Pictures in Conversation

Reading Visual and Material Wonder in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Emma J. Gist

Abstract

Immediately prior to embarking on her adventures in Wonderland, Alice considers, "Where is the use of a book [. . .] without pictures or conversations?" The extensive history of re-imagining through re-illustration over 150 years of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland *demonstrates evident cultural agreement with Alice's position on the interdependent nature of words and pictures. Through an analysis of a selection of editions of Alice's story ranging from 1864 to 2015, I argue that this extensive history of re-illustration has resulted in a shared* Wonderland *iconography that has both built a sense of visual familiarity and made space for book artists to re-engage readers with* Wonderland *through a disruption of this familiarity. This project examines the trajectory of Alice re-illustration and positions four artists' books (by Salvador Dalí, Barry Moser, Didier Mutel, and Anna Hellsgård & Christian Gfeller) as materially significant contributions to the ongoing visual history of Carroll's text.*

In 1864, Charles Dodgson brought into material reality a story he had once told. In the pages of his hand-written and illustrated manuscript "Alice's Adventures Under Ground", Dodgson's nearly forty images balance the story's verbal elements symbolically and physically: one elongated representation of Alice, for instance, fills a page's left margin from top to bottom next to the paragraph in which she exclaims, "now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Goodbye, feet!" (Carroll1964, 22; Fig. 1). When Alice happens upon a gryphon, Carroll's text instructs, "if you don't know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture" (1964, 78), assuming, of course, the presence of a picture to reference. The mouse's "long and sad tale", a brief history he verbally shares with Alice, transforms into a visual pun, a concrete poem in the shape of a tail gliding back and forth across the page (Carroll 1964, 28; Figs. 2.1 and 2.2). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the published extension of the "Under Ground" story, includes these same visual elements along with many more illustrated

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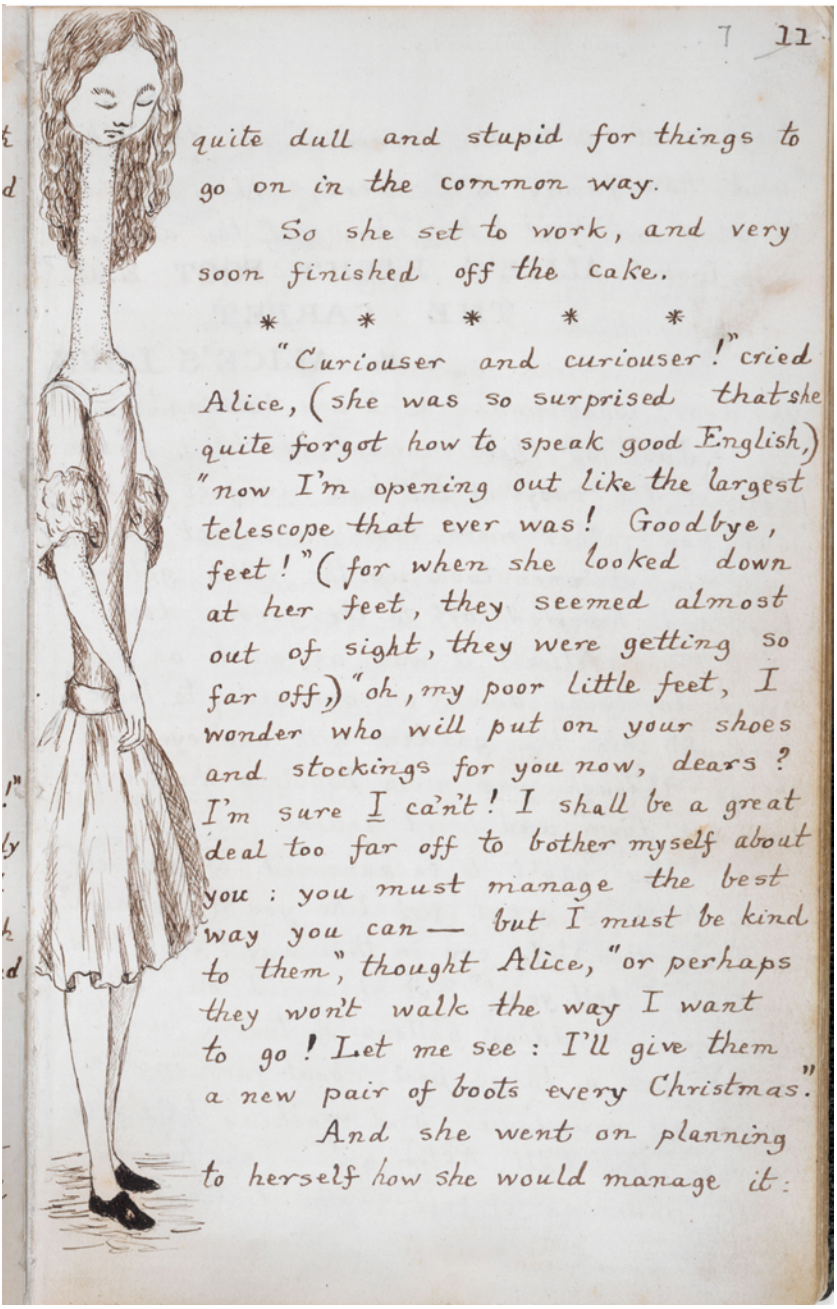
this time by professional artist Sir John Tenniel. In the summer of 1865, shortly following the printing and distribution of the first edition, Dodgson, now Lewis Carroll, recalled the copies due to the inferior quality of their printing, specifically because, in his words, "the pictures are so badly done." He promised in exchange "a better copy" (Ayers 1934, 158).

From its inception, the printed materials of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* have represented an interplay of text and image (of pictures and conversation) in which each element assumes a significance equal to and dependent on the other. In fact, the entire story of *Wonderland*, a dream space induced by Alice's boredom, owes its existence to Alice finding no interest in her sister's book, which "had no pictures or conversation in it, and where is the use of a book, thought Alice, without pictures or conversations?" (Carroll 1934, 2). Subsequent editions of *Alice's Adventures*, of which there are many, have expanded on those visual elements established by Carroll and Tenniel to create a vast and nuanced set of icons that span over 150 years of the *Wonderland* visual universe. This project considers several re-imaginings through re-illustration that have contributed to a collective bank of book-bound images that are continually familiar to ever renewed contemporary audiences. In one sense, this nearly endless series of publications has served, through repetition, to stabilize the inherently unstable experience of *Wonderland*. In another sense, the ongoing history of *Alice's Adventures* has created a fertile ground for artists' books to upend the reader's *Wonderland* expectations through disruption and defamiliarization. Through not only their illustrations but their very materiality, these artists' books draw from the visual and textual familiarity of Carroll's story even as they make the familiar strange again, ultimately re-centering the wonder in *Wonderland*.

