

The Stupidest Tea-Party Ever

Non-conformism in “A Mad Tea-Party”

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The bulk of mankind [...] require something in the nature of a stimulant. Wherever this stimulant is Tea, there is to be found [...] the spirit of civilization in full activity. Where it is wanting, or used in small quantities, barbarous manners are still predominant. (Sumner 41)

INTRODUCTION

In 1869, an American reviewer said about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that "outside of the works of the world's few great humorists we know of nothing as truly and laughably grotesque as the "Mad Tea Party", which Alice attended in all the naive and sweet seriousness of childhood." (Harte 102) The tea-party scene is indeed grotesque. It violates all the rules of conventional table etiquette and the quotation above becomes very ironic if one compares it to "A Mad Tea-Party". This seventh chapter is a perfect example of the chaotic and rebellious nature of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In his famous children's book, published in 1865, Carroll creates many situations which would have horrified every Victorian if these happened to them in real life. Many literary scholars have hinted at this non-conformist aspect but there are no text-based analyses of etiquette in this crucial chapter available. In this paper, I would like to make concrete the vague assumptions that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* breaks several rules of expected behaviour. I will do this by reading the chapter "A Mad Tea-Party" in the context of Victorian manuals of etiquette. Before the textual analysis, I will provide some more context by giving a short explanation of the significance and function of etiquette manuals in 19th century British society. After having analysed the chapter "A Mad Tea-Party", I will hint at two more subversive elements: the lack of a model young heroine and the lack of a moral system of punishment and reward. Then I will suggest reasons why Lewis Carroll decided to add the mad tea party to his book. To conclude my paper, I will take a look at the contemporary reception of *Alice in Wonderland* and more particular, of its satiric nature.

ETIQUETTE MANUALS IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY

In the Victorian age, manuals of self-improvement were published *en masse* and ‘advice literature (...) proliferated in all walks of life’ (Flanders 14). Most of these manuals include a preface in which the author or a guest writer discusses politeness and good manners and the purpose of the manual in question. Three prefaces of Victorian manuals will serve as introductory examples. In the opening of a Scottish manual of etiquette, *Etiquette For All* (1861), the author describes purpose and function of the book:

There are few amongst us who have not at times been in the painful situation of doubt and uncertainty regarding the method of procedure in some particular circumstances either public or private. It is our object in this manual to lay before our readers some of those established rules which obtain in the best circles, and which have been collected and rendered applicable to the present state of society. (*Etiquette for All* 6)

The author wants to prevent readers from landing into embarrassing situations by offering them a set of appropriate rules. He reprimands critics who question the usefulness of these manuals and who think etiquette is insincere and old-fashioned. He advises these people to submit to the laws of society because fashion, or etiquette, is ‘omnipotent with the generality of mankind’ (*Etiquette for All* 6).

The preface to *Habits of Good Society* (1860) is written by a kind of *flaneur*, an old bachelor who for the last ten years observed passers-by from behind a club-window. He says that, due to his rather old age, he has a lot of experience – ‘I have seen hundreds of vulgar, and thousands of ill-bred people’ (17) – but he still asked himself, ‘What makes that man a gentleman, and the other who is passing him a snob?’ (17) He ‘feel[s] convinced that if everybody was well-bred, this world would be far better and far happier.’ (18) Therefore, he decided that someone must start to ‘to theorize on good-breeding’ (18).

The author of *How To Behave*, Samuel R. Wells, sees politeness, morality and good taste as a coherent whole. '[Politeness] is the result of the combined action of all the moral and social feelings, guided by judgement and refined by taste.' (9) He believes that the forms in which politeness is reflected, i.e. etiquette, may vary according to time and place but politeness itself never changes. He even sees politeness as an innate quality and goes as far as to say that 'the most perfect knowledge of the rules of etiquette and the strictest observance of them will not suffice to make one truly polite' (10). Yet, he believes that those who do not have the 'instinct of courtesy' (10) but already possess 'a sense of equity, goodwill toward our fellow-men, kind feelings, magnanimity and self-control' (11) can acquire the art of good behaviour. Good behaviour is not just a formality, it is a sign of respect for others and it can be taught. To stress the importance of respect, Wells even includes paragraphs on rights and duties in his manual. Earlier in the manual, he quoted the elocutionist Cotesworth P. Bronson, who said that 'true politeness is perfect freedom and ease, treating others just as you love to be treated' (12), which even links good manners to Christian values. Later in the manual, the author becomes a little more critical and acknowledges that 'formal parties in general are tiresome affairs and that there might be [...] a great deal more enjoyment with less ceremony.' (80) But in the end, he advises the reader to accept the rules and agrees with the author of *Etiquette for All* when he says that 'we are to take society as we find it' (80).

