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# We're All Mad Here : The Madness of Linguistic Expression in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

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Abstract

The occurrences of madness in the text of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures on Wonderland* and in Sir John Tenniel's accompanying illustrations have largely gone unexamined or have been seen by interpreters as simple byproducts of Carroll's use of nonsense language. This paper examines the ways in which madness is produced and framed in both the context of the narrative as well as in Tenniel's associated illustrations. A close reading and examination of the language of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* reveals a framework through which the narrative's underlying elements of madness can be perceived. Through their use of language, the narrator as well as the characters allow the reader to occupy a unique perspective in the narrative. A perspective which not only allows them to see the language frameworks that are produced, but to subsequently use those frameworks to perceive the madness that emanates from within the narrative. Several of the illustrations by Sir John Tenniel, which accompany Carroll's text, are also examined, not only for their visual content and expression, but also how they visually represent moments in the text as well as in accordance with their physical placement in the narrative. The illustrations offer not only an interpretation of the madness present in the narrative. They also depict their own forms of madness, particularly in aspects of the narrative which are descriptively sparse.

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# We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

by

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# We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

## Introduction

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* recounts the story of a young girl who unwittingly enters, explores, and subsequently exits the fictional realm called Wonderland. This story, and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass,* have been no stranger to scrutiny concerning their variety of whimsical characters and Carroll's extraordinary use of language. However, one aspect appears to remain largely unexamined: how the narrative's multiple applications of language, and the characters' language (through which the narrative is often told) take precedence over their actions in generating the story's claims of madness. Studies of the language of the Alice texts have been traditionally examined in terms of Carroll's use of nonsense in the confines of Wonderland as well as the ability of the narrative's language to satirize aspects of Victorian society and the individuals in Carroll's own life. One example of the former is found in James R. Kincaid's "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland". He contends that Alice's presence in Wonderland and her reaction and response to its sociological structure speaks to her psychological and allegorical makeup. He argues that "in rejecting…[Wonderland's] disorder Alice is rejecting not only the terrifying underside of human consciousness but the liberating imagination as well…For flexibility, surprise, and

disorder are at the root of comedy as well as terror, and Wonderland shows Alice not only rootless hostility but free and uncompetitive joy" (Kincaid 92). In rejecting all of the elements that construct Wonderland, according to Kincaid, Alice rejects some of the basic psychological elements that lie at the root of her own humanity. Alice works hard and is ultimately successful at rejecting Wonderland's madness, but what she overlooks is her own fundamental madness that allows her to enter and proceed through Wonderland.

While Kincaid's argument may account for Alice's behavioral reaction to the seemingly incoherent forms of expression that exist in Wonderland, it also fails to acknowledge the presence of madness emanating from the characters' abilities to use language. Of the connection between madness and language in the nineteenth century, Sally Shuttleworth argues, "...there was a rather disturbing elision at this period between children and adults classified as deaf and dumb and those deemed idiots, both alike outside the domain of language, which would confer humanity. In popular discourse, reforming zeal focused on the possibilities of lifting inmates from a stage of pre-linguistic animality into full humanity" (185). Language is clearly categorized as a significant element that an individual needs to possess in order to be deemed human. This presents a difficulty when attempting to classify either Alice or most of the residents of Wonderland, as they possess a command of not only language, but of logic. However, this connection is only cursory and does not directly address the effects of the disarray that exists in Wonderland on Alice and the elements of madness that would not have been subsequently created without Alice's presence.

John Tenniel's well-known illustrations, which depict scenes throughout Carroll's story, initially appear only to illustrate arbitrary moments and characters in the narrative without regard to a specific servicing of the story. However, as I will show, these illustrations do more than just provide a visual means of conveying the narrative; they also function as their own form of language through which meaning (specifically madness) is conveyed. W. J. T. Mitchell provides one signal approach to examining the vocabulary of such images: "The commonplace of modern studies of images, in fact, is that they must be understood as a kind of language; instead of providing a transparent window on the world, images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparence…" (8). Tenniel's illustrations of the Alice texts can be examined according to this view. Due to their level of interconnectedness with the narrative, Tenniel's illustrations far exceed any degree of blatant transparency. Not only do the images simultaneously supplement and complement the language of the narrative, the illustrations seem to emerge from the narrative as a distinct interpretive aspect. Of Tenniel's attitude toward the creating of the illustrations, Rodney Engen states that "Tenniel approached his task with characteristic thoroughness and first studied the text carefully to provide the correct detail mentioned as well as those imaginative fantasies which Dodgson left up to his reader's imagination" (73). It is the latter part of Engen's suggestion which allows the reader to see how Tenniel's illustrations act as an integral part of the narrative. If the illustrations can occupy the space of not only interpretation, but as a manifestation of the narrative, then this allows them to act as an extension of the narrative's language, and thus its madness, as well as a means of a differing interpretation of its madness.

My intent is to argue that the means by which language is conveyed in the text, both narratively and through Tenniel's illustrations, of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as well as the narrative context of its language, are symptomatic of the characters' madness but also generate an interpretive means through which the degree of madness that the narrative possesses can be examined. The characters in the narrative struggle with, are aware of, and perpetuate their own madness through their use of language, both in their interactions and dialogue with the other characters, to the reader, and in the narrative text as well as John Tenniel's illustrations.

## Chapter I: The Structures of Madness and Language in Wonderland

Michel Foucault, in his work *Madness and Civilization*, presents madness as having "...symbolized a great disquiet...Madness and the madman become major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men" (11). While Foucault's reference is to the image of the Ship of Fools, it has implications for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. For not only is there an unsettled nature to Alice's journey; each of Wonderland's characters touts, at the very least, one of Foucault's three representative qualities of "mockery," "unreason," and "ridicule" (Foucault 11). He notes that "In farces and *soties*, the character of the Madman, the Fool, or the Simpleton assumes more and more importance. He is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings: he stands center stage as the guardian of truth-playing here [;] a role which is the complement and converse of that taken by madness in the tales and satires" (Foucault 11). The characters who inhabit *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* offer not simply a representation of madness, but a means of providing insight. The madness exhibited by and through the inhabitants of Wonderland provide insight into the character of Alice, and Alice's manifestations of madness provide insight into those she encounters in Wonderland.

The concept of madness or insanity became a commonplace and intriguing topic in the nineteenth century. Andrew Scull asserts, "Writers of fiction, for whose wares a burgeoning market was now emerging, were not slow to seize upon the dramatic possibilities the madhouse presented" (140). If we accept Scull's assertion, madness was a topic whose appeal seemed to lie in its ability to reach and touch upon emotional extremes as well as peculiarities, which were at odds with the accepted standards of nineteenth-century society. Simon Cross suggests, that "...in the early- to mid-Victorian

period it resides in fascination and popular appeal with the grotesquerie…For the Victorian period at least, singing about madness must be seen in relation to the attractions of melodrama, fairy tales, gruesome murder ballads, penny dreadfuls and so on" (47). Cross' statement clearly brings to the forefront the notion that the ideas and behaviors associated with madness became clearly entwined with a variety of theatrical and dramatic works. When Lewis Carroll completed a draft of "Alice's Adventures Underground", in a letter to Tom Taylor, he asked for advice on the title. In the letter's postscript, Carroll writes:

> I should be very glad if you could help me in fixing on a name for my fairy-tale…The heroine spends an hour underground, and meets various birds, beasts, etc. (no fairies), endowed with speech…I first thought of "Alice's Adventures Under Ground," but was pronounced too like a lesson-book, …then I took "Alice's Golden Hour" …Here are the other names I have thought of:

$$\text{Alice among the } \begin{cases} \text{elves} \\ \text{goblins} \end{cases} \quad \text{Alice's } \begin{cases} \text{hour} \\ \text{doings} \\ \text{adventures} \end{cases} \quad \text{in } \begin{cases} \text{elf} - \text{land} \\ \text{wonderland} \end{cases} \quad (\textit{The Letters } 65)$$

It should be noted that Carroll refers to the story in his letter as a "fairy-tale", one of the forms of entertainment identified in Cross' statement. Despite Carroll's admission that the story does not contain fairies, the implication of the story's ethereal elements remains, thus maintaining the element of madness as well. Scull concurs "Victorians developed an insatiable appetite for these tales of the same cast among the lunatic" (239). If the image of madness was becoming a significant part of a wide variety of literary and dramatic works in the nineteenth century, then its fundamental presence in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* would not be an entirely insupportable concept.