To make this argument I will briefly discuss, in addition to a facsimile of the "Under Ground" manuscript and an early edition featuring illustrations by Tenniel, a sample set of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, each illustrated by a different artist and published between 1901 and 1967. These texts provide a contextual perspective from which we can then consider four specialized artists' books published between 1969 and 2015. Operating from Johanna Drucker's (1995) and Amaranth Borsuk's (2018) scholarship on the nature of artists' books, particularly those with an "auratic quality" as Drucker describes it, I will consider how each artist both honors and disrupts their reader's deep familiarity, even attachment to, Alice's book-bound adventures. Through this interplay of honor and disruption these books re-engage the reader in the surprise, disorientation, and fascination that define the very nature of *Wonderland*.



7 11

quite dull and stupid for things to go on in the common way.

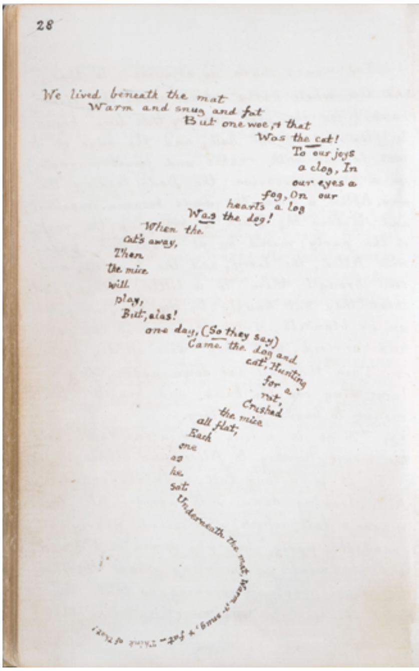
So she set to work, and very soon finished off the cake.

* * * * *

"Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice, (she was so surprised that she quite forgot how to speak good English,) "now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Goodbye, feet!" (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed almost out of sight, they were getting so far off,) "oh, my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears? I'm sure *I* can't! I shall be a great deal too far off to bother myself about you: you must manage the best way you can — but I must be kind to them", thought Alice, "or perhaps they won't walk the way I want to go! Let me see: I'll give them a new pair of boots every Christmas."

And she went on planning to herself how she would manage it:

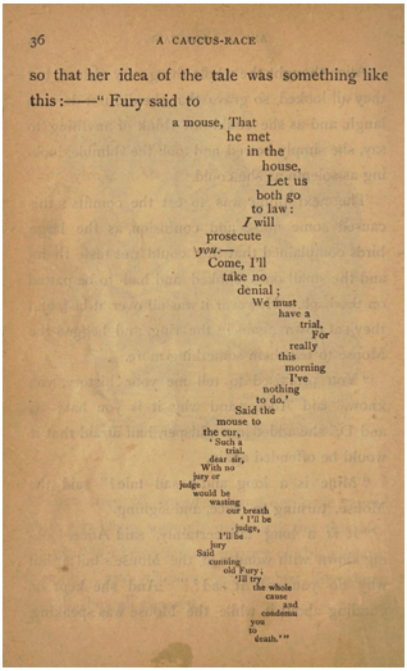
Figure 1. Lewis Carroll, 1964, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground: A Facsimile of the Original Lewis Carroll Manuscript*, 11. Photo from the British Library.



28

We lived beneath the mat
Warm and snug and fat
But one woe, & that
Was the cat!
To our joys
a clog, In
our eyes a
fog, On our
hearts a log
Was the dog!
When the
cat's away,
Then
the mice
will
play,
But, alas!
one day, (So they say)
Came the dog and
cat, Hunting
for a
rat,
Crushed
the mice
all flat,
Each
one
as
he
sat
Underneath the mat, Warm & snug & fat– Think of that!

Figure 2.1. Lewis Carroll, 1964, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground: A Facsimile of the Original Lewis Carroll Manuscript*, 28. Photo from the British Library.



36 A CAUCUS-RACE

so that her idea of the tale was something like this:——" Fury said to
a mouse, That
he met
in the
house,
Let us
both go
to law:
I will
prosecute
you.—
Come, I'll
take no
denial;
We must
have a
trial.
For
really
this
morning
I've
nothing
to do.'
Said the
mouse to
the cur,
' Such a
trial,
dear sir,
With no
jury or
judge
would be
wasting
our breath
' I'll be
judge,
I'll be
jury
Said
cunning
old Fury;
'I'll try
the whole
cause
and
condemn
you
to
death.' "

Figure 2.2. Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel, 1885, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 36. Photo from the Library of Congress.

Collective Visual *Alice* in Context

This project begins with editions of *Alice's Adventures* for everyday readers, the single story illustrated again and again for multiple audience generations. In agreement with a claim made by Emily Lauer after conducting a similar survey of *Alice* texts, my review of these early twentieth-century editions, in comparison with the manuscript and Tenniel illustrations, revealed consistent representation of the same particular scenes across editions. As Lauer explains, "Not every inch of the written text has been illustrated by various artists over the years, but rather [. . .] the same few lines of text have been illustrated again and again by different hands" (2014, 49). Will Brooker in his essay "Illustrators of Alice" ultimately attributes the trend of repetition to the existence of a "shared iconography" (2004, 126) that he credits to ongoing reference to the work of Sir John Tenniel rather than to "cues and specifications in the text itself." He goes on to cite the "cultural authority of Tenniel's original designs" as a deterrent against each artist exercising complete creative freedom in each iteration (2004, 143).