From these three prefaces, we can deduct that manuals on etiquette had both a prescriptive and a pragmatic function. First of all, they helped people to behave correctly and confidently. The author of *Etiquette For All* believes that etiquette is an intrinsic characteristic of society which cannot be abandoned and etiquette manuals were also strongly intertwined with *contemporary* society. Secondly, most people accepted that

society could only run smoothly if everybody acted according to the rules and this idea is expressed in the prefaces to *Habits of Good Society* and *How To Behave*. Therefore, good behaviour was not an option for members of the higher classes; it was essential for everybody who wished to engage in polite society. Manuals helped the Victorians to achieve and hold on to the peacefulness and kindness. As long as everyone behaved in an appropriate way, there was no reason for gossiping and turmoil. After all, it was believed that 'conformity to social norms was an outward indication of morality' (Flanders xl). In general, manuals of good behaviour fixed the social rules of a particular social class but they were also helpful for people who moved upward in society. 'At any one time most people in any single group had a clear idea of what was expected of them at that level, and had books and magazines to instruct them if they were hoping to move on to the next.' (Flanders 253)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF "A MAD TEA-PARTY"

It is striking to see that a children's book leaves behind all these intrinsic and fundamental Victorian norms and values like conformity, peacefulness, politeness, etc. First of all, we might ask ourselves why Lewis Carroll chose a hare, a hatter and a dormouse to be the tea-party characters. As Sy Montgomery explains in *The Wild Out Your Window* (2002), 'Mad as a March Hare' is an old proverbial expression. For most of the year, the hare is a quiet and shy animal but in March when the breeding season starts, 'hares begin to dash about in full daylight, getting into brawls with other hares, engaging in boxing and kicking matches and high-speed chases' (Montgomery 17). Carroll probably knew this proverbial expression. The Hatter says: 'We quarrelled last March – just before he went mad, you know', while he is pointing with his teaspoon at the March Hare (Carroll 72). Anne Clark (134) believes that Carroll picked up the Mad Hatter character from a *Punch* article with the title 'Mad as a

Hatter'. It was common knowledge among the Victorians that hatters often went mad because of the use of mercury. Montgomery writes that it 'caused hat-makers' muscles to jerk spasmodically, like a madman' (17). One contemporary reviewer seems to consider the choice for a hatter and a hare a quite obvious and traditional one: 'Then we find her [Alice] one of a mad tea-party, her companions those traditionary lunatics a March hare and a hatter.' (Carroll 265) The Dormouse is a less central character in the chapter and he is less rude than the March Hare and the Hatter. He adds to the absurdness of the scene because he is falling asleep all the time, even in the centre of chaos. In reality, dormice indeed hibernate for the greatest part of the year.

'There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house.' (Carroll 68) This sentence opens the seventh chapter and already indicates what is to be expected from the tea party Alice is going to attend. This chapter, just like all the other chapters in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, not only contains a lot of absurd situations and topics but also a lot of violations of etiquette and rules of good behaviour. The quotation above precedes a whole set of broken rules; tea parties are not supposed to take place outside of the house. *The Hand-Book of Etiquette* for example recommends that tea should be served on the drawing-room table (*The Hand-Book of Etiquette* 25). According to the same manual, tea parties consist of conversation, music and games but only the former is present at the March Hare's party. *Habits of Good Society* prescribes that a tea party mostly consists of ten to thirty people but the mad tea party only consists of four people. *Le Follet* writes that 'at breakfast we are languid and thoughtful; at dinner, silent and ceremonious; at tea, chatty and unreserved' (Lancaster 14) Chatty and unreserved, however, does not mean that you can be offensive and ill-bred towards others. Nevertheless, this is exactly what every character in the "Mad Tea-Party" chapter does, including Alice.

