

# Alice in Wonderland (3)

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*Overview of chapters 7-12*

# Chapter 7: A Mad Tea Party



*Alice tries to take tea with the Hatter, the March Hare, and a Dormouse. She takes part in a confusing conversation and hears the beginning of the Dormouse's tale.*



# Madness: the Hatter and the Hare

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*The Mad Hatter and the March Hare are another example of how in Wonderland language creates reality (rather than just reflecting it)*

*“as mad as a hatter”  
(also because Victorian hatters worked with mercury, and mercury poisoning leads to insanity)*



# Madness: the Hatter and the Hare

*“as mad as a March (>marsh?) hare”*



*Tenniel drew the March Hare with wisps of straws on its head.*

*This was a clear symbol of lunacy or insanity in the Victorian age.*



*Unsurprisingly, Disney's Hare does not retain any trace of the straws.*



# A Mad Tea Party: a central chapter

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- *Alice reaches the furthest point in her descent into chaos: the word 'mad' is particularly prominent.*
- *The conversation at the tea table is absurd and aggressive, a parody perhaps of Victorian hypocrite 'civil' conversations during snobbish tea-parties.*
- *Alice's puzzlement: the conversation "seemed to her to have no sort of meaning, and yet it was certainly English".*

# Agon at the tea table

*“Have some wine,” the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.*

*[...] “I don’t see **any wine,**” she remarked.*

*“There isn’t **any,**” said the March Hare.*

*“Then **it wasn’t very civil of you** to offer it,” said Alice angrily.*

*“**It wasn’t very civil of you** to sit down without being invited,” said the March Hare.*

*“I didn’t know it was your table,” said Alice [...].*

*“**Your hair wants cutting,**” said the Hatter. [...]*

*“**You should learn** not to make personal remarks [...] it’s very rude”*

# Lack of progress in Wonderland

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- *What is striking in the chapter is the lack of progress:*
  - *no progress in conversation*
  - *no progress in the ritual of tea-taking (they go round a circle)*
  - *no progress in time (it's always tea-time)*
  - *no progress in the riddle-solving tension on the part of the reader:*
    - *“Why is a raven like a writing desk?” remains with no answer.*

# Nonsense and puns

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- *the idiomatic saying “to kill time” is taken literally.*
- *beat time (=in music) / beat time (=physically assault time)*
- *the Dormouse’s story:*
  - *nonsense: the girls draw “everything that begins with an M-”*
  - *draw (=with pencil) / draw (= pull smth from)*
  - *“they were in the well” / “they were well in”*



# Chapter 8: The Queen's Croquet Grounds



*Alice finally gets into the splendid garden she had glimpsed at in the hall of doors (Ch. 1). Here she meets the Queen of Hearts, plays a strange and 'live' game of croquet, and helps the Cheshire Cat keep his head.*

# The Queen's Croquet Grounds: disorder

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- *The Garden Alice enters is the parody of a powerful symbol for Victorian culture: the beautiful and protected garden of childhood and innocence.*
- *Oscar Wilde, “The Selfish Giant” (1888), Frances Hodgson Burnett, The Secret Garden (1911): the garden as a secluded and protected space for a spiritual progress.*

# The Queen's Croquet Grounds: disorder

*In contrast to the ideal garden connected with infancy, Alice is confronted with a garden which is the space for some unsettling disorder:*

- *the roses are fake, their beautiful colours are painted artificially*
- *the game of croquet has no rules and is incoherent*
- *instead of protection and spiritual elevation, the garden is pervaded by the Queen's insistent threat: "Off with their heads!". Alice: "they're dreadfully fond of beheading people here"*

# Alice and authority

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◦ *At the beginning of the chapter, Alice recognizes royal authority:*

◦ *she is “eager to see the Queen”*

◦ *the text itself emphasizes the central importance of the royal couple:*

*“last of all this grand procession, came  
THE KING AND THE QUEEN OF  
HEARTS” (all capitalized)*

# Alice and authority

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- *At first, Alice is very polite when speaking to the Queen:*
  - *“What’s your name, child?” “My name is Alice, so please your Majesty”.*
- *.. but then she gradually gains in confidence as she recognizes that “they’re only a pack of cards, after all”:*
  - *“And who are these?” [...] “How should I know? [...] It’s no business of mine. [...] Nonsense!”*

# Alice and authority

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- *The recognition that the King and Queen are only “a pack of cards” (repeated also in Ch. 12) perhaps hints at something deeper:*
  - *social status is an arbitrary symbol*
  - *the adult world is a world of conventions*
- *Alice rebels against such authority and shows her belief in justice (rebels against the game, helps the Cheshire cat and the soldiers: “You shan’t be beheaded!”)*