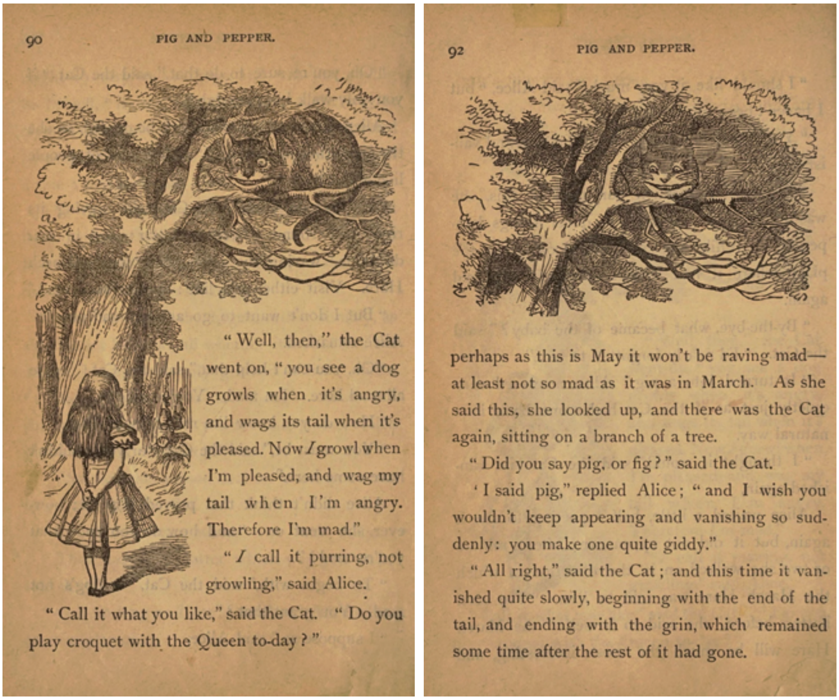
Brooker's theory, however, does not extend any credit to every other illustrator's contribution to this shared collection of visualized *Wonderland*. Borrowing from George Bornstein, Lauer introduces this assembled, composite understanding of the text of *Alice's Adventures* specifically as a "layered palimpsest" (2014, 46), an example of collaborative construction resulting from numerous artists' interpretations of Carroll's texts across time. She claims:

> The illustrators come after each other, not to re-envision the words of Lewis Carroll, but to re-envision the scenes as already represented pictorially. This parade of illustrators is like a parade of annotators, explicating the text for each other at least as much for their purported 'intended' audience.
>
> (Lauer 2014, 49)

Each artist, then, who contributes to the construction of a visually familiar *Wonderland*, participates in laying a shared visual groundwork around Carroll's story.

To briefly demonstrate this shared iconography, we can consider the image of the famous Cheshire Cat at the moment when, from his perch in a tree, he first demonstrates his remarkable ability to not only disappear and reappear but to separate himself from his grin. In the sixth chapter, "Pig and Pepper", Tenniel illustrates the smiling Cheshire Cat peering down at Alice who, back turned to the reader, stares up at him. This image wraps around the text of the story, couching verbal Wonderland within visual Wonderland. The chapter closes with an image of the Cheshire Cat mid-disappearance, a moment indicated by a technique of horizontal lines whose gaps suggest the fading away of every part of the cat but his smile, which remains bright and clear and causes Alice to consider, "Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin [. . .]; but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!" (Carroll and Tenniel 1885, 93; Fig. 3).

While almost every illustrator in my survey presents the Cheshire Cat on his perch, they nevertheless each approach this representation uniquely. A. E. Jackson places the cat above the chapter title, separating his image from the verbal text relating Alice's conversation with him (Fig. 4); Charles Robinson, alternatively, presents the cat three times from three angles (Fig. 5). In Gwynedd Hudson's work the cat appears as a motif



90 PIG AND PEPPER.

"Well, then," the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now *I* growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad."

"*I* call it purring, not growling," said Alice.

"Call it what you like," said the Cat. "Do you play croquet with the Queen to-day?"

92 PIG AND PEPPER.

perhaps as this is May it won't be raving mad—at least not so mad as it was in March. As she said this, she looked up, and there was the Cat again, sitting on a branch of a tree.

"Did you say pig, or fig?" said the Cat.

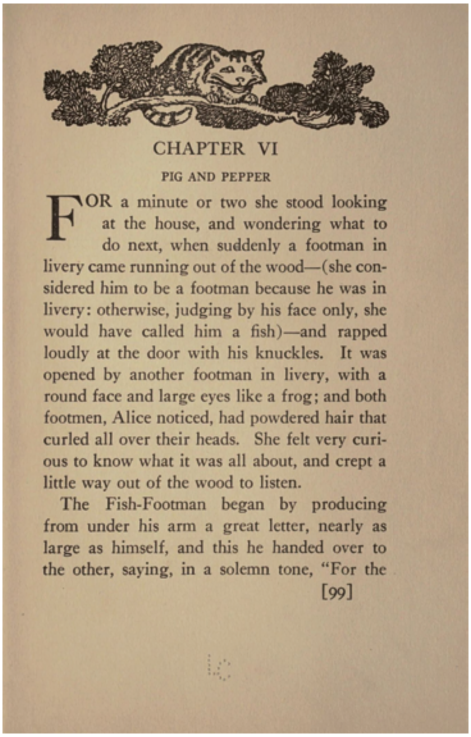
'I said pig," replied Alice; "and I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy."

"All right," said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.

Figure 3. Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel, 1885, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 90, 92. Photos from the Library of Congress.

throughout the text in the form of a smiling cat face in a cloud: his visage concludes the chapter "Pig and Pepper" and appears as embellishment on the leaves that cover full-color plates in both this chapter and others, his frequent reappearance in unexpected places in the physicality of the book mimicking his sudden appearances within the narrative (see Fig. 6). Ralph Steadman's presentation of the tree-bound Cheshire Cat directly mimics Tenniel's work: like Tenniel, Steadman makes use of a technique of imposed parallel lines over the cat that obscure all but his grin. Unlike in Tenniel's illustration, however, Steadman's Cheshire Cat is nearly three times Alice's size, a compositional choice that introduces a sense of intimidating imbalance to their encounter.

