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Alice's Journey Across the Globe into Mysterious Realms: The Significance of the Exotic Animals in Wonderland

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Contrary to the common view that Wonderland was sheltered from major world events, Carroll projects global trends onto his intrepid child explorer, allowing her to experience the expanding and shrinking effects of global dynamics. Emigration to the Antipodes stretches her body and the reader's imagination beyond terrestrial limits into mysterious realms. Unbelievable animals became a reality in the context of world exploration, challenging the Victorians to extend their mental as well as their geographical horizons. The threat to the biblical divine order of animals unknown to Noah was augmented by the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Carroll, as a devout Christian, revived traditional views of animals as allegories of virtues and vices and as mediators between the world of spirits and the material world. Alice and Wonderland animals play roles as divine beings in a coded confrontation between contemporary scientific paradigms and magical belief-systems.

Keywords: animal symbolism, mythology, human-animal relationship, Darwin, spiritualism, Christianisation

In a century of industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation, a diversity of trends challenged the Victorians' worldview in the mid-1860s, when *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) was first published. Living through these transitions entailed shifts in perception, as technical marvels made journeys "above ground" faster, and far-off lands more accessible, while new scientific paradigms challenged old assumptions about the natural order. Carroll sends Alice "under ground" to examine, in his unique humorous mode, some of the conundrums of his

era. The story of Alice's adventures is addressed in the first instance to Carroll's child audience, but is also food for thought for his adult readers.

It is often supposed that Wonderland was sheltered from major world events and represents a fantasy world fabricated from Carroll's close observations of his local surroundings, which he shared with the children who heard the original oral renderings of the stories embedded in the final version. As Morton N. Cohen writes in his highly respected biography of Lewis Carroll, "The landmarks, the language, the puns, the puffery – it was all rooted in the circumscribed enclave of their Victorian lives. Oxford provided the landscape, its architecture, its history, its select society, its conventions" (1996: 136). Yet many of the creatures in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* have their origins far from the City of Oxford in England, where the author Reverend Charles Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll (1832 – 1898), lived and taught mathematics. Alice meets several animals native to Britain – a rabbit, a mouse, a duck and also a caterpillar and a pigeon – but she sings about crocodiles and hippopotami and plays croquet with a flamingo mallet. The introduction of such exotic fauna to Wonderland in the sense of "originating in or characteristic of a distant foreign country", definition 1 of "exotic" in *Oxford Dictionaries* (2015), brings the rest of the World closer to the parochial Oxford location.

Famously, Carroll himself took part in *Alice's Adventures* in the guise of a bird from the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. He pictured himself for the original handwritten version of the story *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (ca. 1864) as a Dodo swimming along behind Alice in a pool of her own tears, accompanied by a bizarre throng of beasts (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The Pool of Tears. After Lewis Carroll, ca. 1864.
Sl. 1. Jezero suza. Prema crtežu Lewisa Carrolla (oko 1864.).

Those mentioned in the text (Gardner 2001: 28) represent, at a playful level, the children of Dean Liddell of Christ Church, and his friend Reverend Robinson Duckworth (1834–1911), who all got soaked on a boat trip in Oxford: the colourful Lory, an arboreal parrot native to Australia, represented Lorina Liddell, the Eaglet was Edith Liddell, and Reverend Duckworth was the Duck, as confirmed by a dedication in Duckworth’s copy of the original manuscript, “The Duck from the Dodo” (Gardner 2001: 29, n. 10). Interpretations of Wonderland rarely explore beyond this information. Jenny Woolf’s discussion in her biography of Carroll about the weather and who really was in the boat on which day (2010: 158) is typical of the enduring fascination with the local context. Yet it is curious that the native duck should be greeted by an exotic bird, moreover one that suffered extinction at the hands of European sailors and their domesticated animals in the 17th century.

The Dodo was local to Oxford in the sense that a taxidermic specimen was – and still is – on show at the Oxford Natural History Museum, which Carroll often visited with the Liddell children (Gardner 2001: 28, n. 10). Other foreign Wonderland beasts were also known to the public. Like many Victorians, Carroll enjoyed visits to the Zoological Gardens in London. The visitors’ handbook (Moore 1838) recognised the far-flung appeal of the caged animals (quoted in Wilson 2003: 93):

In his mind’s eye, (the visitor) may track the pathless desert and sandy waste; he may climb amid the romantic solitudes, the towering peaks, and wilder crags of the Himalayan heights, and wander through the green vales of that lofty range whose lowest depths are higher than the summits of the European mountains.

Outlandish animals stretched the imagination to encompass the globe. The Victorian public loved these distant “Wonderlands”, but were unsettled by the challenges they represented to traditional assumptions about the nature of God’s creation. Some of these concerns made their way into Carroll’s narrative, along with his foreign fauna.

Most of the animals in Wonderland can be regarded as exotic in the sense of “attractive or striking because colourful or out of the ordinary” (Oxford Dictionaries 2015: definition of “exotic”, 1.1) since the main characters speak, wear clothes and use human tools such as a cane (the Dodo) or a hairbrush (the Lobster). The following discussion of Carroll’s Wonderland animals focuses on the way real creatures become carriers of different kinds of symbolic connotations, rather than on the more obviously fabulous creatures such as the chimeric Mock Turtle and the Griffin. Some of the minor characters such as the hedgehogs at the croquet ground, which have fewer anthropomorphic features and appear to behave as hedgehogs generally do – rolling up when frightened – also prove to be of significance and carry allegorical meanings, which will be addressed below.