Any Victorian party should be carefully prepared. The first thing to do is invite your guests, and this is the first problem in "A Mad Tea-Party". *The Habits of Good Society* gives some advice about how to write an invitation, how to respond to it and the manual also warns that guests should not come too early nor too late. As for tea parties, invitations should not be as formal as invitations for dinner parties or balls. It is enough to give a tea-party invitation two days before, spoken or by means of a little note. Despite Alice's participation in the above-ground high society, she completely forgets about all of this. Without being invited, she just shuffles along the tea table without ever having met the company. Even when one goes to visit acquaintances who are unexpectedly having a party at that moment, he or she should, according to *How to Behave*, go in and have some quiet short conversation and then leave (Wells 70). Alice, who is a complete outsider, is not a bit bothered about the company's feelings and decides to stay until she does not enjoy the party anymore. The fact that she is not invited has some consequences. First of all, the company makes clear at once that Alice is not welcome. "No room! No room!" they cried out when they saw Alice coming.' (Carroll 68) Nevertheless, Alice sits down in an arm-chair and says indignantly: 'There's plenty of room!' (68) *The Habits of Good Society* says that 'a visitor, unless he is a complete stranger, does not wait to be invited to sit down, but takes a seat at once easily (338)'. But Alice is a stranger to the Hatter, the Hare and the Dormouse and this brings us to a major problem: the fact that there has been no introduction. All manuals stress the importance of unfamiliar persons being introduced to each other. *Le Follet* says that 'it is a capital prelude to an evening's enjoyment, by making people acquainted with each other'(14). *London Society* describes the following embarrassing situation: 'You find yourself close face to face with three tall young ladies, whose faces you are tired of but to whom you never have been introduced.' ("Fashionable Tea Parties" 190)

How To Behave includes a whole chapter on introductions. But then the March Hare seems to have accepted Alice's presence and seems to bring into practice the host's most important duty, making his guests feel at home (how to behave) by offering her some wine. Unfortunately, there is no wine at all and Alice angrily says: 'Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it.' (Carroll 68) The Hare sees his chance to remind her of her own impoliteness and responds: 'It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited.' (Carroll 68) In short, Alice's uninvited presence is the company's license behaving rude towards her.

How To Behave encourages gentlemen to 'be attentive of the wants of any lady who might be seated next to you, especially when there are no servants' (72). There are indeed no servants present but the company doesn't help Alice to any tea or bread-and-butter. Moreover, they ridicule the prescribed helpful behaviour towards women. After having offered Alice wine that is not there, the March Hare later in the chapter again makes fun of her. "'Take some more tea,'" the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly. "'I've had nothing yet,'" Alice replied in an offended tone, "so I can't take more.'" (Carroll 74) The Hatter decides to make the situation even worse and priggishly remarks: 'You mean you can't take *less*, it's very easy to take *more* than nothing.' (Carroll 75) If he were a real gentleman and Alice had been an invited guest, he could have rendered himself useful as a guest, as *The Hand-Book of Etiquette* advises, and pour some tea for Alice. Nevertheless, he is no gentleman and proves this already in the beginning of the chapter by taking the rule 'let there be no nauseous flattery' (Wells 106) a little too literal. He says: 'Your hair wants cutting' (Carroll 69), which is a very personal remark and as Alice says, making personal remarks is very rude. Instead of apologizing, 'the Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this' (Carroll 69) and by doing so, makes another mistake for it is very inappropriate to stare at your conversation partner (*The Hand-Book of Etiquette* 28). After some silence, the Hatter breaks

another rule of politeness by taking his watch out of his pocket. *How to Behave* includes a whole paragraph on pulling out one's watch. The essential message of this chapter is:

Pulling out your watch in company, unasked, either at home or abroad, is a mark of ill-breeding. If at home, it appears as if you were tired of your company, and wished them to be gone; if abroad, as if the hours dragged heavily, and you wished to be gone yourself. (77)