# Chapter 9: The Mock Turtle's Story



*Alice meets again the Duchess, who this time behaves friendly to Alice and appears to be fond of morals. Alice is then taken by a Gryphon to meet the Mock Turtle, and listens to the sad animal telling the story of his schooling in the sea.*

# A Parody of Adults' Didacticism

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- *In this chapter adults' didacticism is exposed as ridiculous and pretentious to the eyes of the child character:*
  - *the Duchess wants to find a moral in everything, but this moral is often absurd.*



# A Parody of Adults' Didacticism

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- *The Duchess: “and the moral of that is - take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves”*
- *Alexander Pope, ‘An Essay on Criticism’: “The sound must seem an echo to the sense”*
- *a kind of metatextual remark on nonsense language...*
- *.... but also a pun on British proverb “Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves”*

# A Parody of Adults' Didacticism

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- *Wonderland creatures such as the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle are self-confident about their knowledge and interact in a way that intimidates the listener (like an authoritarian parent or teacher).*
- *Often, however, the content of what is said is blatantly absurd:*
  - *“Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?” Alice asked. “We called him Tortoise because he taught us,” said the Mock Turtle angrily. “Really you are very dull!”*

# Play with Language in Chapter 9



*“mock turtle soup” = a soup (made from veal) imitating the soup made from turtle.*

*Here, the mock turtle is an imitation of a turtle, a perplexing hybrid creature (half calf, half turtle)*

# Play with Language in Chapter 8

*Other examples of play with language in the chapter include:*

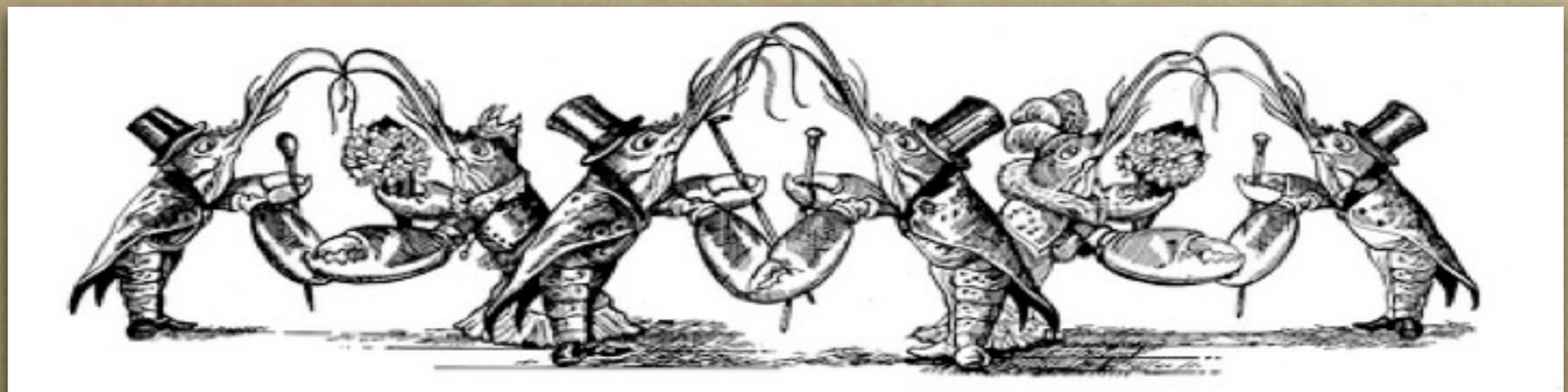
- ◆ *“They are called lessons [...] because they lessen from day to day”*
- ◆ *School subject at the mock turtle’s school: “Reeling and Writhing” (Reading and Writing), “the different branches of Arithmetic - Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision, [...] Mystery [...], Seaography, Drawling, Stretching, and Fainting in Coils”*

*addition subtraction multiplication division history  
geography drawing sketching painting in oil*

# Chapter 10: The Lobster Quadrille



*The Gryphon and the Mock Turtle describe and dance the Lobster Quadrille. Alice tells them of her experiences that day, and hears the Mock Turtle cry while singing the sad “Turtle Soup” song. Then she leaves with the Gryphon to attend a trial.*



# The Lobster Quadrille: Order and disorder

- *The Quadrille Song and the Mock Turtle's 'beautiful soup' song are parodies of songs which were well-known in Carroll's time:*
  - *"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly.*
  - *in Alice: "Will you walk a little faster?" said a whiting to a snail.*
  - *"'Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard him complain, / 'You have wak'd me soon, I must slumber again'" (Watts, Divine Songs)*
  - *in Alice: "'Tis the voice of the Lobster: I heard him declare, / 'You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair'"*