The coordinates of the framework within which the Victorians fashioned their identity were constantly being repositioned. Alice is forced to question her status when she tells the relatively enormous Caterpillar: "I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir, because I'm not myself, you see" (Carroll 2001: 49, emphasis in the original). Eventually, she announces that she is a little girl, although, in the view of the frightened Pigeon, Alice, suddenly grown large, takes on a serpent-like form (56–57). This query about the meaning of being human in relation to the status of an animal is a constant theme in Wonderland. Are Carroll's animals inspirational in their anthropomorphic aspirations, encouraging more respect for nonhuman beings in keeping with Carroll's love of animals, or a comment on the baser side of human nature? Nina Auerbach has pointed out the cruelty in some of Alice's encounters with animals (1973: 27). Alice often appears as a source of threat and danger, terrifying the Pigeon, who suspects Alice of wanting to eat her eggs, for example (Carroll 2001: 57). Yet the animals in Wonderland are not always polite to Alice. "'You!'" said the Caterpillar contemptuously. "Who are *you*?" (50, emphasis in the original). Here, Carroll turns on its head his own hierarchical view of the animal kingdom that he held as a newcomer to Christ Church: on 22 November 1851 he claimed in an address to Hall that Beauty is to be found "in animals, and last, highest, and grandest of all, in the divine form and features of Man" (quoted in Cohen 1996: 535; cf. Brown & Mangelsdorf 2012: 152–153). Alice is very frightened when the Rabbit, apparently mistaking her for his housemaid, sends her off to fetch "a pair of gloves and a fan!" (Carroll 2001: 38), lowering her status to that of servant to a beast. The Wonderland creatures' ambivalent status is part of the enduring fascination of Alice's adventures. A closer look at some of the animals Carroll imported into his story and what he did with them can help to locate Alice's adventures within the boundaries of his imagination, both intellectual and geographical.

Fauna and fairies

A Wonderland where exotic animals can be effortlessly juxtaposed with creatures native to Britain is a place where disconcerting differences in bodily scale can be well managed, if not overcome. The symbolism of scale in relation to animals and things reflects the Victorian's sense of their own identity. A girl who constantly changes in size in a fantasy world full of anthropomorphic animal characters bears some similarity to the magical realms teeming with fairies and oversize beasts popular in painting in the 19th century. Nicola Bown (2001) has interpreted the Victorian penchant for such pictures and stories as a reaction to industrialisation and urbanisation. The identification of grown-up people with imaginary miniature

beings can be seen as a response to a perceived threat of diminishing stature in the face of a society in thrall to the powerful machines of technological progress. Fantasy realms were places where the passage of time could be slowed down, fauna and flora could be brought to the fore, and problems could be solved with spells rather than sound scientific remedies. Bown's analysis can be applied to Carroll's Wonderland, except that instead of fairies, this paper argues that many of the animals and Alice herself represent divinities and nymphs from antiquity. Carroll was adamant that there were no fairies in his book about Alice (Cohen 1979: Letter to Tom Taylor, 10 June 1864).

The relevance of modern technology to the message of Wonderland is made clear at the start of Alice's adventures. The expansion of the railways, which by the fifties had led to a comprehensive national network, encourages Alice to imagine that she could return home quickly by train, for when she falls into a pool created by her own tears she remembers that "wherever you go to on the English coast" you will find a railway station (Carroll 2001: 25). Carroll puts Alice onto a train to travel across the third square of the chessboard in the second book of her adventures *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Expanding and shrinking, coming and going, is a defining feature of her adventures and with it, the ambivalent sense of power and powerlessness in the Victorian age. Alice's first temporary elongation is followed by being cut back down to size, shrinking so drastically that she nearly drowns in her own tears, and yet her anxiety at being "up to her chin in salt-water" was replaced by increasing confidence as "she swam lazily about in the pool" (Carroll 2001: 24, 26). In this sense, her adventures offer reassurance in dealing with dramatic transitions.

Exotic animals accessed through emigration

There were maps hanging on the walls of the shaft Alice descended to reach Wonderland. Her exploration under ground is conducted at a slow pace, as she advances mainly on foot, and yet the territory she covers is immense, both in her mind and in her measurements. While falling down the shaft leading from a rabbit hole, Alice wonders if she will emerge in New Zealand or Australia. These distant locations were highly topical, so this clue to a destination would have been recognised by Carroll's readers (cf. Brown & Mangelsdorf 2012: 74–76). The town of Christchurch in New Zealand, founded in 1850 during a new wave of emigration to the Antipodes, was named after Christ Church Oxford (a joint foundation of a college of the University of Oxford and the Cathedral of the Diocese of Oxford). This was just a year before Carroll's matriculation at that college in 1851. Carroll's interest in the real Antipodes is supported by his presence at a talk on 13 June 1854

about the new Christian community in New Zealand, as he noted in his diary entry for that day: “[a]ttended a large gathering in the Town Hall to hear the Bishop of Oxford and the Bishop of New Zealand report on the growing new diocese in the Antipodes” (Wakeling 1993–1997: Vol. 10, 470–471 and n. 149). His brother Edwin became a missionary to Tristan da Cunha from 1881 to 1889 (Cohen 1996: 433).

Carroll was also a patron of the arts with a wide range of friends and acquaintances in cultural circles, including poets and artists, especially Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882). Some experimented with emigration as a solution to their financial problems. By the sixties, many disappointed emigrants had returned, having failed to find gold or establish a sheep farm. One of these was the artist Thomas Woolner (1825 – 1892), who advised Carroll in 1863 not to try to illustrate the published version of *Alice* himself, as the latter stated in his *Diaries* on 16 July 1863 (Wakeling 1997: Vol. 4, 220). Woolner had left England for Australia in 1852 but returned as early as 1854 after failing to achieve recognition as an artist and breaking off an engagement to marry. Back home, he became a successful sculptor, and was admired by Carroll, who accepted his advice and sought another illustrator, John Tenniel, to embellish *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Jaques and Giddens 2013: 11).