Then the Hatter and the Hare start a short conversation about the watch which apparently does not function properly anymore and the Hare twice says 'It was the *best* butter', which might sound confusing for outsiders. *The Hand-Book of Etiquette* says that one can talk about a private affair with somebody, but not without first explaining it to the rest of the company. After the discussion of the watch, the Hatter explains to Alice why it is always tea time but he cannot do so without breaking the following rule from *Habits of Good Society*:

Nothing is so agreeable, for instance, as to hear public characters discussed at table; and there is a natural love of biography in the human mind that renders anecdote, without scandal, always agreeable. (375)

Nevertheless, the Hatter's anecdote *is* rather scandalous as it pertains the Queen of Hearts' ill-temperedness. He had to sing a song at a concert given by the Queen but she did not like his performance and shouted: 'He's murdering the time! Off with his head!', which is, as Alice exclaims, 'dreadfully savage'. If the Hatter really respected his Queen, maybe he should have kept silent about this embarrassing incident. The Hatter continues: 'And ever since that, (...) he [Time] won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now.' (Carroll 73)

Alice subsequently asks him if that is the reason why the tea table is full of tableware, which the Hatter confirms. The company keeps moving round because there is no time to wash things. Alice wants to ask what happens when [they] come to the beginning again and this could be interesting because it was believed that 'cleanliness is next to godliness' (Wells 17). However, no answer is given. "Suppose we change the subject," the March Hare

interrupted, yawning. "I'm getting tired of this." (Carroll 74) He is not only explicitly showing that he is bored, he is also breaking off the topic. This is most impolite. 'Instead of overthrowing, you should build upon what is advanced by your companions, until the subject has been discussed ; and then you may start a new one, if you please' (*The Hand-Book of Etiquette* 32). He again starts a new subject during the Dormouse's story about the three sisters in the treacle-well. Alice is still asking questions about the unrealistic story while the Hare suddenly encourages her to 'take some more tea' (Carroll 74). Nevertheless, Alice has already committed a great sin against politeness herself: she has interrupted the Dormouse more than once. According to the *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, interrupting 'a speaker in the middle of his sentence [is] almost as rudely as if, when walking with a companion, you were to thrust yourself before him and stop his progress' (*The Hand-Book of Etiquette* 30). Instead of applying Coleridge's theory of the willing suspension of disbelief, Alice interrupts the Dormouse exactly three times to ask a question and constantly hinders the progress of the story by pointing at its unrealistic nature. The company is very annoyed by Alice's behaviour. The Hare and the Hatter go 'Sh!' and the Dormouse snaps at her: 'If you can't be civil, you'd better finish the story for yourself.' (Carroll 75)

At this point, it becomes very clear that the company, including Alice, is violating the rule that 'discussions [must be] carried on with interest but not with excitement' (Aster 405). Additionally, etiquette manuals discourage their readers to ask too many questions: 'By constantly putting questions, you render yourself wearisome, and sometimes very impertinent in conversation. [...] Avoid a prying style of conversation, and check all petty curiosity' (*The Hand-Book of Etiquette* 30). But it must be remarked that Alice's questions were triggered by the dullness of the Dormouse's story, and being a bore to your company is yet another social mistake. *The Hand-Book of Etiquette* wants to prevent its readers from

becoming offensive, like the Hare and the Hatter, but also from being boring in conversation, like the sleepy Dormouse. In the following passage, Alice eventually seems to become used to the rude treatment of her company.

‘You can draw water out of a water-well,’ said the Hatter; ‘so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well – eh, stupid?’

‘But they were *in* the well,’ Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice this last remark. (Carroll 76)

However, when Alice’s ‘I don’t think...’ is interrupted by the Hatter with ‘then you shouldn’t talk’ (Carroll 76), she has enough of the company and abruptly leaves the tea party. This seems to prove *The Habits of Good Society* author’s statement that ‘we pardon [a display of ill-temper], we overlook it, and sometimes it even amuses us, but, sooner or later, it must chill back love and freeze friendship’ (75). While Alice is walking away from the party, she more or less hopes that they would call after her but ‘the last time she saw them, they were trying to put the Dormouse into the teapot’ (Carroll 77). This is not what the author of *How To Behave* had in mind when he wrote: ‘When visitors show any intention of leaving, you will of course express the desire you feel to have them stay longer.’ (Wells 60) However, this is just another consequence of Alice’s decision to attend a party to which she was not invited.