Another aspect of madness that directly impacts any examination of the Alice texts is the concept of female insanity and its increasing presence in nineteenth-century Victorian society. Elaine Showalter states, that "It is notable that the domestication of insanity, its assimilation by the Victorian institution, coincides with the period in which the predominance of women among the insane becomes a statistically verifiable phenomenon" (315). Showalter's use of the term "domestication" is significant here because it creates a direct connection between the concept of madness and the domestic sphere traditionally inhabited by women. This connection converges in the character of Alice, who leaves behind the traditionally domestic scene at the beginning of the narrative for the confines of Wonderland, in which the notion of domesticity is essentially turned on its head and Alice becomes the subject of close examination. Elizabeth Langland argues that a close scrutiny of women in Victorian society

> ...challenges more traditional critical analyses of women's place in Victorian society and requires revision of our notions of gender and agency. In embracing this conception of the subject in history, we discover intricacies of interpretation that allow neither simple absolution nor easy condemnation of Victorian middle-class women on gender and class issues. (303)

Although Langland's primary concern is with issues of gender and domestic female agency in a broad scope, there exists the implication for a direct application to Alice and her susceptibility to have her own madness brought out by those she meets in Wonderland, and to manifest that madness when confronted with its societal methods and structures. When the Cheshire Cat insists that "You must be [mad], ...or you wouldn't have come here" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 57), he not only calls attention to Alice's

innate madness (unbeknownst to Alice), but he also points out that it is her very madness which has brought her to and allowed her to enter Wonderland. In addressing this seemingly primal state, Sally Shuttleworth states, "Following the publication of Darwin's *Origins*, however, ideas of inheritance came to play an increasingly large role in psychiatric discourse, whilst the common simile, that a child is like an animal, took on new literal forms" (181). Despite the retroactive nature that might characterize an application of this pattern of thought, Alice, in her fall down the rabbit hole and entrance into Wonderland, has experienced a level of degeneration. However, she has not become precisely "like an animal", but rather has taken on (whether by choice or fundamental nature) one of the essential characteristics of the inhabitants of Wonderland, their madness. Despite arguments made by Kincaid and others that Alice rejects the madness of Wonderland by rejecting its logic, she lacks the capacity to do so completely until the novel's end. She must acquire some element of madness from Wonderland or else she would not be able to proceed through it. Indeed, it can be argued that Alice's madness does not solely emanate from the innate madness of her humanity, but also from the transformation that she has undergone in entering Wonderland.

The Cheshire Cat's statement identifying Alice as mad also brings into question the relationship between madness and Alice's sense of personal agency. She initially appears to move about Wonderland and interact with its inhabitants of her own free will. However, there cannot help but arise the question of the degree to which madness is compelling her actions and words. Of a mad person's sense of self-control and personal agency, Andrew Scull asserts, "What was evident, however, was that these patients' complaints did not necessarily undermine their ability to think coherently much of the

time, or to exhibit some modicum of control over their actions, however precarious the rule of reason might seem to be at other times" (324). Although Scull refers to the psychoanalysis of the early twentieth century, a retroactive application can be made, at least in part, to Alice's actions in the narrative. When Alice interacts with the Cheshire Cat for the first time, her first question of him is:

> "Come, it's pleased so far," thought Alice, and she went on. "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
>
> "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
>
> "I don't much care where -----" said Alice.
>
> "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
>
> "----- so long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.
>
> "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if only you walk long enough."
>
> (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 56)

Alice appears to be making an inquiry as to what direction she should take next in Wonderland, as if she does not want to proceed any further without a definitive route. The distorted version of the Socratic question and answer method, which characterizes the dialogue, however, suggests the opposite. Her statement of wanting to get "somewhere" implies that she not only desires to proceed further into Wonderland, but will determine her own direction in doing so. The Cheshire Cat, as if possessing knowledge of Alice's determinate will, frames his response so as not to tell Alice where to proceed to next, but rather how to proceed. Rather than leaving her confused and at a standstill, his replies only seem to expedite her sense of personal agency. However, the

question of whether Alice's motivation stems from her madness or simply her own curiosity remains initially unanswered.

The resolution to this question may lie in an examination of the nature of her dialogue with the Cheshire Cat, rather than of Alice's motivation, as language can act as a structure that compels a close examination of the narrative with the impetus of establishing an interpretive framework within the narrative. The language of the dialogue frames Alice's preceding journey as well as her subsequent one. Calvin R. Petersen suggests, "[Alice's] escape from time's devouring, "excremental" demands seems to result in a confrontation with madness" (429). Alice's question of which direction she should proceed in may be indicative that she is initially aimless in her wanderings, but coupled with her previously established willingness to enter Wonderland, it more closely indicates that she is, as Petersen suggests, escaping further into Wonderland by her own means and compulsion. If we accept this view, then Alice's compulsion to proceed despite a lack of any evidence of direction from the Cheshire Cat, not only assures that she will interact with varying levels of madness, but also denotes the presence of her own degree of madness. It is through language and its use that Alice enters Wonderland through the rabbit hole, for Alice and the narrator in fact create the rabbit hole and the subsequent entrance to Wonderland through language. One of Alice's first thoughts in the narrative is "and what is the use of a book…without pictures or conversations?" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 9).

Alice's thought, while in its narrative context directed toward the book that her sister is reading, hits upon two of the most significant elements of language not used within the story itself, which literally define it: the text and John Tenniel's accompanying

illustrations. Of the framework of language, Jacqueline Flescher, in "The Language of Nonsense in Alice", writes, "Language offers endless possibilities of upsetting the order of behavior, because it can establish a coherent system in a variety of ways" (129). Alice is repelled, and subsequently thrown into a more enveloping state of madness, by the absence of the language of images and vocalizations in her sister's book. It is the absence of the very literary elements, which Wonderland possesses in spades, that propels Alice to follow the White Rabbit and enter Wonderland. This lack of a particular language structure compels Alice to follow the White Rabbit. It also creates the acceptable structure in the form of the description of the rabbit hole. As Alice enters the mouth of the rabbit hole, the narrator's words devise its structure. "The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 10). The narrator's description of Alice's fall down the rabbit-hole simultaneously describes and creates the hole. Calvin R. Petersen argues, "We can now get a better idea of why Alice pursued the White Rabbit on such a stressful journey…[S]he is again struggling with the question of who she is" (429). Petersen's argument that Alice is attempting to understand her identity provides an impetus for Alice's step through the entrance of the rabbit-hole.

Language provides the framework that is necessary in order to interpret and understand the manifestations of madness within the narrative. Flescher argues that "The first qualification concerns language. The backbone of nonsense must be a consciously regulated pattern. It can be the rhythmic structure of verse, the order of legal procedure, or the rules of the chess-game. Implicitly or explicitly, these three variations are all

present in *Alice*" (128). Flescher suggests that, in order to understand language that is considered to be nonsense, a structure must be operational within it that grounds any subsequent interpretation. Flescher's statement can be taken one step further when applied to the presence and elucidation of madness in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* The presence of the language structures allows madness to not only be perceived in the narrative, but to be interpreted and perpetuated. The Cheshire Cat presents a unique facet in the language of madness in the narrative. He is first presented in the chapter "Pig and Pepper" as part of the scenery of the Duchess's kitchen. Of the presence of the Cheshire Cat, the narrator notes, "The only two creatures in the kitchen, that did not sneeze, were the cook, and a large cat, which was lying on the hearth and grinning from ear to ear" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 52). The Cheshire Cat's presence is remarked upon by the description of the narrator and not through dialogue. It is the narrator's description and selection of those who do not present a violent physical reaction to the pepper that highlight the presence of the Cheshire Cat and his entrance into the narrative. The narrator's language, perhaps because of or in spite of the narrative's focus on articulating the chaos of the Duchess's kitchen, generates the language framework through which the Cheshire Cat appears and is noticed by both Alice and the reader. The Cheshire Cat through his dialogue with Alice will subsequently declare himself to be mad, but it the narrator's articulation of his presence in the madness of the kitchen that initially posits the Cheshire Cat's own madness. The narrator has in a sense brought the Cheshire Cat forth from the very madness of the Duchess's kitchen.