I suggest that Carroll's knowledge of the adventures of enterprising emigrants and missionaries led him to project the expanding and shrinking effects of global dynamics onto his intrepid child explorer, Alice. One result of her involuntary transformation into a being that spans the globe is that she is able to map the experiences onto her own human form. Carroll sketches delightfully ludicrous consequences of her predicament. Elongated Alice says goodbye to her feet as she will be “a great deal too far off to trouble” herself about them (Carroll 2001: 20). At the same time, he refers obliquely to difficulties experienced in the real world, for if her feet have emigrated, it would be quite normal to have difficulty in communicating with them and to “give them a new pair of boots every Christmas” (ibid.), which would have to be sent by carrier, one of the ships that plied the globe. As long as Alice stretches right across the Earth, Carroll's Wonderland leaves the parochial context of the boat trips and is able to represent the whole world. However, the territorial consequences of colonialism were not the focus of Carroll's attention in *Wonderland*, but would be explored later on the chessboard in *Through the Looking-Glass* (Brown 2015: 39–45).

The gap between Britain and the Antipodes was not only a matter of miles to be covered in a few months by crossing the oceans, but also a mental one. In Carroll's day, the Southern hemisphere was still understood to be a mirror image of the upper, civilised North and thus a place where everything should be topsy-turvy. In the world-turned-upside-down genre discussed by Ronald Reichertz in *The Making*

of the *Alice Books* (1997), animals change places with humans in opposition to normal expectations. The reality of the Antipodes created a modern Wonderland, where these long-held traditions were reinforced by direct experiences of the exotic. Emigrants were astonished by antipodean animals like the wombat. Where did they and the human native inhabitants fit into God's creation? As St. Augustine (354 – 430 AD), for example, cautioned in his AD 420s treatise on “Whether We are to Believe in the Antipodes” (1872–1876: 413–426):

But as to the fable that there are Antipodes, that is to say, men on the opposite side of the earth, where the sun rises when it sets to us, men who walk with their feet opposite ours, that is on no ground credible. (...) it is too absurd to say, that some men might have taken ship and traversed the whole wide ocean, and crossed from this side of the world to the other, and that thus even the inhabitants of that distant region are descended from that one first man.

Alice echoes St. Augustine's image of “feet opposite to ours” when she muses, “How funny it'll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downwards. The antipathies, I think –” (Carroll 2001: 13). In the 19th century good Christians put their minds to work in an attempt to reconcile new discoveries with Biblical tradition. Perhaps God had some creative energy left over and amused Himself by creating extraordinary animals: “Barron Field, writing a poem about the kangaroo in 1819, could only imagine that the beast was pieced together ‘on Creation's holiday’, a saturnalian respite after the hard work of shaping the northern hemisphere was done” (Conrad 2004: Lect. 1). Barron Field (1786 – 1846) thought antipodean animals might have been conceived after the fall of man as a punishment. Against this backdrop, Carroll uses the context of contemporary globalisation to create characters capable of playing specific symbolic and even mystical roles, as I will seek to demonstrate with reference to the humble Dormouse.

Is the Dormouse a wombat?

As soon as the *Alice books* appeared, Carroll's contemporaries started asking themselves, “Haven't I seen this beast somewhere before?” According to the painter Ford Madox Brown (1821 – 1893), the Dormouse at Carroll's Mad Tea-Party in Wonderland might have been inspired by the wombat, a relatively slow-moving marsupial from Australia. More specifically, he suspected Dante Gabriel Rossetti's charming pet, which slept on the dining table to the amusement of his guests, particularly when “it proceeded in leisurely fashion to devour the entire contents of a valuable box of cigars” (Hueffer 1896: 261). Rossetti kept a whole menagerie of strange animals at Tudor House in Chelsea (Rossetti 1906: 284–285):

From contemplating a Japanese salamander in a tank or a white mouse nursing her brood, in the studio, and hearing a wood-owl hoot or a parrot talk in the corridor,

you could pass into the garden, and see a kangaroo skipping, a racoon washing and swallowing a biscuit, or an armadillo pacing his rounds not to speak of a zebu chasing [...] Dante Gabriel Rossetti round a tree. The wombat, and after him the woodchuck or Canadian marmot, were too precious to be allowed much out of doors: they were my brother's companions day by day, and the wombat would follow at the housemaid's heels when she went upstairs to make the beds.

Rossetti had long been a fan of the wombats in the London Zoo and loved to escort his friends on pilgrimages to their cage, the 'Wombat's Lair' (Trumble 2003). He acquired his cigar-consuming wombat in 1869. This was after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* had been published in 1865, and so this wombat was too late to attend the Mad Tea-Party, leading some commentators to dismiss Ford Madox Brown's suggestion (eg. Trumble 2003). However, Rossetti's first pet wombat, of uncertain date of entry to Dante's home, was more dearly loved, according to his brother William Michael (Rossetti 1895: 253). Since Carroll was acquainted with the painter, he might have met Rossetti's first wombat before inviting a Dormouse to tea with Alice. Be that as it may, the wombat was special, having achieved a kind of cult status among artists in the mid-19th century. Carroll already had an opportunity to encounter the marsupial, as an image if not in real life, when artists painted the frescoes in the Union Debating Hall, Oxford, in 1857 – the “year of the wombat” (Woodford 2012: 65). This is a likely source of the idea of casting a wombat-like dormouse as a beast in Wonderland, so Ford Madox Brown's guess was not in vain. According to Valentine Cameron Prinsep (1838 – 1904), who assisted in the project when a young painter, the artists scratched pictures of wombats into the foundation layer of paint. In a biography of Edward Burne-Jones (1833 – 1898) by his wife Georgiana, she recorded (Burne-Jones 1904: 162–163):

Mr. Prinsep says that the windows in the spaces they were painting were whitened in order to tone the light, and that the whitened glass was covered all over with sketches, chiefly of wombats. “Do you know the wombat at the Zoo?” asked Rossetti; “a delightful creature – the most comical little beast.” He was drawn by Edward in endless different positions and situations, and Rossetti's admiration led him years afterwards to buy a live one and try to make it happy at Cheyne Walk.