In keeping with Lauer's assessment of illustrators as annotators, the illustrators included in this project each uniquely highlight, through their various artistic emphases, particular elements of Carroll's story: for instance, Arthur Rackham's Wonderland is one of dismal, muted colors and sharp angles (his Cheshire Cat incorporates seamlessly into a pointed, gnarled tree), but his Alice, in a pink patterned dress, black stockings, and



CHAPTER VI

PIG AND PEPPER

FOR a minute or two she stood looking at the house, and wondering what to do next, when suddenly a footman in livery came running out of the wood—(she considered him to be a footman because he was in livery: otherwise, judging by his face only, she would have called him a fish)—and rapped loudly at the door with his knuckles. It was opened by another footman in livery, with a round face and large eyes like a frog; and both footmen, Alice noticed, had powdered hair that curled all over their heads. She felt very curious to know what it was all about, and crept a little way out of the wood to listen.

The Fish-Footman began by producing from under his arm a great letter, nearly as large as himself, and this he handed over to the other, saying, in a solemn tone, "For the

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Figure 4. Lewis Carroll and A. E. Jackson, 1914, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 99. Photo from the Library of Congress.

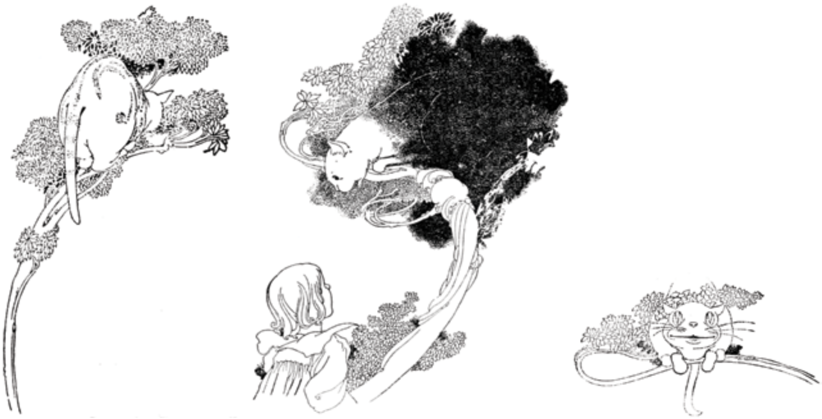

Figure 5. Lewis Carroll and Charles Robinson, 1907, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 87, 89, 90. Images from Wikimedia Commons.

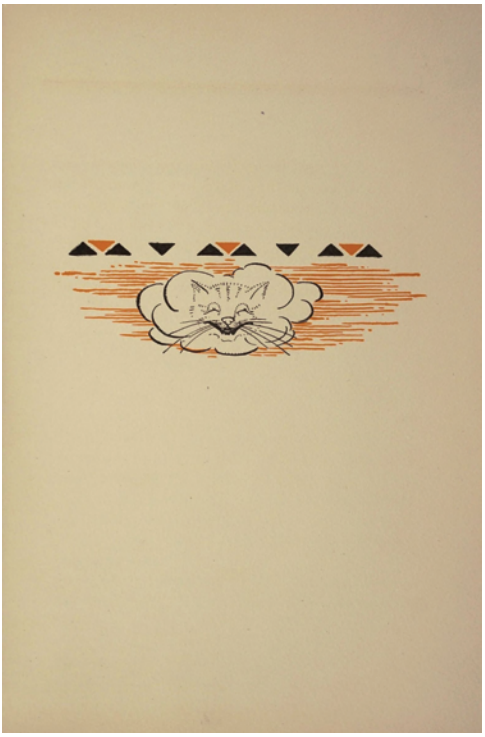

Figure 6. Lewis Carroll and Gwynedd M. Hudson, 1922, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 89. Photo from the Library of Congress.

soft wavy hair, remains sweet and separate from the world of her dream. Steadman's illustrations of Alice, much like Tenniel's, align her with Wonderland rather than separate her from it: her long, stringy hair and frequently sour expression remind her reader that she is just as much a part of the Wonderland dream-world of her imagination as any other character in it. Charles Robinson clothes Alice in a childish dress with no waist and peppers the text's margins with whimsical illustrations (a technique likewise employed by Hudson), at points even allowing the images to displace the words and cut across the page: his Wonderland is not separated into pages of only verbal text or only image (like Peter Newell's), but represents a comingling of words and pictures in a physical book full of surprises that match the fictional landscape. Even without offering a radical reimagining of *Alice's Adventures,* the adjustments these artists make, paired with their adherence to the established iconography, carve out space for new visual imaginings of Alice.

Steadman's work in particular, though, does begin to hint at the new liberties that have since been taken by illustrators of *Alice's Adventures*. For instance, his illustrations boldly compete for status with the verbal text of Carroll's story even within the physical form of the book: Carroll's and Steadman's names appear in equal size on the cover, and, notably, the title is altered to *Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland*, a change which suggests the creation of a new work entirely, not a simple reproduction of the 1865 text. This elevation of newly created visual art to a place of equal importance alongside Carroll's words in pursuit of a new, co-authored creation reflects the shift toward collaborative authorization that shapes the later artists' books. Steadman's illustrations in particular anticipate the artists' books' extension into as yet unseen and unexpected visual expressions of both Wonderland and Alice even as they continue to build upon a familiar canon of images.

Alice's Adventures in Artists' Books

In her foundational work *The Century of Artists' Books*, Johanna Drucker defines artists' books by sketching out the "intersection" or "zone of activity" (1995, 2) in which they can be found. This definitional strategy makes appropriate space for the numerous approaches that an artist might use in the process of creating an artist's book without falsely identifying any one practice as a contingency. Amaranth Borsuk expands on Drucker's definition, clarifying that, "The artist's book is not a catalog, a book containing images of artworks, or a fine press production of a novel with illustrations by a celebrated artist, exquisitely tooled leather covers, and marbled endpapers. It *can* be one of those things, but only if those choices are interrogated and integrated into the way the work makes meaning" (2018, 115). Drucker herself writes that, "Ultimately an artist's book has to have some conviction, some soul, some reason **to be** and **to be a book** in order to succeed" (1995, 10–11, emphasis in original). Drucker offers, then, that artists' books must be works of art that purposely and meaningfully take the form of a book over some other shape.