It is Alice's subsequent dialogue with the Cheshire Cat, however, which brings about the first direct statement of madness in the narrative. After being told that two inhabitants of Wonderland, the Hatter and the March Hare are both mad, Alice proclaims:

> "But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.
>
> "Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
>
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
>
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 57)

This dialogue is significant for two reasons: the Cheshire Cat directly proclaims himself to be mad, but then proceeds to expound on the reasons why he thinks that he is so. Such a direct proclamation would suggest that madness may function not only as a topic entwined within this particular instance of dialogue (and, I would argue, the entirety of the narrative), but it would also extend its means of conveyance within the narrative to the accompanying illustrations, which occupy narrative space.

Another example of this framework occurs during the trial scene in the chapter "Alice's Evidence". In the scene, a written text (stated to be in the form of a letter) is offered as evidence. However, it is the King's verbal reactions to facets of the evidence that provides the lens through which his madness can be viewed. The White Rabbit states:

> "I haven't opened it yet," said the White Rabbit; "but it seems to be a letter, written by the prisoner to – to somebody."

> "It must have been that," said the King, "unless it was written to nobody, which isn't usual, you know." (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 104)

The framework occurs within the words in the King's decisive response being almost antithetical in nature to those in the White Rabbit's statement. In their statements, "Nobody" acts in response to "somebody" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 104). However, it is more than simply an opposition of words; it is an iteration and negation of existence. The King's madness is evident in the opposition of words that turn the very existence of the written evidence on its head. The White Rabbit affirms the existence of not only the author of the letter, but that of the recipient as "somebody," while the King negates the existence of both as "nobody". This opposing response structure continues in the dialogue:

> "Please your Majesty," said the Knave, "I didn't write it, and they ca'n't prove that I did: there's no name signed at the end."
>
> "If you didn't sign it," said the King, "that only makes the matter worse. You *must* have meant some mischief, or else you'd have signed your name like an honest man." (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 104-105)

Here, rather than a countering of words, an opposition of logic takes place. The King's response to the Knave's logic is to involuntarily reorder it in his construal of the facts. But, it is the antithetical framework that has already been established, through the presence of the contrary nature of "somebody" and "nobody" that also brings the King's madness to the surface through this framework. The King's interpretation of all of the pieces of information associated with the paper appears to be one that is indicative of his madness. The King is in fact violating accepted logical structures, but both Alice and the

reader must be aware of and accept these structures in order to understand that they are being breached. In "Language-Games and Nonsense: Wittgenstein's Reflection in Carroll's Looking-Glass" Leila S. May suggests, "What all of these language-games have in common is that if the governing rules are broken, nonsense happens. In that case, language functions like an engine running in neutral; you gun the motor and make noise, but the gears do not engage" (81). In a manner similar to Flescher's argument, May's application of language-games offers the idea of an overlying structure or framework through which any interpretation of language must occur. However, her use of the term "broken" implies a destruction or obliteration of that which constructs the framework. This begs the question of what becomes of the resulting "nonsense" if the rules of language are not broken, but rather merely refracted to appear so to all except the dialogue's interlopers of Alice and the reader.

It is the refraction of language and its rules, rather than the outright breach of them, that creates a sense of madness. If the structures of language had been irreparably damaged, as May implies, then our ability to perceive madness through them would be demolished as well. However, May proceeds to argue, "...we can say that a language whose rules cannot be followed creates an impossible form of life. Or, we might say, it creates a form of madness" (82). The difficulty with her argument comes not with the suggestion that madness develops from language's inability to follow a set of structural rules, but rather from the suggestion that any madness is "an impossible form of life" (May 82). To suggest that something is impossible implies that it is incapable of having been created in the first place. If the rules of language are broken and therefore cannot maintain its existence, then by extension, May's argument inadvertently suggests that

madness can never have existed as well. However, since the language's structures exist, even in a refracted form, and are generated within the narrative, they allow for the manifestation of the madness that is both framed and exposed. In addressing with the effect of unconventional uses of language, K. K. Ruthven suggests that "As a subversive figure of disorder, *hysteron proteron*[1] makes alternative literary histories possible by drawing attention to the *pre*posterousness of various literary conventions at odds with commonsense notions of sequence" (346). Ruthven's argument deals mainly with the idea of the preposterous as it applies to the composition of Thomas Chatterton's poetry; however, it possesses an underlying applicability to the Alice narrative. The narrative's own descriptive language (language that is outside of that which makes up the characters' speech and dialogue) contributes not only toward illustrating the characters' madness, and the varying degrees to which they manifest madness, but also toward demonstrating language's active contributions to perpetuating that madness. The combination of the King's and the Knave's logic creates the structure that allows the reader to see their madness. The Knave points out that the letter has "no name signed at the end", while the King counters that the absence of the signature is indicative of "mischief" (Carroll 104-105). While both characters are attempting to emphasize that the absence of an attributed author of the letter makes the simultaneous case for both guilt and innocence, it is their dialogue that projects their madness. The King's response mimics the structure of the Knave's address creating a mirror-image effect in the dialogue. The Knave's words are structurally reflected back in the form of the King's words. It is only because the reader is

[1] According to Ruthven, "*hysteron proteron* names a type of fallacy in which the conclusion is said to antecede the premises because one of them already assumes the proof for it" (346).

outside of the narrative do they have the ability to understand and perceive the Knave's and the King's madness that has been created by the structure of their narrative dialogue. Of language's ability to generate distinct meanings based on varying perspectives, May makes an analogous argument that "...the rules have not been broken; rather, they have been understood differently by players from somewhat different language-games" (85). Madness in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is not generated from any defined or incongruous set of rules that a language may possess, but rather it seeps up and materializes through the variety of language structures applied in and through the narrative. The characters in the narrative as well as the reader interpret and extract meaning from the narrative's language differently. That meaning can then be retransmitted and subsequently interpreted and reinterpreted both within the narrative by its inhabitants and outside of it by the reader. If we return to the King's dialogue with the Knave, another way in which it frames and exposes madness is through construction of the logic that he uses. The King's argument that the nature of the written document as unaddressed and unsigned is indicative of the prisoner's guilt appears to Alice, and initially to the reader, as unfounded and chaotic. This approach of examining the logic, however, offers another methodical language framework through which the narrative's underlying madness can be perceived by the reader. May argues that "There is definitely a form of logic (which I am calling hyper-logic because it is logic in excess) in these exchanges, despite the madness – or, perhaps we should say, *because of* the madness" (83). Although her statement refers to a different part of the story, it has a clear application in this scene. The King's argument does possess logic, but a logic that has been altered and distorted so as to allow the King's state of mind to become a spectacle

suitable for examination. The King's logic may be a form of "hyper-logic", but it is not the logic that exposes the madness, but rather its articulation into dialogue. The King's logic becomes madness only when formulated into words. Words, which when confronted with the words of Alice's logic, complete the framework of its madness. Following the King's statement,

> There was a general clapping of hands at this: it was the first really clever thing the King had said that day.
>
> "That proves his guilt, of course," said the Queen: "so, off with-----"
>
> "It doesn't prove anything of the sort!" said Alice. "Why, you don't even know what they're about!" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 105)

Despite the Queen's interjection, Alice is in fact contributing to the entirety of the framework of distorted logic. She cuts off the Queen's statement, not as a means of separating one framework of distorted logic from another, but rather as a means of hastily attaching her logic to that previously stated. Of Alice's ability to contribute to the logic of the narrative, Beatrice Turner argues that "...the entire narrative may be considered a complex linguistic joke at the expense of Alice and the reader, neither of whom possesses the requisite knowledge to make sense... and as such she almost always comes out second best in the debates in which she is engaged" (247). The narration as well as the dialogue in the narrative may indeed be the "linguistic joke" that Turner suggests; however, the difficulty with her argument arises at her suggestion that the reader is at as much of a disadvantage as Alice. While neither the King nor the Knave recognize their own madness, which stems from the skewed logic in their dialogue with each other, the reader almost certainly can and does. The reader is able to identify the characters'

miscarriage of logic in addition to the aggregate of their madness. This is done through the presence of the juxtaposition of the King's language with both the Knave's as well as Alice's. It is also this interface of logic that creates the framework that allows the reader to determine the characters' madness in their use (or misuse) of language and the construct of its rules.