These wombats disappeared as the murals neared completion, but their humorous style can be surmised from Burne-Jones' “Wombat in the Desert”, which Georgiana offers as an example (Fig. 2). Carroll watched the progress of the work and would surely have seen them. The idea that the Dormouse might be a wombat inspired by its fame as a Pre-Raphaelite mascot points to the symbolic importance of this creature. Valentine Prinsep explains: “Rossetti was the planet round which



Fig. 2. Wombat in the desert. After Edward Burne-Jones, C19.

Sl. 2. Wombat u pustinji. Prema crtežu Edwarda Burnea-Jonesa, 19. stoljeće.

we revolved. We copied his very way of speaking. All beautiful women were ‘stunners’ with us. Wombats were the most beautiful of God’s creatures” (quoted in Burne-Jones 1904: 164).

These male artists identified themselves playfully with the wombat as a handsome beast in disarmingly harmless disguise. This meaning is apparent in a depiction by Rossetti of a wombat following a beautiful woman, who is holding the marsupial on a ribbon (Fig. 3). She was Jane Burden Morris (1839 – 1914), the wife of William Morris (1834 – 1896), whom the two artists had engaged as a model while painting the Oxford Union murals and who became a friend and muse of Rossetti (Rossetti Archive: 7). When Rossetti acquired his second wombat, he wrote to Jane Morris “What do you think? I have got a Wombat at Chelsea, come the other day...” with a postscript (letter to Jane Morris, 11 September 1869; Rossetti Archive, no date: 8)

Oh how the family affections combat
 Within this heart, and each hour flings a bomb at
 My burning soul! Neither from owl nor from bat
 Can peace be gained until I clasp my wombat.

Given this possibility of a symbolic load being carried by an innocent little creature, the Dormouse at the Mad Tea-Party (Fig. 4) could also be an admirer of Alice in animal disguise. The Wonderland scene would then be a *tableau vivant* of the story of “Beauty and the Beast”.

The special feature of Carroll’s Mad Tea-Party is that the table is set for a large number of absent guests. This is a clue to an older source of the beauty and beast fable, the well-loved story of Cupid and Psyche, which in turn derives from



Fig. 3. Mrs. Morris and the Wombat. After Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ca. 1869.
Sl. 3. Gospođa Morris i wombat. Prema crtežu Dantea Gabriela Rossettija, oko 1869.

ancient stories about beast bridegrooms (Warner 1995: 274). The popularity of this theme in art and literature in mid-19th century Britain is epitomised by the Palace Green Murals in Kensington, London, based on the story from William Morris's epic poem *The Earthly Paradise*, commissioned in the late 1860s. Morris had asked Burne-Jones to make a series of woodcuts on the theme in 1865.

Alice's Adventures (Under Ground and in Wonderland) and the Wonderland Mad Tea-Party conform in motifs and sometimes in the formulation of Carroll's text to the first telling of the tale in Apuleius' novel *The Golden Ass* from the 2nd century AD (cf. Brown 2015: 156–163). The oracle of Apollo advised that Psyche would “wed a fierce, barbaric, snake-like monster” if abandoned on a “lofty mountain-rock” (Apuleius 2008: 78) from which she fell – gently, like Alice. Psyche then entered a grove as attractive as the garden Alice could see but not enter, and was entertained at a table laid for dinner where “various plates of food were placed before her, brought not by human hands but unsupported on a gust of wind. She

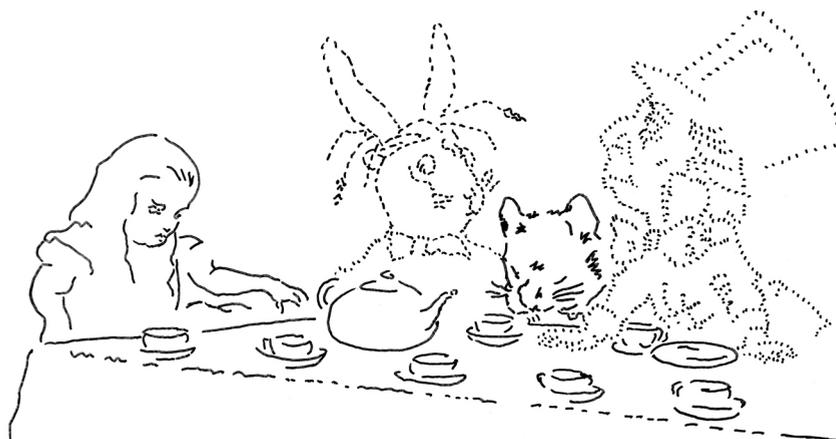


Fig. 4. The Mad Tea-Party. After Sir John Tenniel, 1865.
Sl. 4. Luda čajanka. Po uzoru na pl. Johna Tenniela, 1865.

could see no living soul, and merely heard words emerging from thin air: her serving-maids were merely voices” (81).

Cupid (Amor) was waiting for her, sleeping like the Dormouse – a beautiful rather than beastly sight, although Psyche’s two jealous sisters had told her to expect a monster. The god of desire has often been depicted in art exhausted from creating havoc among men with his arrows, or being punished by his mother Venus or by Diana’s nymphs, who destroy his weapons or clip his wings (Hall 1984: 87). The Dormouse is subjected to another kind of punishment by being stuffed into a teapot, indicating that he plays Cupid as an amorous beast opposite Alice playing Psyche. A paper entitled *Cakeless*, which was circulated in Carroll’s college in 1874 by another Christ Church Student, the Reverend John Howe Jenkins, satirises the aspirations of three sisters, who clearly represent the Liddell daughters, and the prospective marriage of the one dubbed “Psyche”. Jenkins envisages an admirer being punished by being abandoned in Wonderland, forced to consider his predicament through the looking-glass and imprisoned in the belfry (Clark 1979: 189). The implication is that Dodgson under the pseudonym “Kraftsohn” is to be punished for protesting against the marriage of “Psyche” to someone else. So this colleague was equating Dodgson with Cupid and thus with the Dormouse. Perhaps Dodgson-Carroll deliberately shared the first two letters of his name Do not only with the Do-do but also with the Do-rmouse.

