

BY TIFFANY TESKA

STUDENT ESSAY
*Golden Age of Children's
Literature Course*



THE DREAM WORLD OF *Wonderland*

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll creates a whimsical, alternative reality based on arbitrary rules and nonsense to express his ideas regarding the nature of dreams. While the original illustrations of the text were created by 19th-century English artist and satirist John Tenniel, famed surrealist Salvador Dalí provides a more expressionistic and psychological exploration of the mind through his own illustrations of Carroll's work in the 1969 Maegenus Press edition of *Alice*. In order to understand Dalí's interpretation of the text, it is important to trace his interests in dreams back to its origins in Sigmund Freud and Surrealism, which came to light during the early 20th-century and focused on new forms of expression that sought to unhinge the supposed creativity trapped in the unconscious mind. Although Carroll, Dalí, and Freud were all from different time periods, their individual beliefs about the nature of dreams allow for a better understanding of how to analyze *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a whole.

According to Carroll, the dream world is one that maintains autonomy from one's conscious reality.





This notion of the dream world being its own, separate space is constantly mirrored throughout the text when Alice tries to bring her Victorian education into the realm of Wonderland. Every time Alice tries to recall one of her lessons from the real world, the lesson is presented as parody or distortion within the realm of Wonderland, which possesses an entirely different sense of logic than Alice's Victorian England. When the Mock Turtle is having a conversation with Alice about his education, he parodies the different branches of mathematics, which he describes as "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision." Carroll's distortion of these mathematic subjects and formal education emphasizes his ideas regarding the autonomous nature of the dream world.

Carroll's ideas about dreams are further expanded upon and supported through Salvador Dalí's expressionistic illustrations from the 1969 edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.




The surreal images created by Dalí smoothly complement Carroll's beliefs regarding the independent realm of dreams. Alice "lends itself to being illustrated in the style of the Surrealists" as Carroll's free-flowing and arbitrary structure of Wonderland mirrors the Surrealists' focus on psychic automatism. This mode of artistic expression is one of the defining characteristics of the Surrealist movement that derived from André Breton's influential work, *The Manifesto of Surrealism*.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*. Unknown, *Illustrator*, Lothrop, *Publisher* (1898)

TOP LEFT, MOCK TURTLE: *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. John Tenniel (1899)

TOP RIGHT: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Salvador Dalí (1969)



In the chapter, “Advice from a Caterpillar,” Dalí provides a prominent depiction of Alice and the Caterpillar which emphasizes “the dichotomy between the two realms” of Victorian reality and the dream world of Wonderland. By depicting Alice as a sharp, black form, Dalí forcefully depicts Carroll’s original textual portrayal of Alice’s confusion in the whimsical realm of Wonderland. Dalí captures Alice’s anxieties about being in a foreign place and not understanding her identity through his use of abstract color washes and bleeding lines, which illustrate the capricious nature of Wonderland. Her sharp form and her ability to cast a shadow, compared to the free-flowing, colorful form of the Caterpillar, emphasizes the distinction between the real world and the dream world.

While Dalí does portray the existence of both a real and dream world, his integrated illustration of the two realms implies that there is a common ground between dreaming and being awake. In each of his drawings of Wonderland, Dalí’s illustrations constantly highlight depictions of the interactions between both realms. His illustrations emphasize

the ability of the dream world to mirror the situations and characters of reality, while still maintaining their own aesthetic look and agency.

Through the characterization of Alice as Carroll's dream child in conjunction with the expressionistic illustrations created by Salvador Dalí, the 1969 edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* offers a psychological investigation of the nature of dreams in this work. Dalí's illustrations capture Carroll's ideas regarding the autonomous nature of dreams; his balance of abstract colors and use of different forms highlights the dichotomy between reality and dreams. Because of Dalí's fascination with tapping into the unconscious mind to try to find the ultimate levels of creativity and reality, his expressionistic artwork perfectly complements the arbitrary and nonsensical world of Wonderland that Carroll fabricates. ❁



Hiltz, Siri. "Curiouser and Curiouser: An Exploration of Surrealism in Two Illustrators of Lewis Carroll's Alice." *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*. 2011.

OPPOSITE PAGE AND TOP RIGHT:
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.
Salvador Dalí (1969)