This is not the first instance in which the narrative's underlying madness has been highlighted and exposed through a conflict of language structures. Alice's encounter with the Hatter and the March Hare in "A Mad Tea Party" demonstrates not only May's "hyper-logic", but also the ability of language to be structured in such a way as to allow the reader access to madness through a form of language that goes unarticulated by the existence of an absence of the answer to a riddle. As a response to one of Alice's admonishments, "The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he *said* was "Why is a raven like a writing desk?"" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 60). The riddle is initially significant not for the question it poses, but for the prompt which generates it. Of Alice's feelings, Kathleen Blake writes, "She finds these mad creatures with their endless circulating around the tea table very incompatible" (122). Alice tries once again to inject her own feelings and thoughts into a narrative with which the only compatible feature is madness. The Hatter's riddle manifests out of a seemingly incongruous thread of conversation. His reaction to Alice's statement is not to provide any continuation of her line of reasoning, but to pose a riddle, a verbal inquiry to which an answer is supposedly being sought. The Hatter, however, is seeking an answer, but not to the riddle. He seeks a resolution of Alice's own thought process. At its core, the Hatter poses the riddle to highlight any lack of substance that Alice's admonishment may possess. He also poses it

to encourage Alice's ability to resolve her own madness with that of Wonderland. The resolution initially takes the form of a conflict of Alice's logic with that of the Hatter. She proposes, "Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles—I believe I can guess that," she added aloud." (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 60). Alice's initial response (and arguably her most instinctual) is one of thought, rather than of speech. The only recipient of this thought can be the reader to whom it can be argued the riddle was also addressed. The reader is not only uniquely privy to Alice's thoughts, which are manifested in the form of language in the narrative, but to the conflicts of logic that this manifestation produces. It is this knowledge which allows the reader to be one of the intended recipients of the riddle. Just as the mirroring that occurred in the King's dialogue with the Knave could be seen exclusively by the reader, the reader understands that they are also its recipient, as it allows them insight into the very madness that the riddle embodies.

The riddle in fact does not actually go unresolved. It is the reader's interpretation of it that holds the answer. This is intimated by the March Hare when he asks Alice, "Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 61). The March Hare's question inadvertently suggests that an answer to the riddle exists, but it is one that must be sought out, not by Alice, but by the reader who has a greater knowledge of the riddle's operative framework. Of the significance of the riddle's functioning, Jan Susina argues "...the connection between a raven and a writing desk lies in how both are creatures of the runes or letters of the alphabet; both hide meaning playfully beneath the surface" (20). Whatever connection may exist between these elements in the context of the riddle, they are beyond not only

Alice's comprehension, but the Hatter's and March Hare's as well. The reader remains as the only one capable of applying any meaning to the riddle. Blake suggests, "...the riddle, is quite literally a waste of time in terms of practical use, it is felt as a waste in psychological terms if it does not allow of a solution, a gratifying sense of closure and triumph" (122). The fact that there is no readily apparent resolution to the riddle is almost immaterial to the language that is used in the posing of it. As both Susina and Blake aptly suggest, the Hatter's riddle offers an incongruous comparison between two physically incompatible things, but is a question whose answer must not only exist, but lie in the very fabric of its make-up: its words. Although she compares the riddle's items to the symbolic interpretive nature of runes in order to draw the underlying connection between them, there is the clear implication that only the reader is capable of making any correlation between them. Alice is not yet capable of deciphering the riddle because she still possesses a great deal of Wonderland's madness and has not reached the point at which she has regained enough of her own logic in order to reject Wonderland's madness.

The riddle's ultimate meaning lies in its words and structure, where they offer up a means of glimpsing the text's undercurrent of madness. Jean-Jacques Lecercle writes, "The text of nonsense is a verbal asylum, in which madmen speak, but within the limits and constraints of the text, which phrases both the discourse of madness and the discourse on madness" (208). The seemingly nonsense language which characterizes the Hatter's riddle and the disparity between Alice's contemplated and verbalized responses delineate the boundaries of Lecercle's "verbal asylum". Alice, the Hatter, the March Hare not only occupy this confined space within the narrative, but the riddle represents a

microcosm of it. The riddle is a nonsensical question whose answer can only be contrived from a distortion of its logic or words. Peterson seems to concur that "...other inhabitants of *Wonderland*, never give comprehensible answers to questions about the sense of things...because you might discover that *Wonderland* is a dream from which there is no waking" (432). Peterson's asserts that the incomprehensibility of an answer can allow the questioner to realize that they lie on the edge of the razor of awareness and one false move would damage them irreparably and set them into madness. While it can be argued that Wonderland may indeed be a dream, it is more likely a fleeting dream incurred as a result of the fact that the reader is privy to Alice's thoughts and capable of determining any resolution to the riddle, affording them a unique position. The reader is simultaneously asylum inmate and attendant, one who is capable of experiencing the madness brought forth by the narrative's words, but also one who is able to interpret that madness.

One of the more apparent conveyers and perpetuators of both the narrative and its integral madness is the narrator of the story. The narrator occupies a unique space within the narrative and has the capability to incite advancement within the narrative as well as to spawn the feelings, ideas, and words that surround and augment the characters within the narrative space that they occupy. Early in the narrative, one of Alice's very first experiences with her interactions with Wonderland is conveyed and expressed almost entirely through the narrator. The narrator states,

> Suddenly she came upon a little three-legged table, all made of solid glass: there was nothing on it but a tiny golden key, and Alice's first idea was the this might belong to one of the doors of the hall; but, alas! either the locks were too large or

> the key was too small, but at any rate it would not open any of them. However, on the second time round, she came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high: she tried the little golden key in the lock, and to her great delight it fitted! (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 12)

Although Wonderland appears to be alien to Alice here, the contents of the hall initially appear to accommodate themselves to Alice's desires independently of any action on her part and before those desires even reach her conscious thoughts. She desires a door for the key to fit and one appears that "she had not noticed before" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 12). However, it is her unconscious desires that are actually prompting the materialization and manipulation of the surroundings that she encounters. But, it is important to note that Alice's thoughts and desires are channeled not through Alice herself, rather through the words and description of the narrator. It is only through the narrator's words that the reader glimpses the malleability that constitutes not only of Wonderland, but also the narrative. As a result, the narrator has relegated the reader to a level similar to that of Alice, a level in which their seeming madness is projected and manifested though another's words: Alice's through the narrator and the reader's through the narrative. The language, which represents the construct of madness that is situated in Wonderland, needs to be questioned in terms of what it forms. This is problematic given the number of elements of language that seem to relate to the generation and continuity of Wonderland's madness. Leila S. May suggests, "Wonderland is not a site of insanity but a possible world that would merely be (radically) different from our own" (84). The difficulty with May's argument is that it relies on the assumption that Wonderland is a preexisting, fixed place that is simply an alternative form of reality. Wonderland and all

of its inhabitants (including Alice) are not in fact fixed, but are exceedingly unsolidified in their construct. They are elements that are subject to creation and manipulation by the language that is used in Wonderland's very composition as well as that used within it. Therefore, if language not only creates and manipulates Wonderland and its inhabitants, it also must create and manifest the madness that is found within. Beatrice Turner argues that "The text grants linguistic control to those who inhabit Wonderland and the Looking-glass world and, in doing so, define them as adults" (249). The narrative text of Wonderland, and in particular its dialogue, does indeed represent a linguistic fight for control. However, this manifestation of a struggle for control is not one associated with power, but one waged over madness.

Turner's argument becomes problematic when it is confronted with the case of Alice herself. Alice does not verbally spar with the Cheshire Cat as a means of necessarily gaining power, but rather appears to be attempting to situate her own sense of identity and degree of madness within the current circumstances in which she apparently finds herself. If Alice is not an adult who can wield language successfully in Wonderland, then the question becomes one of why has she not been granted this status at this point in the narrative, as the Cheshire Cat suggests that since she too is also mad, she is a denizen of Wonderland. Shuttleworth argues, "…these representations circle constantly around questions of language and humanity—whether a lack of articulacy might confer greater moral or intuitive wisdom or lead to a subhuman form of existence" (186). If we are to accept that Alice is not an inhabitant of Wonderland, then it calls into question why and how Alice was ever able to gain entrance to Wonderland at the outset.

The presence of verse in the narrative is another significant structure of language that effectively characterizes the madness in Wonderland. The Hatter offers a prominent one in the form of a children's rhyme. He sings to Alice:

*'Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!*

*How I wonder where you're at!'*

You know the song, perhaps?"