Drucker writes of books generally that "They are low maintenance, relatively long-lived, free-floating objects with the capacity to convey a great deal of information, and serve as a vehicle to communicate far beyond the limits of an individual life or contacts" (1995, 8). It is this type of book with which readers are most familiar, as one regularly "finds them at friends' houses, motel rooms, railroad cars, school desks" (Drucker 1995, 8) (many of us have, no doubt, encountered a copy or two of *Alice's Adventures in*

Wonderland in such contexts). Monica Carroll and Adam Dickerson build on this notion to describe artists' books as uniquely positioned between the familiar and unfamiliar: these works present themselves as belonging to a set of common, familiar objects when they are in fact completely uncommon. In agreement with Drucker's position that artists' books must "have some conviction", Carroll and Dickerson explain that these texts "are thus in a position to disrupt expectations" and that "in virtue of their difference from this 'standard form,' can problematize the 'obvious,' 'commonsensical' and 'taken-for-granted' nature of texts" (2018, 13).

Fundamentally, artists' books, like all books, are reader-activated (Borsuk 2018). Borsuk writes that the meaning of an artist's book "arise[s] at the moment of access" (2018, 147) and adds that the act of accessing an artist's book notably forces the reader's attention to the texts' materiality (2018, 147): in contrast, the materiality of a book for general reading is easy to ignore, often made invisible behind the content of the text. In the case of the artist's book, it is largely its materiality that embodies what Drucker calls an "auratic quality, an often inexplicable air of power, attraction, or uniqueness" (1995, 93). Although she cautions that manifesting the "auratic quality" cannot be systematized (1995, 93), she does provide a framework in which we might consider the wonder inherent in the experience of engaging with artists' books. She writes that the fascination induced in the artist's book reader "is not the same as respect, interest, or other forms of engagement. It has to do with tapping into a certain level of **fantasmatic**—a level of psychological engagement in which emotional energy attaches to an object for reasons which cannot be explained through reason or conscious analysis" (1995, 94, emphasis in original). It is from this perspective that we will consider four artist's book editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, created respectively by Salvador Dalí (1969), Barry Moser (1982), Didier Mutel (2002), and Anna Hellsgård and Christian Gfeller (2015). Through their unique material and visual approaches to (re)telling the story of *Alice's Adventures*, these texts harness the auratic quality that Drucker names in the service of reacquainting readers with the wonder inherent in *Wonderland*.

Salvador Dalí (1969)

The 1969 Maecenas Press-Random House edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* features twelve color plates and one etching by revered Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí.[1] The text's auratic quality begins here, with the reader's knowledge that the boxed folio before them contains not only the familiar story but an original work of this highly esteemed artist. Even as one of a series of 200, this text's aura of originality transforms our estimation of it (Austin 1972) and colors our interactions with it. The box that contains the text mimics the shape of a large book with a linen cover and orange leather spine. After unpinning the cover and opening the box, however, the reader discovers that the "book" is something else entirely: a 43-centimeter-tall set of unbound, deckle edge signatures inside a fabric-wrapped cover. This brown cover features only a reflective gold image of Dalí's signature, and nothing else: no book title, no credit to Lewis Carroll.

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[1] For one of Dali's illustrations, see https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Lewis-Carroll--Alice-s-Adventures-in-Won/C271587D636FE944.

The reader first engages with the content of this artist's book by unfolding the cover and then the first large sheet to reveal the text's frontispiece (on which Dalí has signed his name) opposite the aforementioned etching. In this early moment of the reading experience, the reader comes face-to-face with Dalí's art and through it the artist himself. The first chapter, "Down the Rabbit Hole", initiates the pattern followed by each subsequent chapter: every chapter consists of one signature of three sheets (or six leaves). The *recto* of the first leaf is labeled with the chapter title. The much-anticipated, full-page illustrations are always on the seventh page (in the center opening of the signature), and they are, in a word, stunning. Whether the preceding pages, filled with Carroll's words, are read, skimmed, or only glanced at, it is the encounters with Dalí's work, inside the loose and precious pages of this book's unwieldy form that define the reader's experience with this remarkable text. Carrying with them still the sharp smell of ink, these explosively colorful, intricate representations of familiar scenes from a familiar story are embellished with surprising new elements including insects, dancing figures, and shapes reminiscent of atom bomb explosions. Even these newly imaginative images, though, take cues from the history of *Alice* illustrations to ground the reader in at least a fleeting sense of recognition: the reader will be perhaps unsurprised by an encounter with a white rabbit and caterpillar in their respective chapters, and will easily understand that the melting clock at the center of "A Mad Tea Party" is meant to take the place of the table we expect to see. Close attention to the abstracted tree in the center of the illustration for "Pig and Pepper", paired with knowledge of a century's worth of Cheshire Cat appearances, will reveal an oblong shape of deep purple perched in the tree to be none other than the famous cat, his tail hanging down below the branch.

Engaging with the Dalí edition of *Alice's Adventures* is not about finding out what happens to the titular character because it is not about reading her story for the first time—in fact, it might not be about "reading" in the traditional sense at all, but rather in an expanded, multimodal sense. While experiencing this text we take Alice's place in the story, discovering new visual wonders around each corner, behind each page. We come to eagerly anticipate the interpretations of *Wonderland* Dalí might offer and the winks he might make to the reader as he fuses Carroll's story with his own work. In this reader-activated auratic text, the reader finds the familiar story transformed as they proceed delicately from its beginning to its end. Once they are ready to leave the text, the reader (at least when that reader is a library patron) must carefully realign the signatures in the portfolio and return the text to its box where it is to lie dormant in anticipation of its next reader. This process is accompanied by a slight sense of loss, a sadness at separating from the beauty of the artwork that now sits closed away in the dark. In fact, it is not unlike the feeling of waking from a dream: in this peculiar way we, like Alice, find that we must eventually leave *Wonderland*.

Barry Moser (1982)

Like the Dalí edition, Barry Moser's Pennyroyal Press version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is stored in a book-shaped box with a purple spine and grey linen covers. One lifts the lid of the box to access the book itself (one of 350 copies), which is only about half as thick as the box would suggest but a full 43 centimeters tall. Unlike the Dalí edition, the Pennyroyal *Alice's Adventures* is bound. The reader opens the marbled cover and must turn past several skeleton-key themed prints on thick white pages before finally reaching the frontispiece. The sweeping red letters of the book's title on the right sit opposite a chilling illustration of the King of Hearts on the left: a single, perfectly circular eye peers out from the shadow of his cocked crown, his lips and nose almost meeting in a slight snarl. This is not the reader's first encounter with the king, however: the ghost of this illustration is visible through the leaf, offering a material hint on the page before of darker things to come.

