

# The Use of Violence in *The Nursery "Alice"*

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## Introduction

*The Nursery "Alice"* (1890) is a picture book which is based on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll (1832-98), and it was adapted to children by the author himself. Carroll states that "And my ambition now is (is it a vain one?) to be read by Children aged from Nought to Five" in the preface. The first sentence of the book illustrates that the narrative of the text follows the style of old tales: "Once upon a time, there was a little girl called Alice; and she had a very curious dream." In addition to the different narrative style from the original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Nursery "Alice"* also has some differences: the departure from the novel, the patternisation of telling stories.

### I. *The Nursery "Alice"* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

While *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has twelve chapters and forty-two illustrations, *The Nursery "Alice"* has fourteen chapters and twenty illustrations. The difference lies in the illustrations of *The Nursery "Alice"* which were coloured by John Tenniel (1820-1914), who made original white and black illustrations for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The front and back covers were painted by not Tenniel but Emily Gertrude Thomson (1850-1929), a woman illustrator. These colourful illustrations by Tenniel and Thomson easily draw young readers' attention. Another of the great characteristics of *The Nursery "Alice"* is texts by Carroll in which Carroll narrates as if he talks to readers. His narrative style is classified roughly into the following five patterns: 1) asking readers about their feelings, 2) showing his own mind, 3) telling readers to look at pictures, 4) questioning about readers' experience, and 5) making readers guess how the story develops.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll's statement, especially about inviting readers to look at pictures, are put into round brackets. Unlike the original book, Carroll gives didactic comment in his narrative parts. From these diversified ways of telling stories in *The Nursery "Alice,"* you can see that this book is not mere simplified version. The main story is not different from the original, but it was restructured as a picture book which children under five easily can be absorbed in both of text and illustrations.

### II. Violence in the narrative of *The Nursery "Alice"*

A remarkable point in this book is that some of the violent expressions are included, and these are similar to ways to tell morals in fairy tales and folk songs. Fairy tales in Britain are famous as nursery rhymes, namely *Mother Goose*, and some songs contain violent and cruel expressions. Toshio Fujino explains that they are not aware of that and present cruel actions without feeling any guilt and that they release their own cruelty by singing songs including brutal expressions [in *Mother Goose*] (141). He concludes that children have a brutal instinct by nature (183). This explains the possibility that Carroll intended to tell child readers violence through his narrative style like *Mother Goose* in *The Nursery "Alice."* He allows them to release their own cruelty. Hiroko Sasada asserts that Carroll's narrative style in this book is a technique that permits readers a way of interpretation (85), but she does not mention the reason of using violent words, nor clarifies how important they are in *The Nursery "Alice."* However, can nursery readers understand what violence means? Carroll must have had a reason why he introduced *The Nursery "Alice"* some violent expressions. This essay examines violent expressions to clarify how they have influence on children and what Carroll convey through them.

### 1. Episode of "Dash" in Chapter VI. "The Dear Little Puppy"

Alice, who ate one of the little magic cakes and had grown very small, encounters one puppy. An episode of another puppy named "Dash" is inserted by Carroll in the scene. He had relationships with many girls and called them his "friends", one of whom is the owner of Dash. Dash has care and favour from children. The following is the quotation from the episode. Carroll tells readers to look at the picture indirectly and shows that Alice's situation is contrastive to the children's in the episode.

"Do you know, one day we remembered it was Dash's birthday that day. So we said 'Let's give Dash a nice birthday-treat, like what we have on our birthday!' So we thought and thought 'Now, what is it we like best of all, on our Birthday?' [ . . . ] 'Why, its oatmeal-porridge, of course!' So we thought Dash would be quite sure to like it very much, too.

[ . . . ] 'Now, Dash, you're going to have your birthday-treat!' We expected Dash would jump for joy: but it didn't, one bit!

"So we put the saucer down before it, and we said 'Now, Dash, don't be greedy! Eat it nicely, like a good dog!'

"So Dash just tasted it with the tip of its tongue: and then it made, oh, such a horrid face! And then, do you know, it did hate it so, it wouldn't eat a bit more of it! So we had to put it all down its throat with a spoon!"