PUNISHMENT AND REWARD AND THE MODEL YOUNG HEROINE

To appreciate the subversiveness of this chapter, it must be well-understood that in the Victorian era, there was a strong intertwinement between literature and reality. Books, especially children’s books, were supposed to reflect appropriate behaviour and therefore functioned as moral exempla. However, as I have already mentioned, the tea-party chapter dispenses with fundamental Victorian values like good behaviour, morality and peace which can be achieved through the reading of etiquette manuals and the realization of the rules

described therein. Yet, there are two other elements that prevent the book from having an exemplary function. This function was achieved through two main elements: a solid system of punishment and reward and a model young heroine which were both based on real life attitudes and ideals. According to Gerald P. Mulderig, the lack of these two elements is what makes *Alice in Wonderland* a landmark in Victorian children's literature. He believes that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a 'radical departure from the traditions of juvenile literature before 1865' (Mulderig 320). I will briefly discuss these two elements and their absence in *Alice in Wonderland*.

The model young heroine was not allowed to have any independence. From the close reading of some selected books, Mulderig deduces the characteristics of this ideal female protagonist. She 'exemplif[ies] the delicate balance of self-reliance and submissiveness'; she is 'thoughtful, obedient, serious and unassuming' and there is 'very little room [...] left for satisfying personal tastes and interests, and any independence of mind was stamped out' (Mulderig 322). Samuel Butler similarly wrote in this semi-autobiographical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903): 'If their [children's] wills were "well broken" in childhood, (...) they would acquire habits of obedience which they would not venture to break through.' (qtd. in Flanders 34) This proves that in reality too, obedience was regarded as an advantage, not only for the parents but it was also considered necessary for the child's 'own physical, intellectual and moral welfare' (Flanders 34). Secondly, the unassuming and submissive literary young heroine reflected the ideal Victorian woman whose preferable state was ignorance. Flanders writes that 'girls were to read of duty, trials, perseverance (while) boys read of ambition, achievement, success – their "nobility" would be in accomplishment, not in abnegation' (52). Alice is the complete opposite of this model young heroine. She challenges the idea that a woman or a girl should be ignorant as she continuously asks questions and

looks for meaning and truth. She is also independent. Once she realizes that the company will not serve her, she helps herself to some tea and bread-and-butter and she decides for herself whether she wants to attend the party and when she wants to leave. Mulderig agrees with James Kincaid who says that Alice is 'an invader disrupting a warm and happy world' (qtd. in Mulderig 323) as she invites herself to a tea party.

According to Mulderig, Alice 'is perhaps the only one whose conduct is never explicitly condemned' (323-24). The Victorians' concern with discipline and obedience is strongly intertwined with religion. According to Flanders, they believed that God gave authority to the head of the family, the head gives authority to his wife, etc. Disobedience upsets this order and is therefore disobedience to God. For that reason, rebellion must always be punished. (34) Early in the century, children had to bear physical punishment like beatings but later, parents punished their children in a psychological way by telling them how disappointed they and God – because the child had broken the Fifth Commandment – were (Flanders 35). This real-life aspect was included in literature. 'The world of Victorian children's fiction [...] is one of immediate and inescapable justice' (Mulderig 325). Its main moralistic lesson is that goodness is rewarded and evil, thoughtlessness and imprudence are always punished. Yet, Mulderig argues that Alice never regrets anything or at the very most only for a short moment. Alice regrets that she has attended the mad tea party – 'The stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!' (Carroll 77) – but immediately after she has left the party, there is already another adventure waiting for her. Actually, there is no reason to regret anything because in Wonderland, nobody is held responsible for one's actions. Mulderig concludes that 'self-indulgence merits not punishment, but satisfaction' (326). In addition to the system of punishment and reward, Alice also makes fun of death. Mulderig writes that death was a popular theme in traditional children's literature. It was often not

the wrongdoer who died but an innocent family member, which led to unbearable self-reproach and repentance. This reflects the Victorian belief in psychological punishment. Mulderig not only found that death is ridiculed through jokes, but also that there is no death at all. The Hatter was supposed to be beheaded but seemingly, this command was never carried out.