Around the Roman numeral I on the page that promises to take the reader "Down the Rabbit Hole" of the first chapter, Moser has fitted a cluster of flowers and leaves and grasses: in the center, the outline of a tunnel that quickly fades to the dark unknown. The following pages of Carroll's text are riddled with illustrative black ink (or at times gold or green or blue) wood engraving prints. The enormous margins are stippled with red annotations that match the color applied to Carroll's lines of asterisks.

Conspicuously, Alice herself does not appear within Moser's *Wonderland*, only outside of it (on either end of her dream). In his "Note on the Prints" Moser writes that previous illustrators of *Alice's Adventures* (including Carroll, Tenniel, and Dalí, among others) "have intruded on the privacy of Alice's adventure, standing apart and observing Alice in her dream" (1982, 143). Of his own work, in which he resists taking the position of a spectator or voyeur, he writes that "The images of Alice's dream are always seen from Alice's point of view, for after all, the dream *is* Alice's dream" (1982, 143, emphasis in the original). Although the reader recognizes Moser's medium as the same technique used by Tenniel, this clever shift in perspective defamiliarizes many of the illustrations by requiring the reader to play the role of Alice and see for themselves. Moser presents many of the characters in portrait rather than in active context; the Mad Hatter and March Hare, for example, stare directly out at the reader from two large blocks in a single opening. Alice herself appears in portrait at the end of the text in a foldout that, when open, extends beyond the edge of the book. Her hair falls over her shadowed eyes even as she seems to return the gaze of the reader who, until engaging with this version of the text, has perhaps not considered that Alice might look back at them.

While a reader familiar with *Alice's Adventures* might expect to observe Alice observing the Cheshire Cat, as they no doubt have before, they find themselves instead observed by Moser's Cheshire Cat who stares down and out from his perch in a darkly gnarled tree (see Fig. 7). On the facing page a smaller print presents simply the cat's toothy grin overlayed with a shadow of leaves (see Fig. 8). Directly underneath this print, Alice's familiar words remark on the curious nature of this a grin without a cat.

The reader reaches the end of their reading experience by turning past final pages that mirror the first pages, a reversed path which leads us back out of the text. The story's title, printed in reverse here at the book's end, calls our attention to the text's materiality: when one turns this page, they might glance back to see the imprint of the title pushing through the leaf to create on the leaf's *verso* a ghostly outline of the title, now no longer in reverse. This edition of *Alice's Adventures* is filled with other such moments of material whimsy: Moser describes that, as a result of establishing and breaking his own design rules, "whiskers, hats, fobs, and mouse's tale come falling and punching, helter skelter, into those carefully pruned margins" and that "Asymmetry mocks symmetry. Nonsense sullies sense, with appropriate irreverence" (1982, 144). In justification of these artistic twists and turns he reminds us parenthetically that "after all, in Wonderland, one should never be able to anticipate what's to happen on the next page" (1982, 144).

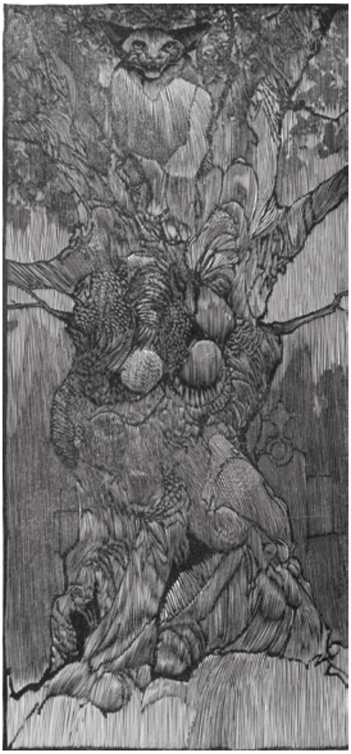

Figure 7. Lewis Carroll and Barry Moser, 1982, *Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 80. Image of wood engraving reproduced with permission from the artist, courtesy of Louisiana State University Hill Memorial Library.

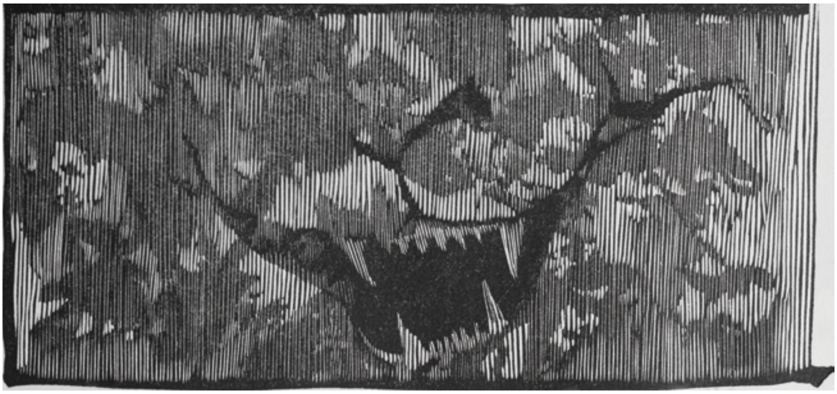

Figure 8. Lewis Carroll and Barry Moser, 1982, *Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 81. Image of wood engraving reproduced with permission from the artist, courtesy of Louisiana State University Hill Memorial Library.

Moser offers a reimaged *Wonderland* reading experience packaged in elements that feel familiar: the form of the book, the medium of printing, and the text of the story itself create a structure within which we feel secure. Moser builds up our expectations through these elements to eventually disrupt them. His captivating work draws the reader into a new *Wonderland* by presenting the old one from a different angle and unfolding before us new points of focus and discovery.

Didier Mutel (2002)

Didier Mutel likewise plays with familiarity and surprise in his edition of *Alice's Adventures* but takes a much more direct approach than either Dalí or Moser. Mutel's 2002 edition (of which there are 50 copies) is housed in a rigid sleeve wrapped in red fabric. This fabric matches the thick paper cover that holds the dense rainbow stack of unbound, deckle edge signatures that make up the 36-centimeter-tall book. Each unique page bears the texture and inky smell of its laborious coloring process.[2] Prior to reaching the frontispiece, the reader encounters the first illustration, a representative example of the way in which Didier's etchings will surround, or even engulf, small reproductions of Tenniel's original work throughout the text. On this page Tenniel's King and Queen of Hearts, pulled from their original context, hover over the head of a rough outline of a female figure whose presence fills the yellow page. Another member of the royal court stands at her base. The next page, which the reader must turn past to move forward in the text, is a translucent leaf of delicate Japanese paper. After the reader turns this page, if they glance back they will see that the woman has all but disappeared while Tenniel's original illustrations have not.