# The Lobster Quadrille: Disorder & Order in Wonderland

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- *The play on poems is a typical feature of Alice in Wonderland: although Carroll questions and demystifies Victorian conventions, parody also somehow retains the original straightforward 'rule'.*
- *Literary critic Linda M. Shires: nonsense operates as the distorting mirror at the circus funhouse does. We suddenly see ourselves as spatially different, even multiple, but its pleasurable nature comes from its being temporary: after some initial bewilderment, we regain our body (the form of the whole can be glimpsed at under its fragmentation).*

# Puns in Chapter 10

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- \* *“And what are [shoes under the sea] made of?”  
“Soles [=sogliole/suole] and eels [=anguille/  
tacchi] of course”*
- \* *“No wise fish would go anywhere without a  
porpoise [=maiale marino]. [...] If a fish came to  
me, and told me he was going a journey, I should  
say, ‘With what porpoise?’” “Don’t you mean  
‘purpose’?” said Alice. “I mean what I say”, the  
Mock Turtle replied, in an offended tone.*



# Chapter 11: Who Stole the Tarts?



*Alice decides to attend the trial of the Knave of Hearts, who is accused of stealing tarts. Here Alice meets again some of the creatures of Wonderland from previous chapters: the White Rabbit is a Herald, the King of Hearts is the judge, Bill the Lizard is a juror and the Hatter is a (nervous) witness.*

# Chapter 11: Alice and nonsense

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- *The final two chapters revolve around the trial concerning who stole the Queen's tarts.*
- *The trial is chaotic and disorganized, like the Caucus race in Ch.3*
- *Alice gains in confidence and starts to subvert the nonsense world of Wonderland*

# Alice's self confidence

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- *She's interested in the trial mainly because of the tarts: "I wish they'd get the trial done, [...] and hand down the refreshments!"*
- *She is proud at her skills in remembering grand words: "I suppose they are the jurors" [...] she thought, and rightly too, that very few little girls of her age knew the meaning of it.*
- *She boldly judges the 'creatures': "Stupid things!"*

# Linguistic Humour

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- \* *“Take off your hat,” the King said to the Hatter. “It isn’t mine,” said the Hatter. “Stolen!” the King exclaimed [...]. “I keep them to sell [...],” the Hatter added as an exclamation.*
- \* *“I’m a poor man” [...] “You’re a very poor [=weak, not skilful] speaker”*

# Chapter 12: Alice's Evidence



*Alice has grown back to her full size when she is called as a witness. She overturns the jury, gives testimony to the King, resists the aggressiveness of the Queen, and is attacked by a pack of cards. She wakes up on the riverbank, tells her sister of her strange dream, and goes off to take tea.*

# Alice's evidence/Alice's (self) confidence

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- *Alice is now prepared to reject the nonsense world of Wonderland as well as the nonsense trial:*
- *The Queen's motto: "Sentence first, verdict afterwards!"*
- *"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly. "The idea of having sentence the first!"*

# Alice's evidence/Alice's (self) confidence

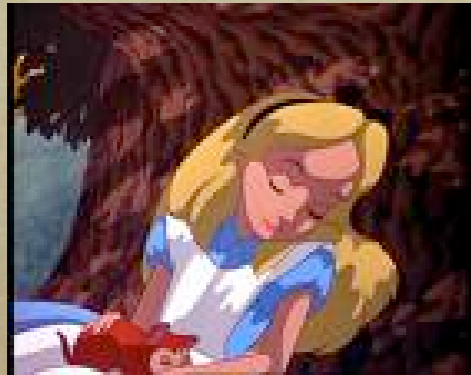
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*The child is now overturning the absurd rules of absurd social hierarchy:*

- *reaction to absurd rules: (to the King) “that’s not a regular rule: you invented it just now”*
- *reaction to absurd behaviour: (to the Queen) “It doesn’t prove anything of the sort! [...] you don’t even know what you’re about!”*
- *reaction to absurd authority: “Who cares for you? [...] You’re nothing but a pack of cards!”*

# The end of it all: a 'curious dream'

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*At the end of the book, we find Alice waking up from the dream of Wonderland...*

*... but this does not imply a rejection of dreaming: rather, we find Alice's sister (day) dreaming about Alice's adventures in Wonderland.*



# A dream of a dream...

*For Carroll dreaming is a mental state allowing the dreamer to escape 'dull' reality:*

*“So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality - the grass would be only rustling to the wind, and the pool rippling to the waving of the reeds - the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the Queen’s shrill cries to the voice of the sheep-boy”*

*superiority of the (day)dream and of (child) imagination*