

Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione
Laurea Magistrale in
Scienze Pedagogiche e Progettazione Educativa



LINGUA INGLESE

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About the author

- 4th of July 1862
an important date in his life (marked in his diary “with a white stone”): the trip to the river Goldstowe with the three Liddell children, the daughters of the Dean of Christ Church. First telling of the Alice story
 - 1864 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* first published.
 - 1866 second edition published
 - 1872 sequel *Through the Looking-glass and What Alice Found There* published.
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The Victorian Age

- A complex age marked by political, social and religious unrest during which England underwent a gradual but steady process of democratization, seeing greater freedom granted to the Catholics (*Oxford Movement*) and, above all, the rise of the middle class. This was made up of manufacturers, merchants, bankers who increased in power and took over the reins of government favoured by progress in industrial and technological fields and the resulting prosperity.
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Social Problems

- **Misery, distress, life in slums, health problems (lack of hygiene) in workhouses and slums.**
 - **Debtors' jail (the Marshall Prison)**
 - **Poor education (incompetent, rigid teachers, corporal punishment to maintain discipline)**
 - **The New Poor Law (1834)**
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The Victorian Compromise

The particular Victorian social situation, which saw prosperity and progress (the inventions of telephone, telegraph, photography, etc.) on the one hand, and poverty, ugliness and injustice on the other, which opposed ethical conformism to corruption, moralism and philanthropy, to capitalistic greediness, and which separated private life from public behavior.

Respectability



Under the influence of Queen Victoria herself, manners underwent a deep change in this period, the age turning excessively PURITANICAL.

Sex become a taboo subject, all the words with vaguely sexual or "indelicate" connotations were driven out of everyday language or replaced by euphemisms. Manners and speech were to be restrained and sober, so that RESPECTABILITY became the key Victorian concept.

Victorian Family



- It was the best expression of the Victorian compromise with its basic ideals of respectability and conventionality. The father was always very authoritarian, the mother was to be submissive and fruitful (cfr. Wilkie Collins: *The Angel in the House*).
 - In spite of Malthus's warning, Victorian families were very large and the Queen herself proved a very prolific mother with her nine children.
 - Middle class women were to adhere strict codes of behavior which expected them to be frail, innocent, pure, confined within the family walls, devoted to a few “respectable” jobs (i. e. teaching, social activities)
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Rules and restrictions involved men too, who were forbidden to gamble, swear or drink. Appearance being very important, middle class people's clothes tended to be very formal even in the privacy of family life.



The Victorian House

A status-symbol of the Victorian ambitions to economical wealth, money-making and social climbing to respectability, the typical Victorian house became imposing and pretentious outside while overcrowded with furniture, ornaments and decorations inside.

Philosophical currents



- * **J. BENTHAM, 1748-1832 Utilitarianism**
only what is useful is good and all moral, social and political action should be directed towards achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
 - * **C. DARWIN, 1809-1882. The Origin of the Species and the theory of evolution.**
 - * **K. MARX, 1818-1883, Marxist ideology**
 - * **A. SCHOPENHAUER, 1788-1860, pessimistic philosophical view: God, free will and immortality as human illusions.**
 - * **A. COMTE, 1798-1857) - Positivism**
 - * **H. TAINE, 1828-1893 – Determinism (race, milieu, moment)**
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Optimism vs Pessimism



Optimism

Colonial expansion was fostered, scientific research was encouraged, transportation spread and improved. Belief that happiness could be reached through technical progress (The Great International Exhibition, 1851)

Pessimism

Philosophical idea of determinism against the superficial Victorian optimism and hypocritical concept of respectability

Gilbert Chesterton

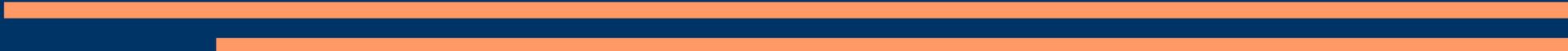


“It is not children who ought to read the works of Lewis Carroll”. *They* should be read instead by “sages and grey-haired philosophers... in order to study that darkest problem of metaphysics, the borderland between reason and unreason, and the nature of the most erratic of spiritual forces – humour – which eternally dances between the two”.



We can actually say that

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is a great novel about humour, an ironical, humoristic and subtly intelligent portrait of Victorian society and of life in general.



