However, ambiguity is a defining feature of Alice-tales.

³⁷ The two stances Haughton refers to are: "'No, no! The adventures first,' said the Gryphon in an impatient tone: 'explanations take such a dreadful time.'" (109) "but the Red Queen interrupted her impatiently. 'That's just what I complain of! You *should* have meant! What do you suppose is the use of a child without any meaning? Even a joke should have some meaning – and a child's more important than a joke, I hope,'" Carroll, 265, Haughton ix-lxvi.

enchanted *Gryphons* who simply wish to enjoy a children's story without making any efforts at serious interpretations, and who claim that adventures should come first since explanations are such a waste of time. On the other hand, disenchanting/ed *Queens* insist that even jokes should have meanings, that one should make an attempt to make sense, especially when it comes to children and an adult's responsibility for them, and stress that nonsense is made expressive precisely by its meaningfulness.³⁸ These interpretive stances put forward fascinating theoretical dilemmas. They concern just as much the (*im*)possibilities of a perception without interpretation, and of a joyously forgetful yet revelatory revelry in sustained meaninglessness (see *Gryphons'* stance), as much as (*im*)possibilities of a neutral, objective meaning-fixation lacking any emotional surcharge or affective side-effects of signification –which would result from psychic involvement in or corporeal reactions to reading experience (see *Queens'* stance). However, in the long run, the two stances fuse to create an exciting dynamic out of the imaginative (con)fusion of incompatibles such as curiosity/scepticism, nonsense/commonsense, fantasy/realism, immersive identification/ critical self-reflection: be it a Lobster Quadrille, a crooked contrariwise tango, or the Futterwacken jig, the Gryphon and the Queen, and all can join the dance with Alice.

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³⁸ Haughton, xi.

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