SATIRE AND SINCERITY

At the end of this bachelor paper, the question arises why Lewis Carroll decided to write such a playful rebellious chapter. While Charles Dodgson was an unremarkable mathematician and Oxford don, his alter ego Lewis Carroll was a brilliant satirist. He was fond of humorous literary genres and has written several parodies and satires. In the previous part, I have pointed at the intertwinement of literature and reality and the inevitable punishment-and-reward-system in Victorian literature and how Carroll dispensed with all this. According to Anne Clark, the books Carroll read when he was a little boy were perfect examples of this kind of traditional children's literature. Carroll was an enthusiastic but also an extremely critical reader. He for instance parodied Hannah More's *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, which is a typical literary moral exemplum. It deals with a shepherd and his family who, despite their bitter poverty, live a dutiful and respectable life (Clark 16). Carroll also loved to parody the prose serial, which was a very popular genre in the Victorian literary landscape. An example is 'Sidney Hamilton', 'a nine-part melodrama in which Sidney, estranged from his father, falsely accused of attempted theft, is in turn robbed by Sidney's best friend' (Clark 54). Carroll provides the story with an completely unconventional end as '[it] is brought abruptly to a farcical conclusion in which Mr Hamilton's only complaint is of toast wasted at the breakfast table' (Clark 54). In a weekly magazine, the *Comic Times*,

Carroll published “Hints for Etiquette: or Dining Out Made Easy” which is, as Dr Selwyn Goodacre has argued, a parody on a chapter in the very popular *Hints On Etiquette and the Usages of Society*. It shows that Carroll was familiar with contemporary etiquette manuals and that he had previous experience with parodying them. “Hints for Etiquette” excels “A Mad Tea-Party” in its explicit satire. In *Hints On Etiquette* we find a rule like ‘Never use your knife to convey your food to your mouth, under any circumstances; it is unnecessary, and glaringly vulgar. Feed yourself with a fork or spoon, nothing else, - a knife is only to be used for cutting.’ Carroll distorts this into a rule like: ‘To use a fork with your soup, intimating at the same time to your hostess that you are reserving your spoon for the beefsteaks, is a practice wholly exploded.’ (qtd. in Clark 87)

The “Mad Tea-Party” chapter is also a parody. Little girls often re-enacted tea parties with their dolls, friends and siblings and this was encouraged by adults who described cosy tea parties in children’s books and magazines. The editor of *Kind Words for Boys and Girls* writes that toys in sets and in boxes are to be preferred to single toys which allegedly stimulate selfishness and greed. Children must play together because ‘it teaches them to be kind, and forbearing, and gentle, and courteous, for they try to imitate grown-up people’ (Clarke 37). He states that if one child misbehaves, the others will point out to their friend that his or her behaviour is not acceptable. Thereby, children in a playful way acquire the good manners which they will need once they are adults engaging in society. In the *Children’s Friend*, something similar can be found in the article “The children’s tea-party”. Two little girls had a very nice make-believe tea party and this is not because they had a table, a tiny tea-set, milk and sugar and some food but because ‘they had agreed to please each other’ (142). By doing so, they avoided quarrel and ‘love and good-nature had smoothed out every wrinkle from [their] faces’ (142). According to the author, they acted

according to the Bible that 'enjoins a spirit of forbearance and love' (142). Again, little girls learn to be hospitable hostesses by re-enacting adult tea parties. A third similar example is a poem from the *Children's Treasury* in which a little girl says to her doll: 'Come, let us make believe / That I'm a great fine lady / Waiting friends to receive.' ("My Tea-Party" 142) The *Child's Companion* includes a picture of a rather small tea party with the caption: 'They thought no party could ever be so charming' and the *Child's Auction* also describes a tea party with children and dolls. Tea (probably milk and water), grapes, baked apples and bread and butter are on the table. ("The Great Tea-Party" 121) In short, the tea party as a sociable affair was deeply ingrained in Victorian life and very young children were encouraged by their parents but also by children's magazines and books to re-enact it with little tea-sets and other children. Carroll knew that his infant audience was familiar with the rules of a tea party and they must have noticed the subversion of them while reading the chapter. They might even liked this temporary "time-out" from traditional social behaviour. All this creates the impression that Carroll disapproved of the conventional children's book of his time.