About the author



- Born in January 1832, eldest son of eleven children
- His father was a Reverend of the Anglican Church eventually Archdeacon of Richmond but also a distinguished classical scholar with a logical-mathematical mind and a ruthless sense of fantastic fun

hence Carroll's complex character

a mixture of sense of religion, tradition of loyalty and service, pride in social standing, an innate conservatism mixed with a fantastic originality of mind

TWO DISTINCT MINDS

**THE MIND OF INTELLECT,
LOGIC, AND RATIONALITY**

As a child he used to entertain his brothers and sisters by performing magic tricks and marionette shows, and writing poetry for illustrated manuscript magazines which often anticipated characters of the Alice Books such as Humpty Dumpty or the Mouse's tail.

**THE MIND OF
IMAGINATION, FANTASY,
DREAM.**

- He built a railway station in the Rectory Garden
 - He used to promote warfares among earthworms
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- Educated in the best schools (Richmond – Rugby - Christ Church College, Oxford)
 - Resident of the College (1851)
 - Deacon's Orders as a sort of “experiment” (*practically a layman*)
 - Constitutional stammer: a constant problem in his official service → decides not to proceed to priesthood
 - After taking his B. A. Degree, appointed Sub-librarian, lecturer in mathematics, but always keen on literary and artistic career (not only as writer but as painter, drawing, photographer of children)
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Carroll, Alice in Wonderland and the Victorian World

A contradictory personality

- Psychoanalytical readings of Carroll's life and work
 - Sexual connotations of his love for children (“three-fourths of his life”, as he used to say)
 - Self-caricature as “hermit” vs the perfect “party-maker”
 - Sexual scandals and ambiguous reputation: no evidence that he was really involved in any forbidden relationship.
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- Mainly educated as a child of a Victorian middle class family in nurseries run by women, Carroll embodied the typically feminine wish for perfect eternal childhood, lost and ever desired.
 - The image of Alice Liddle (and so of Alice in the novels) becomes to him an ideal vision compensating the competitive and moralistic values that contaminated Victorian lives.
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***Victorian education
fancy and the Victorian “world of facts”***

Alice reacts with her fantastic world in which everything seems to be illogical and upside down to the rationality, rigidity and logic of Victorian education and society (perfectly embodied in characters as Thomas Gradgrind, the school-director in Dicken's *Hard Times*, 1854

“NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!”

Religion and children

The Evangelical movement and the centrality of children's spiritual growth as the heart of the religious identity of the family.

Puritanical idea of children's inherent wickedness

The surrealistic quality of the novel

In the first Alice novel the old comfortable order of things, which was considered positivisticly and rationally knowable, becomes one in which each creature lives its own, completely self-centred, disconnected life. The power she can display of growing and shrinking, first in apparently random way and without any reason or rationality, is the metaphor for the anarchy she suddenly finds herself in.

Such anarchy resists any rational explication and represents a threat to a sensible child's common sense. All pragmatic reasonableness is annihilated together with the basic social and linguistic conventions (see chapters 1 and 2: *Down the Rabbit-Hole* and *the Pool of Tears*)

The dialogue between Alice and the Cat *Chapter Vi – Pig and Pepper*

“What sort of people live about here?”. “In *that* direction”, the Cat said, waving its right paw round, “lives a Hatter: and in *that* direction” waiving the other paw, “lives a March Hare. *Visit either you like. They're both mad*”.

“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”

“A mad tea party” (Chapter VII)

Alice felt dreadfully puzzled. The Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English.

“I don't quite understand you, she said, as politely as she could.”

In Alice's perception the English language itself seems to lose its communicative meaning in the Wonderland, words are technically understandable but their meaning actually isn't.

The sentence symbolically refers to the contradictions and oddities of the Victorian Age and society, especially in the eyes of little children.

Alice's speech to herself while falling down the rabbit hole, the explanations she tries to find for what she is experiencing, the attempts to recognise in the little girl she is now the one she used to be in the world outside, up the rabbit tunnel she has entered, are clearly (failing) attempts to find rational reasons for what seems to be extremely irrational, including Alice's unstoppable and overwhelming need to follow the White Rabbit and jump into the hole.