"I've heard something like it," said Alice.

"It goes on, you know," the Hatter continued, "in this way: —

*'Up above the world you fly,*

*Like a tea-tray in the sky.*

*Twinkle, twinkle—'"* (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 63)

The Hatter's verse is distorted and interrupted in such a way as to reflect a level of madness consistent with that which characterizes Wonderland. It should be noted that "The Hatter's song parodies the first verse of Jane Taylor's well-known poem…" (Gardner and Burnstein 89n8). Gardner and Burnstein's note suggests an alteration of the original text of the poem, but their denotation of the verse as a parody does not go far enough to suggest that the changes to the words completely characterize the madness present in it. The Hatter's verse opens and closes with the phrase "Twinkle, twinkle", but the latter of the two utterances of it is interrupted by the Dormouse. The first two lines are also interrupted by the Hatter himself as well as Alice's prosaic statement. The seemingly hastily injected prose allows the distorted verse to be framed as to literally appear on both sides of the prose, but also to blatantly draw attention to the differences in the words from the original poem.

The evidence given at the trial in "Alice's Evidence" is revealed to be not in the form of a letter, but a series of verses. It is also fitting that, like the Hatter's poem, they are read aloud. Like the verse which the Hatter vocalizes into a song, the underlying distortions of meaning and structure of the evidence verse are also revealed. The evidence is read in the scene by the White Rabbit:

*"They told me you had been to her,*

*And mentioned me to him:*

*She gave me good character,*

*But said I could not swim.*

*He sent them word I had not gone*

*(We know it to be true):*

*If she should push the matter on,*

*What would become of you?* (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 105)

The "she" to whom the verse refers can readily be interpreted as Alice. The "you" of the verse, however, is a bit more problematic. While the verse is being articulated to the characters in the narrative scene, it has a much broader audience, the realm of Wonderland itself. The final two lines of the second stanza suggest the vulnerability of the madness of Wonderland should its limits be fully tested by Alice. Frankie Morris suggests, "Bizarre as all these events are, they are neither unconnected nor arbitrary; this is not simply fantasy. Carroll's method of imparting cohesiveness, and thus reality, to his worlds is through the offhand remarks of his characters" (189). While these instances of verse are not "offhand remarks", they do impart the reader's ability to remain connected

to the narrative through the characters' sense of madness. Since the question, along with the rest of the verse, is intended to be vocalized, the question must be addressed to an audience beyond any of the inhabitants of Wonderland. The question in the verse that is read as evidence, like that of the riddle of the raven and the writing desk and the ponderings of the Hatter's poem, is intended for the reader and lingers in the reader's consciousness with no immediately satisfactory answer. But one is not necessarily needed as the reader has glimpsed the madness of Wonderland through them, and perhaps is the only one who can recognize that no answer is indeed the answer.

## Chapter II: Tenniel's Illustrations as a Language of Madness

The language of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that brings forth madness is not limited to the written language of the narrative. The accompanying illustrations by Sir John Tenniel do not merely complement the narrative, but serve as an integral part of the functioning and framework that allows its undercurrent of madness to become manifest. In examinations of the Alice texts, Tenniel's illustrations are often either overlooked entirely, or at best are treated cursorily as visual addenda to Carroll's narrative. However, they are not only integral to the narrative's ability to convey the tale, but also serve as visual manifestations of madness that at times magnify that of the narrative. Yet their madness also differs from that present in Carroll's text. The elements of madness that protrude from Tenniel's images are dependent on what Tenniel has chosen to depict and upon the perspective from which the reader interprets them. Of the nineteenth century view of observation, Jonathan Crary argues:

> But as observation is increasingly tied to the body in the early nineteenth century, temporality and vision become inseparable. The shifting processes of one's own subjectivity experienced in time became synonymous with the act of seeing, dissolving the Cartesian ideal of an observer completely focused on the object. (98)

Crary's statement supports the reader's ability to interpret the fundamental madness within the narrative and the illustrations, including that which lies beneath the illustrations as well. It also allows the illustrations to be interpreted both independently of the narrative and as an integral part of it. The reader can effectively remove the illustrations from the confines of the narrative and examine and interpret them as

elements of their own Alice narrative. Through the illustrations, the reader's experience of the narrative's madness becomes momentarily as simultaneously stable and as unfixed as Alice's. The presence of Tenniel's illustrations in the narrative allow the reader to no longer solely adhere their experience of its madness to the words, but to experience a different lens through which to gaze. The reader no longer sees just "the object" (Crary 98). They witness the madness that invariably progresses through the narrative to the illustrations, while becoming distinctive in its manifestation in the illustrations.

When Lewis Carroll drafted *Alice's Adventures Underground*, what would become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he requested that John Tenniel be the one to provide the illustrations. In a letter to Tom Taylor of *Punch* magazine, Carroll writes:

> Do you know Mr. Tenniel enough to be able to say whether he could undertake such a thing as drawing a dozen wood-cuts to illustrate a child's book, and if so, could you put me in communication with him?...I have tried my hand at drawing on the wood, and come to the conclusion that it would take much more time than I can afford, and the result would not be satisfactory at all. (*The Letters* 62)

Carroll's letter not only requests an introduction, but also indicates that he had attempted his own illustrations to accompany the text. Despite his statement that the creation of his own illustrations would be overly time-consuming and would result in poor quality, the fact that Carroll deemed his own illustrations to be inadequate sparks a degree of curiosity to their content as well as to their ability to draw from the text the level of meaning, and subsequently of madness, present in it to the degree that Tenniel's illustrations do. Frankie Morris argues, "This was no lightly considered choice. Carroll had been a Punch reader since his teens...The two seemed designed to work together.

While Tenniel was Carroll's senior by twelve years and more urbane than the author, their similarities far outweighed their differences" (139-140). Based on the fact that Carroll had followed and admired Tenniel's work and that they ultimately worked well together, we can argue that this is one reason for the smooth integration of the illustrations and the text into one seamless narrative. Tenniel's illustrations do not merely interpret the narrative, they decode and propagate the narrative's underlying connotations of madness. Of the ability to unearth meaning and the relationships within the narrative, Jacqueline Flescher argues:

> Meaning, however undefined, is nevertheless suggested. Preoccupation with meaning is constant throughout *Alice*, sometimes to an extreme degree. The whole range of relationships between word and reference, from total coincidence to exclusion of one of the two terms, can be found. (133)

While Flescher's claim focuses on the assorted levels of meaning that can be conjured by the text's words, we can apply her model of an underlying meaning to the extraction of the madness expressed through Tenniel's illustrations. If we accept the argument that the narrative contains a "[p]reoccupation with meaning," then, given the close proximity and relationship of Tenniel's illustrations with the narrative, the illustrations must by extension be capable of a similar emission of meaning. We might even go so far as to argue that they are an extension of the narrative and, thereby, an extension of any underlying meaning.

There are clear indications that Tenniel may have engaged in a close reading of the narrative prior to creating the illustrations. "On 5 April 1864, Tenniel, who had asked to see Carroll's manuscript before deciding, gave his consent" (Morris 139). The fact that

Tenniel had read the narrative prior to agreeing to illustrate it indicates the close association that the narrative would have had on the development of the illustrations. It also indicates that the subsequent illustrations would have engaged in a certain amount of interpretation of the narrative elements, particularly its most fundamental, its language. It is important to note that Carroll specifically tasked Tenniel with creating the illustrations specifically for his narrative. Of the narrative, Engen suggests that "Dodgson was never strong on description in either Alice book; he preferred dialogue and what he hoped would be strong, clear illustrations to make his points" (73). This statement suggests that Tenniel was presented with a great deal of artistic license when creating the illustrations, and that the illustrations were intended to function both in concert with the text as well as to supplement the missing language of the narrative. Frankie Morris echoes this idea when he states, "It is often said that Tenniel's matter-of-fact manner is the perfect accompaniment to Carroll's writing. Let us take this idea further and state that Tenniel's realism is crucial in preserving the flavor of the texts and in conveying the sensation that the ground beneath our feet has imperceptibly shifted" (189). The movement which Tenniel's illustrations generate within the narrative is not in fact as beyond perception, as Morris claims. If it was, we would not be aware of any disparity between the text and images to begin with. Morris does, however, aptly suggest that Tenniel's images in the Alice texts do not create a rift between themselves and the text, but rather any movement is their merging with the narrative by the connective undercurrent of madness.