Alternatively, Michael Joseph identifies “the White Rabbit as Cupid because it is he Alice follows down the rabbit hole and she continues to follow him. He is the agent of her adventures. And because he is nervous about his reception by the Queen of Hearts, an obvious Aphrodite figure. There is a kind of pairing off of Alice and the White Rabbit (but) all of his bachelor eccentricities disqualify him as a suitable partner [...]” (personal communication 2014, cf. Joseph 2004). Not only the Mad Tea-Party chapter but also the frame of *Alice's Adventures* bear a similarity to Psyche's story. Cupid's angry mother Venus (Aphrodite) commissions Psyche to collect a box in the underworld from Proserpine, which causes her to be overcome by sleep after opening it while Alice, after leaving her sleeping self and falling into an underworld, finds a box that also contains a magic substance, but one that enables her to speak with animals. There are many other possible parallels between Psyche and Alice's adventures. However, in my view Carroll does not keep to one source, but follows various stories from antiquity about mortals entering the underworld, in which Alice and the animal characters play a variety of roles.

From the antipodes to antiquity

Englishmen setting off from their island to explore the world might be furthering their education by visiting Rome or travelling further to the Orient. Lewis Carroll himself only once went abroad, to Russia, Germany and France in 1867. Alice's journey underground allowed him to imagine exotic locations without being able to draw on his own direct experience. Instead, he exploited his knowledge of the myths of antiquity, with their panoply of powerful divinities and vulnerable nymphs. References to classical sources in Carroll's era were frequent, indeed expected of sophisticated scholars at Oxford like Carroll, who were well versed in Latin and Greek. A journey south through the Earth, which Alice estimates as reaching several thousand miles down, became a descent into times past several thousand years ago. For the south was identified in the Victorian era with the paganism of antiquity (Jenkyns 1980: 42–43).

When Carroll stretches Alice across the globe, she becomes a powerful being, who at 9 feet high is able to create a pool with her tears. Her alteration in physical scale is not only cause for concern but endows her with new powers: her inability to reach her own feet quickly becomes an ability to cause a flood by weeping. A female being from antiquity with a similar capability was the goddess Isis, responsible for the life-giving rise of the River Nile, leading to the irrigation of its fertile banks. Support for this identification comes from the verses that Alice then recites, trying to remember a poem by Isaac Watts “Against Idleness and Mischief”

(“How doth the little busy bee”, Carroll 2001: 51), but “the words did not come the same as they used to do” (23) so the bee becomes a crocodile bathing happily in the waters of the great river (see also Brown 2015: 57–58, 97–98). Interestingly, Lewis Carroll first told the story that became *Alice’s Adventures* while on a boat trip on the River Isis in 1862 in Oxford. Thus, the discovery of this Egyptian goddess does not by itself confirm his use of sources from antiquity, since this could be just another transformation of a local feature from the city where Lewis Carroll taught mathematics. In 1852 the flooding of the River Isis (cf. Tyler 2013: 93) washed away the new railway tracks, as if Egyptian magic were making a final assault on modern technology.

The Nile was in the public eye when Carroll created *Alice’s Adventures* due to a number of scientific explorations along the river by Englishmen. Richard Francis Burton (1821 – 1890) and John Hanning Speke (1827 – 1864) had failed to agree about the source of the Nile after their adventures in East Africa in the fifties, so from 1860 to 1863 Speke set out again, this time with James Augustus Grant (1827 – 1892), and became convinced that the river flowed out of Lake Victoria. He died in a shooting accident on 15 September 1864, before being able to defend his discovery at the British Association in Bath that very afternoon (DNB 1885–1900, Vol. 53: 324). By this time Carroll had finished the text of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* (on 10 February 1863), so the death threat associated with the river, when Alice involuntarily recalls the Nile and the crocodile’s smiling jaws, is prophetic rather than a historical metaphor.

An Egyptian angle on Wonderland would imply that some of the animals could be divine beings, since the ancient gods could appear in such diverse forms as crocodiles, cats, frogs, pigs and baboons. Carroll’s use of motifs from antiquity suggests that a main theme of the Wonderland narrative is mistaken identity, especially failure to recognise divinity – whether in the shape of Alice or one of his animal characters, such as the Dormouse. The Caterpillar not only asks Alice who she is but is questioned by her in return, “I think you ought to tell me who *you* are, first” (Carroll 2001: 50, emphasis in the original). Pursuing the connection to the River Isis, the Caterpillar can be identified as the Egyptian deity Thoth, god of writers, mathematics and the calendar, subjects of profound interest to Carroll. Alice was wise to address him as “Sir” (49). The magic in Wonderland that allows Alice to change her shape is essentially Egyptian since it is the Caterpillar as Thoth who teaches her how to turn these mysterious powers to her own advantage (cf. Brown 2015: 60–61). He explains to Alice how she can gain more control over Wonderland magic by nibbling at the mushroom on which he is enthroned. In so far as Alice has fallen into the Egyptian underworld, her escort, the White Rabbit,

must be a kind of *psychopomp*, a guide of souls, like the jackal-headed Anubis or his Greek counterpart Hermes. No wonder Alice is frightened of him.