The role of the Caterpillar

The world in which Alice finds herself from the very first pages is a world in which normal hierarchies of animals and humans step in intensity and in which the typical relationship of cause and effect seems not to be at play at all (see *The Caucus race*).

The Caterpillar's rudeness plays a fundamental role in helping Alice reflect on her own incredible experience. When the Caterpillar asks Alice about her identity, she cannot answer with confidence and is only able to explain her current state of existence (“*I can't explain myself!*”).

How and why she grows and shrinks seems impossible to explain.

Growing and shrinking ***The theme of childhood and identity***

As Carl Jung has remarked, with an explicit reference to the case of Alice in Wonderland it is “a typical infant motif [...] the dream of growing infinitely small and then infinitely big, or being transformed from one to another”

The search for identity, the feeling of displacement and alienation, the neverending shift in size and personality, makes Alice a great novel “ABOUT” childhood.

Childhood and Victorianism

The need for freedom and fancy

Alice's adventures parallel the journey from childhood to adulthood. She encounters a number of new situations in which she needs to show adaptability in order to succeed. At the beginning she cannot restrain from crying, but by the end she is self-possessed and able to face the baffling logic of the Wonderland. Alice's experiences in Wonderland are similar to those of children who have to try to make sense of the real world controlled by adults and the rules they make.

As a typical Victorian girl suffering the superimpositions and rules of the social and behavioral code of the time, she tries to find herself a way to be still alive and give free way to her fancy and imaginative powers in the Wonderland, where "normal" codes are systematically denied.



Chapters I-II One day Alice is sitting under a tree. She sees a white rabbit and follows it down a rabbit hole. After landing on the ground, she follows the rabbit and arrives into a room.

Alice sees a table, on which there is a small key that unlocks a small door. She opens the door and sees a beautiful garden, but she can't go in because she is too big. Alice then drinks from a small bottle labelled 'DRINK ME' and she shrinks.



Alice is now small enough, but she can't reach the key, which is on the table again. She then discovers a cake that says 'EAT ME' and she eats it.

The cake makes Alice grow very tall. She cries and makes a pool of tears. The White Rabbit comes into the room and drops his white hat. Alice holds it in her hand and it makes her shrink again. She swims through the pool of tears, and finds a mouse. They get out of the water and meet many birds and animals.



CHAPTER 2: THE POOL OF TEARS

The start of the chapter soon reveals how Alice is getting more and more involved in the chaotic “unreal reality” of the Wonderland, also mirrored by her linguistic displacement.

“Curioser and curioser”.... p. 30

THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY comes up again in Alice's soliloquy.

“Dear, dear [...] Who in the world I am? Ah, that's the great puzzle!” p. 31-32



p. 32-33

The metaphor of childhood (*the pool of tears*), childish identity, the solitude of the process of growing older and the conflictual relationship with the “world outside” comes back again :

“I do wish they would put their heads down! I'm so *very* tired of being all alone here!”

p. 34

The dialogue with the mouse



Chapter 3: A CAUCUS-RACE AND A LONG TALE

At the end of chapter 2 Alice swims out of the pool of tears and reaches a shore where she finds herself with a Duck, a Dodo and an Eaglet “and several other curious creatures”.

The three animals have a symbolical meaning. The reference to the pool and the shore reminds of the boat-trip that Dodgson had made up the river to Goldstowe with the three Liddells on the 4th of July 1862.



- The **Dodo** (extinguished bird reminding of Dodgson funny nickname Do-do-Dogson)
 - **Lory**: Australian parrot but also referring to Alice Liddell's older sister, Lorina (Ina) Liddell
 - **Eaglet**, Edith Liddell, the youngest sister
 - The **Mouse** represents, according to some interpreters, Dodgson's eldest sister
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Chapters 3–4 The birds and animals are cold and wet, so a Dodo suggests running a Caucus Race. Half an hour later, the race ends and everyone wins. Alice gives out chocolates as prizes. Alice misses her cat, Dinah, but when she talks about it, the birds and animals go away.



The White Rabbit appears again and thinks that Alice is MaryAnn, his housemaid, so he tells her to fetch his white hat and fan. Alice goes into his house, and she finds a bottle. She drinks from it and grows so big that the White Rabbit can't get into the house and she can't get out. A cake is thrown through the window and Alice eats it, gets small again and runs out of the house. She runs into a wood and sees some mushrooms. There is a large green caterpillar on top of one of them.