Another aspect of Tenniel's illustrations that place them within the framework that establishes them as a form of narrative language is their physical juxtaposition and placement within the text. We can even go so far as to infer that Carroll specifically

designed the narrative in such a way as to allow narrative space for the illustrations to occupy. Rose Lovell-Smith suggests, "Tenniel makes use of the difference between vignettes for simple or single subjects, and framed illustrations, including full-page illustrations, for larger-scale and more important and complex subjects, in a way that very closely resembles a similar distinction in natural history illustration" (391). Although Lovell-Smith's argument focuses on connecting Tenniel's illustrations to methods, which largely characterize illustrations of nature, her claim touches upon an important element that also relates to the language of the narrative: the ability to articulate a framework through which an underlying context can be seen. The strategic position of Tenniel's illustrations on the individual pages offer this requisite framework for providing a visual representation of elements of the narrative. It also allows the underlying elements of the narrative (namely madness) to be made clear. This can then prompt ensuing interpretations to transpire through all of the novel's elements, including the illustrations, the language of the narrative, and the dialogue. Morris argues, "Realism, however, is something else; it is the validity of setting, type, gesture. It is a subtle thing, Tenniel's realism" (189). Whatever elements of realism are present in Tenniel's illustrations, it is indeed an understated aspect of them. However, we should not mistake this subtlety for a lack of influence. Tenniel's illustrations are capable of convincing us of their madness because they depict Wonderland with a convincingness that appeals to our sanity. For Morris, this means "But most convincing are the habitants of these strange worlds, performing their roles unselfconsciously—neither playing up to the audience nor pretending to be a party of amiable eccentrics romping through her travels with Alice—

they are simply themselves" (190). Wonderland has no self-awareness; therefore, it cannot possess any pretenses leaving it ripe for unadulterated interpretation.

One of the characters that depicts this sense of unwitting believability is the White Rabbit. Tenniel's illustrations depicting the White Rabbit almost prove to be as elusive as he is to Alice in the narrative. The White Rabbit appears in only seven of Tenniel's illustrations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; however, these images manage to create a distinct lineage and narrative all their own. In fact, it is one Tenniel's drawings to which the reader is introduced at the start of the novel, even before Carroll's narrative begins. The drawing of the White Rabbit precedes the first chapter and greets the reader. The reader has a distinct image of the White Rabbit prior to any description given by Carroll in the narrative. Carroll's description of the White Rabbit is piecemeal. The narrator describes, "...suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her...when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on..." (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 10). Had an illustration been absent, the reader must construct their own image based on pieces of information. The White Rabbit is depicted by Carroll as having a waistcoat and a pocket watch and being in a state of frenzied motion. In Tenniel's image, however, a decidedly more tranquil and contemplative White Rabbit is depicted. He appears to stand calmly gazing at his pocket watch. Carroll's description of the White Rabbit provides the reader with the ability to see the underlying madness by providing the context of frenzied motion in the language, one that the illustration lacks. Tenniel has removed the madness from the White Rabbit, effectively freezing him in a moment, which allows the reader to more fully contemplate him.

The White Rabbit reappears in a later illustration in the chapter "The Pool of Tears". In this instance, the frenzied motion projected in the narrative remains in the text rather than the accompanying illustration. The narrator describes the White Rabbit's encounter with the larger-than-life Alice: "The Rabbit started violently, dropped the white kid-gloves and the fan, and skurried away into the darkness as hard as he could go" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 17). The White Rabbits reactions and movements are described as extreme and possessing a high level of intensity. His reaction to Alice's presence is labeled with the words "violently," "scurried," and "hard" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 17). These words in the narrator's context imply a sense of forcefulness and agitation, but lack any connotation of harm or maltreatment. They also place the depiction of madness firmly on the White Rabbit, rather than Alice. The descriptive words provide the framework through which the reader witnesses, not only a heightened reaction, but one that is indicative of the White Rabbit's madness. Tenniel's illustration of the scene, however, interprets the scene differently and consequently creates a different framework through which a different madness is seen. Tenniel's illustration depicts the White Rabbit's back to the viewer moving away from Alice, but, like the initial illustration, with little sense of urgency. He appears as if he is almost calmly walking away into the infinite space at the back of the hall. Because there is no great sense of urgency generated by the depiction of the White Rabbit, we are forced to look elsewhere in the illustration for the madness it reveals. Any sense of madness that the illustration projects lies in the depiction of Alice. Alice looks almost taken aback by the White Rabbit's retreat. Tenniel seems to have taken liberties with his interpretation of this narrative moment. Tenniel has created a new framework through which the violence,

and therefore the madness, is now transferred to the depiction of Alice. The reactions described in the text are effectively reversed in Tenniel's illustration.

Another of the inhabitants of Wonderland through whom Tenniel revises the framework through which the character's madness can be seen is the Cheshire Cat. The Cheshire Cat sits as one the most prominent examples of the presence of madness in the narrative as well as in its accompanying illustrations. He first appears in the second illustration corresponding to the chapter "Pig and Pepper". Tenniel's illustration of the Cheshire Cat effectively mimics the narrative's sparse description of "a large cat, which was lying on the hearth and grinning from ear to ear" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 52). This description provides no foreshadowing of any of the cat's later statements of madness, and little indication of any of his physical aspects. Yet the facial expression that Tenniel has endowed the Cheshire Cat with in the illustration conveys a sense of what can only be described as incongruous folly. The first indicator of this is the fact that the Cheshire Cat appears decidedly out of place in the scene depicted. Aside from being the only non-human in the scene, his gaze appears to be directed upward at no character in particular, but rather at the point in the illustration which would be considered its vanishing point. His grin is a close-lipped one and, combined with the directionality of his gaze, seems to express a mysteriously serene knowledge in the midst of the chaos that characterizes the Duchess's kitchen. Of the Cheshire Cat's inconspicuous prominence in the story, Rose Lovell-Smith argues that his image is:

> …both grisly and amusing, which is a depiction of the chain of predation, eat or be eaten, in action. One could hardly ask for a more succinct visual summary of this important element in the contemporary contexts of Alice. Recognition of this

> theme will, as well as accounting for lobster and puppy illustrations, also account for the otherwise somewhat puzzling centrality of Dinah and the Cheshire Cat in Carroll's text. (408)

Lovell-Smith's suggestion that the presence of the Cheshire Cat in both the text as well as Tenniel's illustrations is a means of representing a predatory instinct. While it addresses the character's deviously sharp toothy grin and lingering presence in the illustrations, it misses the mark when the illustrations are paired with the language of the text. The Cheshire Cat's presence in each of the instances in which he is illustrated is not necessarily one of predation, but one who possesses an innate unshared knowledge all his own. They also manage to serve as a means through which the madness of the narrative is extracted and re-conveyed to the reader through the interpretive framework of the illustrations.

The Cheshire Cat occurs in three subsequent illustrations in the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. However, there is a marked difference in each of these illustrations. Unlike the first illustration in which he appears, the Cheshire Cat is depicted in all subsequent illustrations with his teeth showing through his grin. This is notable because the visibility of the Cheshire Cat's teeth directly correlates to and expresses the madness articulated in the accompanying text, however, still lacking any sense of the predatory. When Alice encounters the Cheshire Cat in the woods after leaving the Duchess's house, "...she was a little startled by seeing the Cheshire-Cat sitting on a bough of a tree a few yards off. The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought: still it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 56). The narrator's

description of the Cheshire Cat points out two of his most prominent features: his lengthy claws and numerous teeth. The menacing implications of these features are what prompt Alice to approach him with deference. However, in the two illustrations that accompany the scene, the Cheshire Cat appears sitting on a tree branch far above Alice's head in her immediate vicinity, and then again closer up. He is depicted as possessing a wide grin, and sharp teeth can be seen, but the long claws emphasized by the narrator are conspicuously absent. Tenniel has effectively negated Lovell-Smith's "depiction of the chain of predation" (408). Martin Gardner and Mark Burnstein note, "Tenniel's two pictures were placed on left-hand pages so that (in Carroll's words) "if you turn up the corner of this leaf, you'll have Alice looking at the Grin: and she doesn't look a bit more frightened than when she was looking at the Cat, *does* she?" (qtd. in 82n12). The clear reference to Carroll's purposefulness in placing the illustrations on particular pages in order for them to function differently and independently of the narrative when the pages are physically moved indicates that they are as much an integral part of the text as the text itself. In the illustration in which Alice stands beneath the branch on which the Cheshire Cat is seated, her back is to the viewer, but her hands are clasped behind her back as if to demonstrate her fearfulness. However, her face is not visible, so the reader is unable to corroborate her reaction based on her facial expression. However, her body language is serene, indicating a lack of fear.