The reader encounters this technique again at the beginning of the first chapter. In the large space above the text of "Down the Rabbit Hole" floats the familiar white rabbit, paused to check his watch. This time, the process happens in reverse: rather than turning the thin leaf to hide Mutel's etching, this turn of the page reveals it: we next see the same white rabbit perched now on the shoulder of a great, grotesque humanoid monster who, like the woman before, fills the page. Because no words can be printed on the *verso* of the translucent paper, the reader is briefly trapped here, paused in a moment alone with the familiar rabbit and the unknown creature. Similarly, when Alice happens upon the tree-bound Cheshire Cat, the reader witnesses the encounter in the way we have come to visually expect: Carroll's text wraps around Tenniel's familiar illustration of Alice who is turned to face the cat above her. The tree, however, has been removed, leaving the cat to float without context in the space above Alice. Turning the translucent leaf reveals that the cat is neither in empty space nor a tree but rather on the lip of yet another grotesque, naked figure whose enormity dwarfs Alice and the cat. A few pages later the reader turns to see the cat disappearing from between branches that seem to grow out of a rooted, wooden woman who gazes off to the edge of the page and offers her own sly smile.

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[2] For examples of Mutel's illustrations, see https://collecties.kb.nl/en/koopman-collection/1990-2005/alices-adventures-wonderland.

Didier Mutel has described the creation of an artist's book as "not only an exciting personal voyage" but also as inherently collaborative; he writes that "The more one delves into a text, into an idea, the more this collaboration feels like being part of a group, a group which is itself part of a wider community" (2003, 20). In this work Mutel collaborates not only by mingling his and Tenniel's and Carroll's work but by joining the expansive history of *Wonderland* illustration. In the companion brochure that accompanies the book we read that at this specific point in that illustration history Mutel's work is poised to "transform the relationship which connects the reader to Alice's world, encouraging him [sic] to look at this work in a new way. This action leads to the elimination of all preconceptions" (2002, vi). This preface also reveals that, in the spirit of transformation, the formatting of the original 1866 edition of *Alice's Adventures* has been preserved here even as the book has been enlarged from 18 centimeters tall to 36 centimeters (2002, vii). Tenniel's illustrations, however, have not experienced the 400% enlargement along with the rest of the text's content. They thus appear too small in the spaces allotted to them and are engulfed by Mutel's etchings, or the "figures liberated from the image of a sweet and pretty little Alice" (2002, ix). In the process of reading, the preface offers, the reader is given "the choice as to whether he [sic] passes or not 'through the looking glass'" (2002, ix). This choice is at times made for the reader, though, when a turned page reveals the figure before it can be covered with the delicate translucent paper.

Mutel's work, and the experience of engaging with and discovering it, suggests *Wonderland*'s complicated texture: by overlaying the familiar and safe with the frightening and unexpected, Mutel unsettles us. As the startling monsters appear and disappear with the turn of each page, we begin to wonder whether or not they have been in *Wonderland* all along and notice that if we know to look we can see them peeking through the translucent pages behind Tenniel's work. What other dormant creatures might be secretly filling the space around stories we think we know? In the context of Mutel's artist's book, one cannot find answers without turning pages.

Anna Hellsgård and Christian Gfeller (2015)

Anna Hellsgård and Christian Gfeller's edition of *Alice's Adventures* differs significantly from earlier iterations of Carroll's work. To begin, the book has been divided into individual, unique chapters that have been distributed throughout the world (for this project I consider Chapter XI: "Who Stole the Tarts?"). The text includes no words except for the chapter title printed on the brown cover: there is no title page, no frontispiece. The content of the chapter-length book itself is comprised of one 46-centimeter-tall signature of eight double-sided, silkscreen printed sheets. As the reader turns page after page in this one-of-a-kind, bound volume they encounter a series of abstract images inspired by the namesake chapter. Each page, heavy with ink, is covered edge-to-edge with overlapping shapes of rich, bright colors.

In keeping with the spirit of Carroll's *Wonderland*, Hellsård and Gfeller's artist book draws the reader into a journey of unexpected discovery. The reader reaches the most striking moment of the book at the very center: black corners seem to enclose a two-page wide oval in which neon shapes overlap each other like filters, creating new colors in their combination. Thick black angular shapes and thin black lines converge on a stark section of white on the right side of the opening. It is only here, in the center of the book, that any one of the silkscreen prints can be seen in its entirety. Because the book is bound the reader must hold opposite pages together in the center of the book in order to glimpse the complete composition of any of the lower sheets. By breaking the fundamental rule of book reading (that each page is to be read one at a time and in sequence), the reader is able to see where lines from one leaf's *verso* continue onto another leaf's *recto* several pages later, where colors and icons run across the book's center to reprise themselves after they have been forgotten.

Even in the midst of this book of abstract art, a reader acquainted with *Alice's Adventures* and its illustrations might recognize familiar motifs that appear throughout the text. For example, a pattern of four quadrants, each of which contains its own set of lines and shapes (see Fig. 9.1), appears to reflect the white rabbit's robe as it appears in Tenniel's illustration in the chapter "Who Stole the Tarts?" (see Fig. 9.2). This full-page motif is reinforced through repetition, occurring four times in Hellsgård and Gfeller's version of the chapter (on the fourth sheet, or the fourth leaves from either end of the book).