CAUCUS: descending from the Algonquins' language, the word Caucus means political advisor, today the political circles characterizing the American political life especially active during presidential elections.

CAUCUS RACE (CORSA ELETTORALE) is probably a reference to the many political fights among political groups and Christ Church University especially during Dean's election time.

p. 41 The Caucus race as a symbol of equality

p. 42-43 the linguistic pun: *tale/tale*.



Chapters 5–6 The Caterpillar is not very friendly and asks Alice difficult questions, which make her angry (“*I can’t explain myself!*”, p. 56”). Alice wants to get bigger, so the Caterpillar shows her two types of mushrooms, one kind to make her bigger and the other to make her smaller. Alice eats from both and reaches her normal height. She continues walking through the wood again and comes to a little house. She eats from the brown mushroom, becomes very small again and goes into the house.

Inside, she meets an ugly woman, the Duchess, with a baby. Near the fire there is a cook and a Cheshire cat with a big smile. Alice is worried because the cook throws plates, cups and spoons at the Duchess and the baby. The Duchess tosses her baby up and down and before she leaves she throws the baby to Alice. To Alice's surprise, the baby turns into a pig, so she lets it go off into the woods.



Advice from a caterpillar *Chapter V*



The story also reflects some of the confusions of growing up, during which children have to come to terms with who they are. Alice struggles with the importance and instability of personal identity. She is constantly ordered to identify herself by the creatures she meets, but she herself has doubts about her identity as well. Alice keeps getting either very big or very small (children, of course, get bigger all the time). At first this seems to happen by chance and she is upset by it. But the caterpillar helps her to take control of her changing size, and she is then more comfortable in her strange environment.

Symbolic meaning and ambivalence of the *caterpillar*

The Duchess: a symbolic figure

The utterly irrelevant morals the Duchess appends to every statement she makes seem to be a metaphor of the moralistic and often narrow minded education which had characterized Carroll's experience as a student, as well as that of all other young children of the time (at least the lucky ones who belonged to the upper-middle class and could afford an education career).

Strong criticism against the pious moralistic religious teaching to children hypocritical behavior of parents within the Victorian families.

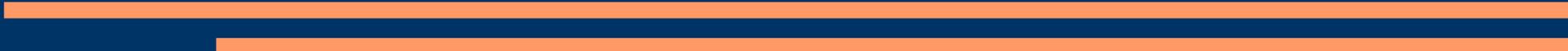


Chapters 7-8:

Alice joins the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and a mouse at a mad tea party. She thinks they are so impolite and they play so many jokes on her that she feels insulted and leaves. Then she finds a door in a tree, goes through it and finds herself once again in front of the small door that leads to the garden. She shrinks and walks through the door. In the garden, Alice comes across three cards painting white roses red because the Queen of Hearts hates white roses.



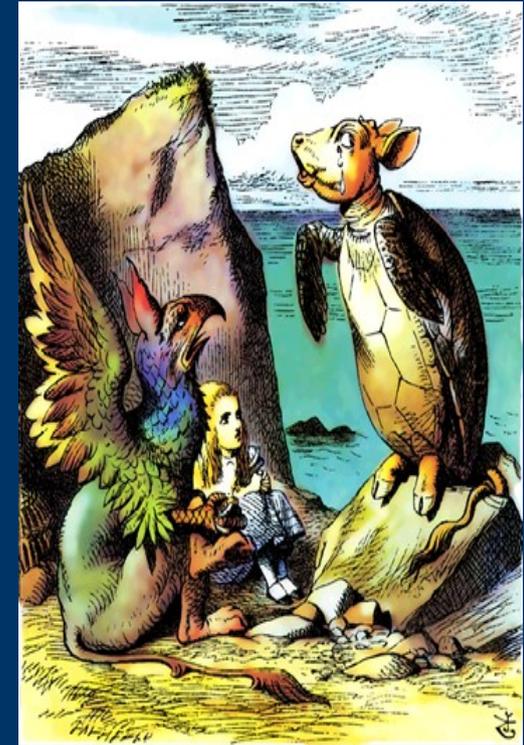
When the Queen and the King arrive, she orders her men to cut off the gardeners' heads. The Queen condemns them and other people to death, but nobody ever loses their heads. Alice meets the Cheshire Cat and when the King sees it he asks the Queen to order her men to chop off the Cat's head. The Cat vanishes and then Alice meets the Duchess again.