Darwin and doubt

From a religious point of view, this concern about respect for divinity reflects in a somewhat eccentric manner the bitter doctrinal arguments within the Anglican Church, which were raging when Carroll arrived in Oxford in 1851. The first telling of the story that became *Alice's Adventures* took place three years after the publication of Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin's thesis that animals evolved, culminating in the appearance of man, was widely seen as a threat to time-honoured traditions: "With man's mind as vulnerable to gradual evolutionary change as his toes, the divine image in which humanity for centuries believed itself created dissolved into primeval slime" (Oppenheim 1988: 60). The haughty manner of the Wonderland animals may reflect their newfound status in the wake of the Darwinian fall of man from the pinnacle of the animal kingdom, for the debate about evolution quickly found its way into children's literature (cf. Keene 2015: 110–138, the chapter "Wonderlands of Evolution"). At the debate in Oxford in 1860 between Bishop Samuel Wilberforce (1805 – 1873) and Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 – 1895) at which Carroll was present (Woolf 2010: 270), Huxley identified himself, under attack about his ancestry, as proud to be an animal (quoted in Wilson 2003: 228):

If...the question is put to me, would I rather have a miserable ape for a grandfather or a man highly endowed by nature and possessed of great means of influence and yet who employs these faculties and that influence for the mere purpose of introducing ridicule into a grave scientific discussion, I unhesitatingly affirm my preference for the ape.

Darwin's theories were greeted by Carroll as a devout Christian, namely Reverend Dodgson, with a mixture of curiosity and scepticism (cf. Brown & Mangelsdorf 2012: 152–155). He collected books by Darwin and his critics (Cohen 1996: 350) and even went so far, after reading Darwin's later book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), as to send him one of his own photographs for use in future publications (Cohen 1996: 350). Carroll's identification with the extinct Dodo represents a tacit acceptance of the drastic effects of selection processes in evolution, casting himself as a loser in the battle for survival. The importance of eating or being eaten is introduced in the first chapter when Alice wonders whether cats eat bats or vice versa (Carroll 2001: 14). However, Carroll continued to believe in the creative power of God and approved of arguments taking this direction (Cohen 1996: 351). Furthermore, he was an animal lover, who protested against hunting and vivisection, so he would have sympathised

with Huxley's "preference for the ape". There is a monkey swimming along near the Dodo in Carroll's drawing of the pool of tears that is not mentioned in the text (cf. Fig. 1). In real life, instead of accepting Man as but a worm, he took the part of animals and plants, arguing that they also have a soul and have thus earned their place in Heaven (cf. Woolf 2010: 199). Alice's relationship to her companions in the pool of her own tears is ambivalent: in Carroll's drawing (cf. Fig. 1) the animals and birds appear to be in pursuit of the young girl and yet she could be leading the way and thus maintaining her human status in Carroll's speech from 1851 as "the highest, and grandest of all".

If some of the Wonderland animals represent ancient divinities, prolonging their symbolic function as representatives of a divine order into the Victorian age, then their confidence expresses their command of magical powers rather than a Darwinian joke. Alice tells the Caterpillar that her substantial diminution in stature is worrying her, "Well, I should like to be a *little* larger, Sir, if you wouldn't mind, three inches is such a wretched height to be" (Carroll 2001: 54, emphasis in the original). Yet the Caterpillar, who is exactly the same height, assures her that "It is a very good height indeed!" (ibid.). Once he has divulged the secret of deliberate shape-shifting both he and Alice share the status of Wonderland magicians and the significance of the Darwinian hierarchy is diminished in consequence. When she follows his advice by eating a piece of mushroom to become all neck and elongation, she mimics his worm-like state.

The various kinds of metamorphosis that make up the wonders of Wonderland are a challenge to Darwinian evolutionary theory and its hierarchical implications. Indeed, the ontological status of all elements of God's creation is thrown into question as the Duchess equates mustard with flamingos and Alice counters that mustard is a mineral (Carroll 2011: 97). The house of the March Hare has bestial features, for "the chimneys were shaped like ears and the roof was thatched with fur" (69).

Traditional religious animal symbolism

The elaborate traditional religious meanings of mediaeval literature and art (Dinzelbacher 2000: 216–230), which faded in the wake of 19th century secularisation, do not appear to apply to the flora and fauna in Carroll's Wonderland. Yet older belief-systems may be hidden in Carroll's cryptic script. In the Victorian era, animals in literature might still draw on their age-old function within Christian iconography as harbingers of good and evil (cf. Preece 1999: 31–34). The juxtaposition of hedgehog croquet balls and flamingo mallets at the Queen's Croquet-Ground (Carroll 2001: 88) points to St. Anthony's categories of allegorical

animals from the 13th century (cf. Brown 2015: 133). The flamingos were originally ostriches in the handwritten version *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (ca. 1864), a bird embodying the hypocrite according to St. Anthony of Padua. Alice tries to use hers to hit a hedgehog, unwittingly meting out the punishment due to this "obstinate sinner, clad all around with the spines of sin" (St. Anthony 1979: 13). Her action is one of complicity in cruelty to the flamingos and the hedgehogs, but if the allegorical aspect is taken into account, it becomes clear that her main attitude is one of naivety as she fails to recognise the code of the game being played around her, which turns the beating of the croquet balls into a form of penance. Another example of an allegorical animal is the crocodile in Alice's poem, who behaves as a crocodile should when he "welcomes little fishes in, / With gently smiling jaws!" (Carroll 2001: 23). John Docherty connects the crocodile and Nile to the biblical concept of Mammon, the vice of greed (1995: 130). Mammon or avarice, one of the seven Deadly Sins, has been personified in numerous forms through the ages (Hall 1984: 37). The moral scruple about pursuit of material wealth was topical at a time of industrialisation, as discussed with irony in 1843 by Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) in his "Gospel of Mammonism" (Carlyle & Duff Traill 2010: 144–150).