I wonder if Alice will give *this* little Puppy some porridge? I don't think she *can*, because

she hasn't got any with her. I can't see any saucer in the picture. (*The Nursery "Alice"* 22-4)

Children wanted to give Dash something on its birthday. They assumed oatmeal-porridge was the best treat for Dash, and tried to give it, but it did not want to eat it. They forced it all down its throat with the spoon. People today can regard the content of this episode as animal abuse. Mikiko Chimori says that Carroll was interested in only upper and middle-class children and women, and that he also had a strong upstream orientation and watched his manners when he had contact with them (18). Also, Camilla Tominey mentions that Queen Victoria preferred oatmeal. Considering that those two factors, one of the children in the episode of Dash is a middle-class girl and loyal to the Queen. Thus, they gave Dash oatmeal which she liked, as the best birthday present for it.

Why did the girl think she "had to" give Dash the treat and put oatmeal-porridge all down Dash's throat with a spoon? Far from being glad, Dash refused to eat the present from her with its angry face. Then for the girl, Dash became "a troublesome dog," because she shows the best treat for it by the standard of them humans, as you see that children use "our" and "we" in their talk above.

Therefore, the violent act of putting oatmeal-porridge all down Dash's throat is caused by children's innocence. Carroll, however, tries to tell readers that they must not force something on animals against their will. Questioning about readers' experience and showing his own mind of, he adds the following before the passage:

Have you got a little pet puppy at your home? If you have, I hope you're always kind to it, and nice thing to eat. (*The Nursery "Alice"* 22)

This episode does not exist in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and you can see it only in *The Nursery "Alice."* In the scene where Alice meets the puppy in the original, she talks to it 'in a coaxing tone', but she is frightened to be eaten.

"Poor little thing!" said Alice, in a coaxing tone, and she tried hard to whistle to it; but she was terribly frightened all the time at the thought that it might be hungry, in which case it would be very likely to eat her up in spite of all her coaxing. (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* 51-2)

Alice's attitude to the puppy is contrast with the girl's one in the episode of "Dash." Sizes

of humans and animals can be reversed in the *Wonderland*, and Alice is on the side of being eaten, that is, she is likely to be a victim. On the one hand, Carroll makes readers imagine the side of being eaten in the original, but on the other hand, he makes them think the side of being forced through Dash in *The Nursery "Alice."* He tells them of the fear of violence.

## 2. The Hippopotamus in Chapter VII. "The Blue Caterpillar"

Alice encounters a Blue Caterpillar in Chapter VII, but it does not appear in the first paragraph of this chapter, and Carroll asks readers the reason why she gets away from the puppy. Here he makes readers guess how the story develops and question about readers' experience.

Would you like to know what happened to Alice, after she had got away from the Puppy? It was far too large an animal, you know, for her to play with. (I don't suppose you would much enjoy playing with a young Hippopotamus, would you? You would always be expecting to be crushed as flat as a pancake under its great heavy feet!) So Alice was very glad to run away, while it wasn't looking. (*The Nursery "Alice"* 25)

Carroll makes readers imagine them being crushed by a hippopotamus. This animal does not appear as a character in either *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or *The Nursery "Alice."* Thus, the following text in the original corresponds to the above quotation.

[. . .] then Alice, thinking it was very like having a game of play with a cart-horse, and a expecting every moment to be trampled under its feet, ran around the thistle again; [. . .] This seemed to Alice a good opportunity for making her escape, so she set off at once, and ran till she was quite tired and out of breath, and till the puppy's bark sound quite faint in the distance. (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* 53)

As you can see, the word "hippopotamus" is not used in the original. Then why did Carroll use the hippopotamus and try to make readers imagine themselves being crushed by it in *The Nursery "Alice"*? This is related to the episode of "Obaysch" a hippopotamus captured near an island in the Nile and had been kept from 1850 to 1878 in London Zoo. Hippopotamus was not kept in Europe since the ancient Roman era, so Obaysch was the first one which British people in the 19th century saw. He was ferocious with human beings and one day escaped from the enclosure. Obaysch's escape shows that a keeper was hated by Obaysch, and that angry Obaysch ran back when he found the keeper

(Sylph). Carroll used this episode and tried to make readers frightened by positioning them as the keeper. He asks them if they act violently like stamping smaller living things and tell them that such an unreasonable action frightens animals.