Chapters 9-10

The Mock turtle's story and the Lobster Quadrille

After the disappearance of the Cheshire Cat, the croquet game starts up again and the Duchess takes Alice's arm. The two start to walk, and Alice becomes uncomfortable that the Duchess holds her so close. Alice thinks that the Duchess is behaving pleasantly because there isn't any pepper present. The two walk and talk, and the Duchess takes every opportunity to explain various moral lessons to Alice. The Duchess attempts to put her hand around Alice's waist, but Alice convinces her not to, telling her that the flamingo croquet mallet might bite. They run into the Queen, who sternly orders the Duchess off and asks Alice to resume the croquet game.

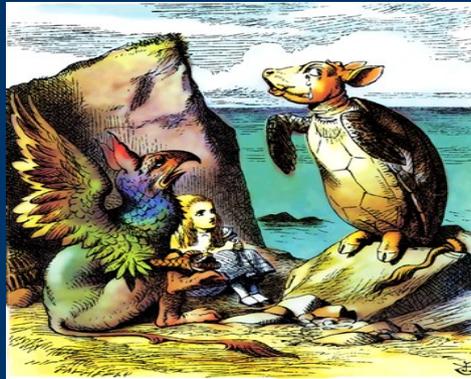




In little time, the Queen narrows the croquet game down to Alice, the King, and herself. All of the other players have been sent off for being headings. With no soldiers remaining to act as arches, the Queen concludes the game and decides that Alice should visit the Mock Turtle. While the King pardons the condemned croquet players, the Queen brings Alice to the Gryphon, who leads her to the Mock Turtle. En route, the Gryphon explains to Alice that the Queen never actually executes anyone. Alice meets the Mock Turtle and immediately becomes concerned since he looks so sad. The Gryphon shows no sympathy for the Mock Turtle, explaining to Alice that he only fancies himself as being sad.

Amid constant sobbing, the Mock Turtle begins his tale by explaining that he used to be a real turtle. He went to sea school every day, and his master was an old turtle named Tortoise. Alice interrupts, asking why the teacher would go by the name of “Tortoise” if he wasn’t a tortoise.

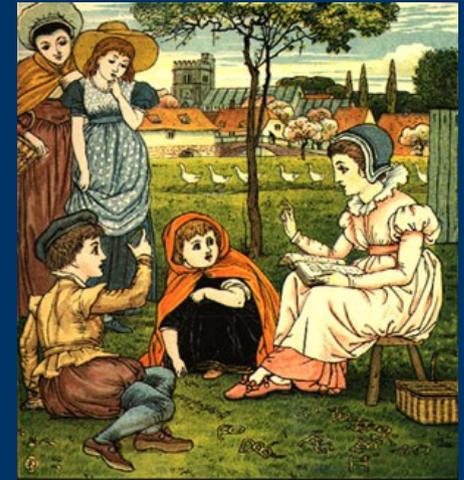




The Mock Turtle chastises her, explaining that he was so named because he “taught us.” He goes on to talk about his education, which he considers to be the finest available. He studied a variety of unusual subjects, including Reeling and Writing, as well as Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision. Alice inquires about the length of the lessons, and the Mock Turtle says that they became shorter with each passing day.



Alice finds this puzzling, but the Mock Turtle explains that they were called lessons because they “lessen.” When Alice asks what happened when there was no time left for lessons, the Gryphon changes the subject to games. The Turtle and the Gryphon sing together some nursery rhymes for Alice (*The Lobster Quadrille, I stopped by his Garden, Beautiful soup, so rich and green*)



Everyone goes into a house for a trial. The Knave of Hearts is accused of stealing some tarts. The White Rabbit calls the witnesses. The first witness is the Mad Hatter, and the second one is the cook. Neither of them can help with the case at all. Next comes Alice, who is growing taller and taller all the time. The King asks her to leave the room, but Alice is not afraid of them because they are only cards. Suddenly, Alice's sister wakes her up. Alice has been asleep for a long time and it was all a dream. Both girls go back home for tea.