In religious usages both native animals like the hedgehog and foreign Wonderland species like the ostrich/flamingo and crocodile can have such unexpected symbolic connotations. These allegorical animals drawn from Christian iconography are not presented in Wonderland with anthropomorphic features such as clothes, nor do they speak or use tools. On the contrary, Alice and the playing-card royals use the croquet ball hedgehogs and flamingo mallets as tools. And yet they most probably represent sinful humans. The more human-like characters with human props such as a watch (the White Rabbit) or hookah (the Caterpillar) are the animals that represent divinities in disguise. An exception to this categorisation is the Dormouse as Cupid, god of love, since he is shown by Tenniel without clothes. However, he is capable of speech as he tells the story of the three sisters at the bottom of a well (Carroll 2001: 79–80), who represent Psyche and her two sisters as well as the three Liddell sisters as discussed above.

Spiritualism and marvellous frogs

According to Janet Oppenheim, the threat of materialist explanations of evolution and human existence encouraged the spread of spiritualism in Britain (1988: 61–64). At séances invisible beings communicated to enthralled Victorians, as they once entertained Psyche. Young girls with predictive powers while in a state of trance were beneficiaries of this fashion. From this angle, it becomes apparent that when Alice utters words about the Nile and crocodile in a "hoarse and strange"

voice (Carroll 2001: 23) she is acting like one of these Victorian women in a manner reminiscent of the Pythia at the Oracle of Delphi. Carroll was clearly fascinated by spiritualism and the paranormal, as confirmed by volumes in his private library. Several of these were published in the 1860s and discuss the history of magic, ghosts, mediums and mesmerism. These interests anticipate Carroll's membership of the scientifically orientated Society for Psychical Research (SPR), which he joined as a founder member in 1882.

Spiritualism was attractive to those Christians who feared that a disillusioned world would lose its faith in the divine. One of the additions in the revised version of Carroll's handwritten manuscript is the mention of an archbishop in Chapter III of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The Duck, who as noted above represents Reverend Duckworth, asks, "The question is, what did the archbishop find?" (Carroll 2001: 31). Duckworth was one of Carroll's Anglican friends who went on to rise within the hierarchy of the Church, so the query Carroll puts in his mouth probably refers to a genuine religious concern. The reference could be to Bishop Wilberforce's championing of traditional Christian views in the debate with Huxley about Darwin's controversial theories in 1860. However, since the dialogue between the Dodo and the Duck was added to the original manuscript when Carroll in 1864 elaborated on Alice's original adventures for the published version, it is worth looking for a controversy closer to that year. In December 1863 the South African bishops threatened the Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso (1814–1883), with deposition in view of his heretical views (Cross & Livingstone 2005: 705). In particular, he questioned the doctrine of eternal punishment, especially as applied to the fate of Africans before missionaries appeared on the scene to convert them to Christianity, "not to us Christians only, but to our fellow-men of all climes and countries, ages and religions, – the same Gracious Teacher is revealing [...] the hidden things of God" (Colenso 1862: 154). Colenso's treatment of Africans as "fellow-men" was provocative at a time when there was doubt about their status as members of the same human lineage, as Carroll's speech therapist Dr James Hunt argued in 1863 in his treatise *On the Negro's Place in Nature* (1863). In this sense, non-native humans were also considered by many Victorians to be exotic animals.

It is difficult to be sure about the significance of what the archbishop found in Wonderland with so few clues to work with, but it is possible to sketch in links between Colenso, Carroll and the controversies of the day. Colenso's theological views were strongly influenced by Frederick Denison Maurice (1805 – 1872), the founder of Christian Socialism. Carroll owned a copy of *Theological Essays* (1853) in which Maurice rejects eternal punishment, and he started attending his sermons in 1862 (Cohen 1996: 355–356).

The challenges involved in imparting the Christian message at a time of theological confusion led some missionaries into the spiritualist fold. The controversial Bishop Colenso emphasised the significance of the supernatural in his work with outlandish peoples, according to a book *The History of the Supernatural* by William Howitt (1792 – 1879), owned by Carroll (item 1014, Lovett 2005: 163; Howitt 1863: 471):

And where, indeed, is now the favourite boast of the Anglican church, that Christianity once proved by miracle, that proof is sufficient for all time? Here we have the answer from Bishop Colenso: he has found that it is not sufficient for sharp-witted Kaffirs. They refuse to accept Christianity, except on the same conditions that the ancient world accepted it, accompanied by those supernatural evidences which pronounce its divinity. They are right, and Protestantism is wrong, and must go to school to the spiritualists if it is not to go to utter ruin.

Howitt supports his spiritualist argument with reference to the “battle of the frogs”, a series of letters in *The Times* newspaper in 1862 reporting the survival of frogs and toads in coal or marble for thousands or even millions of years (1863: 461–464). Three of these letters had been cut out and saved by Carroll, which strongly suggests a link to the appearance of a Frog-footman in the published version of *Wonderland*, waiting for “days and days” (Carroll 2001: 61) and standing next to a marble pillar (McLean et al. 1996: 5–8). Howitt sees disbelief in these marvels of nature as (1863: 468):

[...] a melancholy proof of the progress of that paralysis of faith, in the operations of God in creation, which is fast ruining the human mind. If this spirit go on, the soul of man will soon have suffered a deadly gangrene in all its finer endowments, and cease to be anything but mechanical.

This interest in miraculous phenomena embraces the animal kingdom as a repository of magical powers. The Frog-footman links this topical attempt to reconcile contemporary science and traditional miracles with the mysteries of antiquity. For the frog also points to Aristophanes' play *The Frogs* about another trip to the underworld undertaken by the male Greek god Dionysus (cf. Brown 2015: 67–68).