Another familiar character seems to appear, at least in part, on the twelfth page: over convergent stripes of blue, pink, white, and grey hover

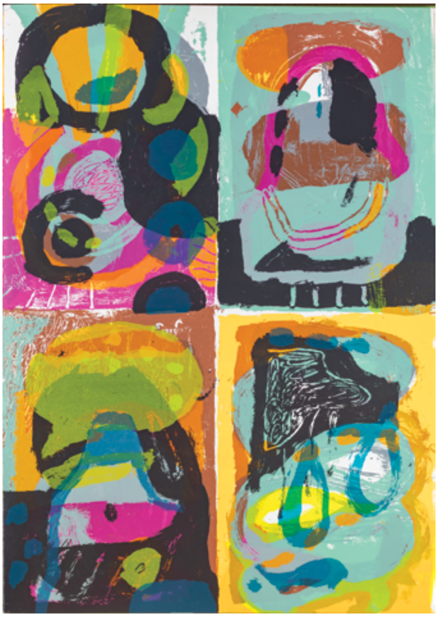
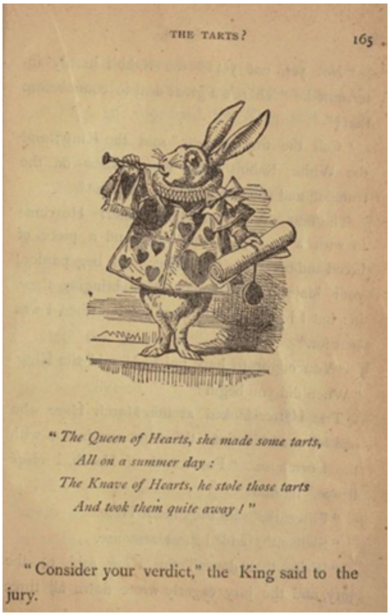


Figure 9.1. Anna Hellsgård, Christian Gfeller, and Lewis Carroll, 2015, *Chapter XI: Who Stole the Tarts?* Image reproduced with permission from the artists, courtesy of Louisiana State University Hill Memorial Library.



THE TARTS? 165

"The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts,
All on a summer day:
The Knave of Hearts, he stole those tarts
And took them quite away!"

"Consider your verdict," the King said to the jury.

Figure 9.2. Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel, 1885, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 165. Photo from the Library of Congress.

two almond-shaped grey spots and a shape of three consecutive peaks in the same color (see Fig. 10). On the opposite side of this sheet (not visible until several pages later), run a series of grey and white horizontal lines. The century and a half of *Wonderland* illustrations that have preceded this artist book suggest that we might reasonably interpret this image as a Cheshire Cat cameo, appearing here as two eyes above a mouth obscured by the animal's upper lip. When we next see him (or rather, do not see him), he has disappeared into the lines used by Tenniel (and others) to signal his departure.

Although the text is shaped like a book (it does, after all, take the form of pages between covers), the experience of "reading" Hellsgård and Gfeller's edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is decidedly different from other editions. The reader does not find Carroll's words within these pages but must, instead, supply them: the story of *Alice's Adventures* might be spread across the world in Hellsgård and Gfeller's distributed chapters, but it

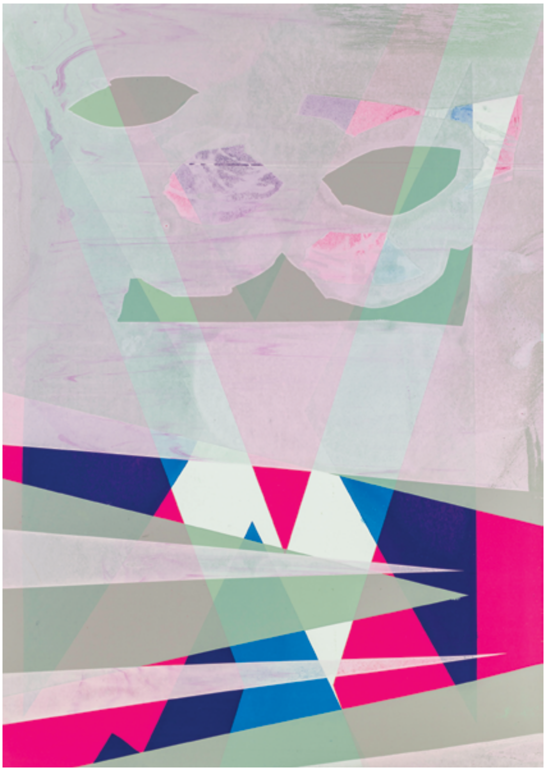


Figure 10. Anna Hellsgård, Christian Gfeller, and Lewis Carroll, 2015, *Chapter XI: Who Stole the Tarts?* Image reproduced with permission from the artists, courtesy of Louisiana State University Hill Memorial Library.

simultaneously dwells within the mind and expectations of the reader. We approach Hellsgård and Gfeller's book knowing that it claims affiliation with Carroll's text and hoping to see and enjoy seeing those points of intersection. We leave both not disappointed and certainly surprised.

Conclusion

When a reader first encounters *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* they, as with any unfamiliar story, are held in suspense, turning pages and not knowing what they will next encounter. Once a reader is familiar with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, made up in equal parts of story and image, they trade their suspense for anticipation, knowing that along with Alice they will find the Cheshire Cat in a tree where they will watch him leave his grin behind. The reader familiar with *Alice's Adventures* has learned what to expect in *Wonderland* and when to expect it.

The experience of reading these artists' books highlights the disorientation so fundamental to the very nature of *Wonderland* by reintroducing the element of suspense and requiring that the reader manipulate a delicately precious piece of art to access the story. The texts' auratic quality, or "inexplicable air of power, attraction, or uniqueness" (Drucker 1995, 93) make materially manifest those same qualities that define Alice's dreamworld. Each of these works has both "some reason *to be and to be a book*" (Drucker 1995, 10, emphasis in the original) in that they offer their unique *Wonderland* points of entry not to listeners or viewers but specifically to *readers*. The people who have the privilege of activating these texts by reading them are no doubt already familiar with, even fond of, Alice as she has appeared in the pages of Carroll's story. They might know from experience to look for the Cheshire Cat in the tree, but as they engage with these texts they quickly find that they do not yet know what he will look like or what will be the process of his disappearance. Dalí, Moser, Mutel, and Hellsgård and Gfeller each make familiar references to the canon of earlier texts that ground the reader in a narrative they think they know, but their departures from *Wonderland*'s illustrative tradition remind the reader, as Alice discovers when she first arrives, that while in Wonderland one should absolutely expect "nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen" (Carroll and Tenniel 1885, 13). These artists' books take their place in a long line of re-illustration by opening up divergent paths to and around and through *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as we have come to know it and might yet learn to see it.

Louisiana State University

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