### 3. The Queen's Garden

When cards paint white roses red in the Queen of Hearts' Garden, the Queen orders them to put a red rose tree just in her garden's corner, but they put in a white one instead, and then they paint the six white roses red for fear that all their heads would be cut off by her. In this scene, he effectively makes readers guess how the story develops three times to heighten readers' tension.

Now can't you guess what the poor little gardeners are trying to do? They're trying to paint the roses red, [ . . . ] work away, little men, work away! Or the Queen will be coming before it's done! And if she finds any white roses on the tree, do you know what will happen? It will be "Off with their heads!"

The Queen has come! And isn't she angry? Oh, my poor little Alice! (*The Nursery "Alice"* 43-4)

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the phrase 'heads cut off' is used.

"Why, the fact is, you see, miss, this here ought to have been a red rose-tree, and we put a white one in by mistake; and if the Queen was to find it out, we should all have our heads cut off, you know. So you see, Miss, we're doing our best, after she comes, to—" (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* 100)

Fujino asserts that the content of "The Queen of Hearts" in *Mother Goose* is that the Knave steals the tarts and the Queen beats him full sore (188-9). He also admits that children immediately consider a queen to be a violent person. When children find the Queen in *The Nursery "Alice,"* they see the same violence as that in the nursery rhyme. However, there are no words such as "off with their heads" or 'heads cut off' in "The Queen of Hearts."

Martin Gardner implies that the cards are involved in Wars of the Roses in the first part of *Henry VI* by William Shakespeare, and the line of "Prick not your finger as you pluck it off, / Lest, bleeding, you do paint the white rose red" (*Henry VI, Part 1, 2. 4. 49-50*) is the motif of the cards (209). Their action reminds readers of printing the white rose red with blood, so the most violent image is reflected in this scene. Painting the

white roses red and “off with their heads” are based on the story of Edmund Plantagenet, Duke of York, who was killed by having his head cut off by the House of Lancaster. Therefore, the white roses represent the House of York which were insulted and humiliated by the House of Lancaster. The illustration of the red roses in *The Nursery “Alice”* makes readers clearly associate blood with suffering Yorkists. Even if children cannot understand the Wars of the Roses, the combination of red colour and the word of “off with their head” makes them imagine that the cards would be cutting their heads off.

We can often see the view that the Queen of Hearts is modelled on Queen Victoria. In *The Nursery “Alice,”* “little men” are rushed into working and there is a possibility that the two sons of Queen Victoria are the models for them. Edward Wakeling analyses as follows:

He [Carroll] had first-hand experience of the royal family and he knew that the queen ruled her family with strictness and determination, preparing them for their role in society and preparing them for their duty to their country. He saw the outcome of this upbringing when he met two of princes who became undergraduates at Oxford. His own attitude towards children was very different. He probably did not agree with the stern approach meted out by Queen Victoria in bringing up her children. The ruthless Queen of Hearts has echoes of Queen Victoria and this is possibly by design. (330)

As Wakeling clarifies, the Queen of Hearts represents Queen Victoria who strictly brought up the two of princes, and Carroll linked her with the house of Lancaster. Like this, the Queen of Hearts was made by the image of the cruel and dominant queen which he had.

The Queen of Hearts is obviously an abusive image and says the word of “heads cut off” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, which is the most violent expression. However, Carroll did not omit this word in *The Nursery “Alice,”* but used it to attract readers’ attention and release their cruelty. He tried to tell children that they should be free from Queen Victoria’s strict discipline through the discovery of Alice, who is fearless of the Queen.

## **Conclusion**

Carroll’s way of narration in *The Nursery “Alice”* is similar to adults’ one when they talk about fairy tales to children. This book has many violent and cruel expressions, but children can enjoy it as a picture book, because he talks to them as an adult who

takes a friendly attitude toward them. Why did he decide to use violent expressions with his skills and techniques of “talking to children” in this book? It is because he tried to tell them that violence is horrible. Accordingly, *The Nursery "Alice"* was not only presented as an acceptable book for children, it but also serves as a moral book to deny violence as cruel behaviour. The book was important for children to grow. *The Nursery "Alice"* was the device of talking about violence or using violent expressions, and it functions as moral instruction for children.

When critics read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, they have focused on Carroll's art of nonsense. However, his narrative power in *The Nursery "Alice"* should not be dismissed as it is one of the great features of his writing technique. Reconsidering his way to teach children what violence is, you can find that he had manifold talents as an author of books for children.

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