Conclusions

The expanded vision that accompanied nineteenth-century globalisation combined with the traditional realm of angels and make-believe, anchoring Carroll's literary images in ancient tradition. The various animals are drawn from different sources that reflect Carroll's interest in current affairs, his Classical training and his Christian background in a coded confrontation between religious and magical belief-systems and the challenges of his age. Alice's interaction with the animal

beings she meets on her journey through Wonderland entails innocent conversations with animals that are not who they seem. Carroll's child readers would enjoy the counterintuitive aspect of these encounters without necessarily realising their more profound meanings, but adults sharing Carroll's interests would be able to recognise his allusions, as did John Howe Jenkins in his attack on Dodgson.

From a Christian point of view, Reverend Dodgson alias Carroll might see respect for the intervention of divine beings in the natural order as a way of encouraging a less materialist view of the world in his readers young and old, in so far as they were able to recognise the myths he weaves into the narrative. Carroll casts symbolic creatures in a variety of roles, ranging from embodiments of the beastly nature of amorous men, allegories of human vice, creatures acting as psychopomps escorting human souls through the underworld and animal incarnations of divine beings. Playing the opposite parts, Alice is unwittingly involved in walking away from the punishment of the unfortunate Dormouse as Cupid, chastising sinful hedgehogs, following after the White Rabbit and respectfully addressing a divine Caterpillar as "Sir". As she oscillates between positions of power and powerlessness, sometimes threatening the animals and at others being threatened by them, she adopts roles from antiquity such as the goddess Isis and the maiden Psyche.

Carroll's imagination stretched far beyond his local environment to embrace current trends, which he projected onto Alice. However, Wonderland represents the whole globe only briefly, as this metamorphosis is merely a transitional state in Alice's journey before she time-travels into realms of myth and magic. Carroll's attachment to traditional religious beliefs helps to account for the juxtaposition of some foreign animals with domestic ones. In spite of Carroll's documented interest in Darwin and his theories, the Wonderland animal characters draw mainly on older symbolism and should probably be seen as rebels in a materialist world rather than Darwinian offspring. Both non-native and animals native to Britain act as mediators between the realm of spirits and the everyday world. Carroll's metamorphosis of beasts into powerful divine beings opened up a fantasy realm with a magical aura of hidden power.

Illustrations

Original drawings by Celia Brown 2015 in ink on acetate:

Fig. 1. The Pool of Tears. After Carroll, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, ca 1864.

Fig. 2. Wombat in the Desert. After Edward Burne-Jones (in Burne-Jones 1904: 163).

Fig. 3. Mrs. Morris and the Wombat. After Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ca. 1869.

Fig. 4. The Mad Tea-Party. After Tenniel in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865.

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Aličino putovanje oko svijeta sve do tajnovitih predjela: smisao egzotičnih životinja u Čudozemskoj

Nasuprot uvriježenomu mišljenju o tome da je Čudozemsku izolirao od važnih svjetskih događaja, Carroll je smjerove globalnoga razvoja projicirao upravo u svoju odvažnu istraživačicu, dopuštajući joj da na vlastitu tijelu iskušava posljedice proširivanja i sužavanja horizonta globalnih zbivanja. Odlazak k Antipodima izdužuje njezino tijelo, a čitateljeva se moć uobrazilje širi preko svake zemaljske granice, sve do tajnovitih predjela. Otkrivanjem su svijeta, naime, životinje koje do tada nisu bile ni zamislive postale stvarnošću. To je ljudima iz viktorijanskoga doba nametnulo potrebu za proširenjem ne samo njihovih prostornih, već i duhovnih predodžbi. Biblijski božji poredak u još većoj mjeri ugrozile su Noi nepoznate životinje, a na njihovo postojanje upućivalo je Darwinovo djelo *O podrijetlu vrsta* (1859). Kao uvjereni kršćanin Carroll je obnovio tradicionalno mišljenje o životinjama kao alegorijskim prikazima vrlina i poroka, ali i ono po kojemu su životinje posrednici između svijeta duhova i materijalnoga svijeta. Carroll Alici i životinjama iz Čudozemске stoga dodjeljuje ulogu božanskih bića u kodiranome suprotstavljanju suvremene znanstvene paradigme i magičnih sustava vjerovanja.

Ključne riječi: životinjski simbolizam, odnos između čovjeka i životinje, Darwin, spiritualizam, pokrštaivanje

Alices Reise über den Globus hin zu geheimnisvollen Gefilden: die Bedeutung der exotischen Tiere im Wunderland

Im Gegensatz zu der üblichen Ansicht, dass das Wunderland von wichtigen Weltereignissen abgeschirmt bleibt, projizierte Carroll globale Entwicklungen auf seine kühne Explorandin, sodass sie die erweiternden und schrumpfenden Horizonte des globalen Geschehens am eigenen Leib verspüren kann. Die Auswanderung nach Australien dehnt ihren Körper und gleichzeitig die Vorstellungskraft des Lesers über die irdischen Grenzen hinaus in geheimnisvolle Gefilde hinein. Im Zuge der Entdeckung der Welt wurden Tiere, die bisher nur imaginär existierten, Realität. Dadurch ergab sich für die Viktorianer die Herausforderung, nicht nur ihre geografischen, sondern auch ihre geistigen Vorstellungen zu erweitern. Die Gefährdung der biblischen Ordnung Gottes aufgrund der für Noah unbekanntem Tiere wurde noch durch die Veröffentlichung von Darwins *Über den Ursprung der Arten* 1859 vergrößert. Als überzeugter Christ belebte Carroll die althergebrachten Ansichten von Tieren als Allegorien für Tugenden und Laster sowie als Vermittler zwischen der Sphäre der Geister und der materiellen Welt neu. Alice und die Wunderland-Tiere spielen Rollen als göttliche Wesen im Rahmen einer kodierten Konfrontation zwischen zeitgenössischen wissenschaftlichen Paradigmen und magischen Glaubenssystemen.

Schlüsselwörter: Tiersymbolismus, Mythos, Mensch-Tier Verhältnis, Darwin, Spiritualismus, Christianisierung