In a collective reference to all of the illustrations in the novel, it is noted that "...although Tenniel certainly endows his creatures with personality and facial expressions, his animals, unlike his humans, are never grotesques" (Lovell-Smith 392). While the people depicted in Tenniel's images can indeed be considered grotesque

representations, several of Tenniel's animals can be as well. The illustrations depicting the Duchess's kitchen, Alice's encounter with the Cheshire Cat in the woods and that of the quarrel between the King, Queen and the executioner all portray the Cheshire Cat contrary to Lovell-Smith's claim. The facial expressions of both the people and the Cheshire Cat are indeed exaggerated. But rather than being completely "grotesque"[2] (Lovell-Smith 392), what they express is an exaggeration of the madness inferred in the narrative. Through his illustrations of the Cheshire Cat, Tenniel presents a decidedly grotesque representation of what is an otherwise innocuously described animal. Because the Cheshire Cat appears in the narrative with the intent to specifically remind Alice that Wonderland is a place in which she is simultaneously an inhabitant and transient due to the madness that permeates it, it is fitting that he is visually depicted as one whose smile possesses an all-knowing quality, rather than one of vicious, predatory intent.

In the scene depicting the argument between the Queen, the Executioner and the King, the narrator describes that "When she got back to the Cheshire-Cat, she was surprised to find quite a large crowd collected around it: there was a dispute going on between the executioner, the King, and the Queen, who were all talking at once…and they repeated their arguments to her, though, as they all spoke at once, she found it very hard to make out exactly what they said" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 76). The text provides only a scarce description of the characters' placement and actions in the scene, but Carroll's description seems to repeatedly emphasize two details in particular: the

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[2] Rose Lovell-Smith appears to use the term more closely related to the *Oxford English Dictionary* meaning of "[a] kind of decorative painting or sculpture, consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers" ("Grotesque, n." def. 1a). However, the definition of the adjective form with the meaning of "Ludicrous from incongruity; fantastically absurd" ("Grotesque, adj." def. 3), more accurately applies to Tenniel's illustrations.

presence and prominence of the Cheshire Cat and the many overlapping conversations taking place. The narrative describes the crowd as being gathered around the Cheshire Cat. The depiction of the Cheshire Cat in Tenniel's illustration is significant because Tenniel chose to make him into the focal point of the illustration, but in a very different way from that derived from the narrative description. His disembodied face sits above the arguing crowd looking down with an enigmatic grin as if all that is taking place below him is doing so at his discretion and for his amusement. The narrator describes his appearance in the midst of the goings on, as Alice "...noticed a curious appearance in the air: it puzzled her very much at first, but after watching it a minute or two she made it out to be a grin...[T]here was mouth enough for it to speak with. Alice waited till the eyes appeared" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 74). The Cheshire Cat's face appears one significant feature at a time (save the nose), but it is the "grin" that is first. The Cheshire Cat is initially incapable of speech, but is capable of infiltrating the scene with his innate madness epitomized in what is his dominant quality, his grin. John Kulvicki argues, "The photo-realist depiction of the Cheshire Cat is an unrealistic depiction of a cat because it depicts the cat as having properties that are not in our conception of a cat, such as a big, grinning, human mouth and other physiognomic oddities...Tenniel's illustrations of the Lewis Carroll's Alice are quite realistic" (348-349). While the narrative elected to have the Cheshire Cat reveal himself in piecemeal, Tenniel, however, elected to illustrate the entire head of the Cheshire Cat, but the innate madness in his grin is no less represented.

Although the conversations taking place in the scene are not represented in the form of dialogue, they are represented and conveyed through Tenniel's illustration. His depiction of the crowd is one in which the characters overlay one another to the point of

disintegration. In essence, they have been reduced almost to the face cards that they are. Of the executioner in Tenniel's illustration of the scene, it is noted, "In Tenniel's illustration of this scene he made the executioner, appropriately, the Knave of Clubs" (Gardner and Burstein 105n8). Tenniel has fashioned him into a representation of the least of the face cards, effectively completing the trio, while defining the executioner's status. While the language of the narrator indicates nothing of the executioner's visage, Tenniel has conveyed another aspect of not only the character, but of the madness that permeates the scene. His face bears an executioner's mask, which simultaneously obscures any distinct features and projects an aura of violence and inhumanity. The executioner is no longer one component of a side note description of a dialogue, but a character whose untrustworthy and servile tendencies have been simultaneously created and revealed. Frankie Morris argues, "We can identify many of the grotesque's components in the *Alice* texts and pictures: objects brought to life and human beings deprived of lifelike attributes, the merging of beings and things, deformities of violence to the human body…all of these occurring within a structured framework that appears to have its own inner logic" (182). Tenniel's depiction of the playing cards, specifically the executioner, initially appears to constitute an image that is closer to anthropomorphism rather than the grotesque. However, both must be present if we are to accept Morris' suggestion of a "structured framework" (182). However, Morris does not go far enough with his claim. While the images may possess and express a sense of logic, it is the grotesque logic of the images that expresses their and the narrative's sense of madness. Since Tenniel's images occupy narrative space, it follows that they not only refract the madness of the narrative, but also generate their own independent representation of it.

Tenniel's illustrations of Alice occur with a great deal more frequency than those of any other character. However, it is perhaps through these images of Alice that the reader is witness to the most prominent and applicable conveyance of madness in the novel. Tenniel's representations of Alice at particular moments in the text differ dramatically from the information and description conveyed in the narrative, and it is this difference in which the reader finds the narrative's sense of Alice's madness. When Alice consumes the contents of the bottle found on the hall table and proceeds to grow rapidly to a larger version of herself, "Just at this moment her head struck against the roof of the hall: in fact she was now rather more than nine feet high" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 17). Aside from the specificity of her height and the relationship of her newly acquired physicality to the dimensions of the room, no other description of Alice's physical features is given. Tenniel's image of the oversized Alice is not derived directly from the text, but rather appears to rely heavily on Tenniel's own interpretation of the character of Alice in the scene. On notable aspect of Tenniel's illustration is that "Unlike some interpretations in which Alice is evenly lengthened, here her neck is monstrously long. And still more disquieting, to accommodate this growth Tenniel has caused the bit of dress above her pinafore to likewise stretch in a most elastic manner" (Morris 191). Morris's claim makes a significant point about the capabilities of Tenniel's image in representing Alice visually. Alice has not merely become a larger version of her human self, but rather a corrupted version whose latent madness is expressed through Tenniel's vision of her grotesquely disproportionate and abnormal anatomy. To interpret Alice as a grotesque figure incorporates Tenniel's image into the interpretive space left unoccupied by Carroll's description and elicits the madness that the text implies but does not directly

express. Alice appears shocked as if by her appearance, but the reader understands that this reaction is based solely on the narrative's description, as there is no component of the image to suggest that she has any visual knowledge of her appearance.

Another disparity between Carroll's narrative description of Alice and Tenniel's accompanying image appears in the scene in which Alice is immersed in a pool of her own tears. Of the image of Alice, Rose Lovell-Smith suggests that "Tenniel's Alice, for instance, having slipped into the pool of tears, is very much more alarmed than Carroll's Alice" (385). The discrepancy between Alice's narrative reaction to the overwhelming pool of her tears and the reaction depicted in Tenniel's illustration is indicative of the illustration's ability to convey the madness that underlies the language of the scene in the narrative. Her face conveys an amount of distress appropriate to satiate the reader's expectation of such a normal reaction to an unrealistic, but threatening situation. But, her facial expression still acts, in part, as a conduit of the seemingly counterintuitive response to the situation given by Alice in the narrative. In the narrative, Alice professes that "...being drowned in my own tears...*will* be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer to-day" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 21). Textually, Alice expresses the sense of oddity that may be felt by someone being enveloped by a large amount of liquid consisting of her own tears. However, her vocalization of the situation expresses the underlying madness in the use of the term "queer," which is directed not only at her present circumstances, but also at the narrative as a whole. Alice is inadvertently pointing out that the narrative's textual framework of language helps to both create and bring its elements of madness to the forefront. All of the circumstances in which she finds herself throughout the narrative are "queer," therefore creating a normative baseline by which to

measure madness. Alice is no longer addressing the state of her own circumstances, but the oddities and inconsistencies of the narrative as a whole as well as the inconsistent gaps between Carroll's descriptive language and Tenniel's interpretive images.

A gap between what Tenniel depicts and what Carroll describes is also seen in the depiction of Alice inside the White Rabbit's house. Alice consumes another explicitly directed bottle with the hope of increasing her size. The contents of the bottle

> ...did so indeed, and much sooner than she had expected: before she had drunk half the bottle, she found her head pressing against the ceiling, and had to stoop to save her neck from being broken...She went on growing, and growing, and very soon had to kneel down on the floor: in another minute there was not even room for this...Still went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window..." (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 32)

In a similar fashion to the pool of tears, Alice has been overcome by her physical surroundings and is in a sense of mortal danger. Just as she had risked drowning, Alice is at risk of being asphyxiated and compressed by the confines of the White Rabbit's house. Alice addresses her circumstances by telling herself, "Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What *will* become of me?" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 32). Although the narrative presents her as ever so slightly more perturbed by her current situation than the pool of tears, Tenniel's illustration, again, adopts a different perspective. Tenniel endows Alice with a facial expression that indicates anger, rather than fear or despair. Whatever madness that is found in the narrative through Alice's incongruous, calm reaction to the situation has been radically altered in Tenniel's illustration. The drowning Alice and the confined Alice, both interpreted through the narrative's language and the interpretations

in Tenniel's illustrations provide the framework through which the madness found in the story can be generated, viewed and interpreted. The reader has at their disposal the ability to interpret Alice's madness in Carroll's narrative description and, when they reach the gap left by the text, turn to Tenniel's images, which interpret that gap and present an independent vision of Alice's madness.

Aside from the illustrations in which Alice is the sole focus, in her other illustrations she acts as a focal point through which the madness in the image is expressed. In images such as that depicting Alice with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, Alice in the Duchess's kitchen, and Alice at the Mad Tea Party, Alice, while not the primary subject of the image, acts as a conduit through which the viewer's attention is drawn to the madness expressed by the other characters. James Kincaid argues,

> ...Alice very often does upset a beautiful comic game by introducing alien concepts of linear progression to infinity, nothingness, and death. Therefore, though the Queen of Hearts is a frightening symbol of unregulated hostility, it is a hostility that leads nowhere; no one is really beheaded, since no logical consequences hold...it is Alice's matter-of-fact world, with its serene acceptance of predation and murder, that is truly awful. (92-93)

While Kincaid argues that it is Alice's serenity within the chaos that characterizes Wonderland and should become the focus of disdain due to its atypical nature, in Tenniel's images it is not a sense of disdain that is created, but rather a sense of radical madness. In the illustration of Alice, the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle in "The Mock Turtle's Story," Alice is tucked away, partially obscured by the Gryphon with her back pressed against a large rock. The Gryphon and the Mock Turtle are at the forefront of the

image. The viewer's first instinctual examination of the image is drawn toward the two creatures rather than Alice. Alice's wide-eyed demure expression emphasizes the Mock Turtle's "large eyes full of tears" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 82). However, it is Alice's presence which makes the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle's expressions of madness all the more pronounced. Her facial expression has neither the same amount of emotion nor the impassioned manifestation of madness as the Gryphon or the Mock Turtle, but the lesser impact of her expression accentuates the others'.

The final illustration of the text of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is of Alice being pursued and attacked by the Queen's army of playing cards. In the accompanying text of the narrative, the narrator describes the scene:

> At this the whole pack of cards rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her; she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some of the dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face. (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 114)

It is interesting to note that the attack of the cards is the last scene of the narrative to be represented visually. The narrator's description of the scene assigns a great deal of furious personal agency to the cards and Alice. The cards "rose up…and came flying down," while Alice "tried to beat them off" (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures* 114). The narrator's description is one characterized by movement, while Tenniel's illustration decidedly less so. Of Tenniel's depiction of the cards, Gardner and Burnstein note, "In Tenniel's illustration of this scene the cards have become ordinary playing cards, though three have retained vestigial noses" (145-146n8). The gradual fading of the human

features of the cards in Tenniel's illustration indicates that their madness is fading as well. Although some of their noses and silhouettes are depicted, the cards in the illustration no longer have the requisite features, namely mouths, with which to espouse language and through language, madness. Just as there is no language emanating from anyone other than the narrator, the Tenniel's illustration has gone the extra step and removed that capability from all but Alice.

While the cards and Wonderland are purported to fade around Alice, the question of how much remains of Alice herself is posed. Turner suggests, "...she exists only as long as the narrative is sustained by the author who created it... Adults, as the arbiters of language, create the child, and they also create the signs by which the child shall be described: innocence, inexperience, a lack of knowledge" (251). If we apply Turner's suggested concepts of creation and transformation to Alice's madness, then it creates a dichotomy of whether her experiences in Wonderland prove Alice to indeed be as mad as the Cheshire Cat claims, or does her madness cease along with her childlike characteristics and the narrative itself. Lois Kuznets similarly suggests, "Alice's control and mastery of the dream world increases rather than decreases...The final rejection of the fantasy is, therefore, an expression of power over the fantasy" (21). Part of Alice's existence, and therefore her power, may vanish with a lack of an accompanying illustration to the conclusion of the story, but the narrative and its language extend the story beyond the illustration. If the narrative is written, then the fact that it has been committed into textual prose should be sufficient to perpetuate the narrative, and by extension, Alice herself and her madness. According to both the narrator and Tenniel's illustration, Alice does not merely retain her human form and capacity for language, but

she has reverted back to the original size she possessed upon entering the narrative and Wonderland.

## Conclusion

The narrative of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* uses language and the absence of language deliberately, with the resulting creation of a narrative that is both comprehensive in its telling and allows that use of language to act as a framework through which the narrative's underlying madness is seen. John Tenniel's illustrations take on a new level of significance when they are placed in conjunction with Lewis Carroll's narrative text. Carroll's narrative is purposefully sparse and ambiguous in its use of description and creates a space within the narrative demanding to be occupied. Tenniel's illustrations proceed to inhabit this unoccupied space within the narrative structure that allows him to ignore or do away with the restrictions that might otherwise have dictated, at least in part, the substance of his illustrations. As a result, his illustrations of Wonderland, its inhabitants and Alice are no longer merely addenda to the story or genuine reflections of aspects of the narrative. According to Turner, "The Alice texts enact the relationships between subject and object, fiction and reality, through language. To wield language in these texts…is to have the power to define, to create, and to destroy" (244). Carroll's narrative and Tenniel's illustrations effectively work in tandem both to create and to turn that creation into an interpretive framework through which we can recognize the narrative's madness. The illustrations have become their own integral features of the narrative, distinct, but not separate. Like Carroll's narrative, they have the distinct ability to "wield language" with all of its itinerant power as well as madness. If we agree with Turner's argument, then it must follow that the capabilities of language extend beyond Carroll's narrative to Tenniel's illustrations as they function as a means of conveying the narrative. Tenniel's illustrations aid in presenting the narrative as

the focal point and impetus through which the text's underlying elements of madness are brought forth. In conjunction, the language and linguistic constructs of the narrative provide the framework that elucidates and perpetuates the madness within and afford the imaginative space fittingly inhabited by Tenniel's illustrations.

Both Tenniel's illustrations and Carroll's narrative language offer alternative depictions of select events within the story and fittingly do so in divergent ways; however, despite the differences and discrepancies each presents, the adeptness with which Carroll's language creates a linguistic framework and Tenniel's illustrations construct a visual one achieves a unique stability that allows the narrative's undercurrent of madness to be realized and to continue to circulate within the tale. Of the perpetuation of the existence of Wonderland, May asks, "Is this a possible world? Is this a sustainable form of life?...if something is actual, it is possible…" (92). The use of language in both Carroll's narrative and Tenniel's illustrations make the answer to these questions a resounding *yes*. They both create and perpetuate the narrative along with a sense of madness that is so compelling that it endows the reader with the ability to follow Alice in her journey down the rabbit hole, through Wonderland and emerge from it.

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