However, I would like to link the "Mad Tea-Party" chapter to a significant aspect of Carroll's personality. Throughout his life, Carroll was looking for 'real' Christianity. About his religious position, he wrote 'I [...] have always felt repelled by the yet higher development called "Ritualism". [...] As I read of the Christian religion, as Christ preached it, I stand amazed at the forms men have given to it.' (Clark 120) He seems to be disgusted by the outward forms and rituals that the Church imposes and which make people forget what Christianity is really about. Maybe this search for sincerity and the denial of outward forms is reflected in the violation of etiquette rules in "A Mad Tea-Party". This does not mean that Carroll did not strive for pleasant parties. When he gave dinner parties himself, he wanted his guests to have a good time. He wrote down on cards which gentleman was going to

escort which lady and he collected these cards to use them for future dinners, so that he would remember which people got on well together. He even considered publishing these cards. (Clark 167) Yet, a pleasant party is not necessarily a conventional and stiff party. Carroll might have agreed with the person who wrote in *St. James's Magazine* that he prefers small and cosy parties to artificial big parties. He wrote that the 'primary evils of [...] fashionable hospitality [...] are [...] late hours and overcrowding; the great defect of principle, its conventionality and culpable want of discrimination' (211). He is very severe for people who 'see nothing to condemn in these fallacies and absurdities, but accept them as the natural and inevitable order of things' and calls them 'superficial minds' (213). This is the opposite of the conservative view that the writers of *Etiquette for All* and *How to Behave* represented. He concludes by saying that 'life is short, and what we call our social system is a very small thing indeed (213)'. Thus, life is short and you should spend your time with the people you like and make them feel comfortable. There is no need for huge prestige parties which follow all the absurd conventions and which are no delight to anyone. By taking etiquette rules with a pinch of salt in "A Mad Tea-Party", this might be the message that Carroll wanted to convey to his (adult) readers.

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

To conclude this paper, I would like to take a look at contemporary reviews to see whether 19th century reviewers noticed the satirical character of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. First of all, contemporary reviewers do not seem to have read the character of Alice as an anti-heroine and a reversal of the traditional model young heroine in children's literature. The *Publisher's Circular* called Alice 'a simple loving child who allows her imagination to paint fairy-like pictures...' (Carroll 257). The *Spectator* equally praises Alice as a 'charming little girl'

(Carroll 260) but is a little more critical in its remark that she treats the pack of cards without respect. The reviewer of the *Literary Churchman* even assigns Alice the status of a 'charming relief to all the grotesque appearances which surround her' (Carroll 265) and ignores the fact that she can be as rude as the others at the tea party. The *Sunderland Herald* thinks Alice is 'a little heroine' (Carroll 265) and completely contradicts Mulderig's demonized Alice when he writes: 'The picture representing "Alice and mouse swimming in the pool of tears" and Alice with a pig in her arms, show her as the perfection of a charming and pretty child.' (Carroll 266) The reviewer of *The Overland Monthly* states that Alice attends the mad tea party 'in all the naive and sweet seriousness of childhood' (Harte 102) but does not mention, let alone criticize, the fact that she was uninvited. These reviewers still see the ideal of the literary heroine embodied in Alice.

Secondly, there is no critique on the lack of a system of punishment and reward and the interconnected lack of morality. *The Press* considers *Alice in Wonderland* a suitable gift-book for young children and surprisingly writes that it 'inculcate[s] good principles' (Carroll 257). The *New Catholic World* only regrets that children should be entertained by impossible adventures in stead of realistic events. The reviewer of the *Illustrated Times* formulates a similar critique by writing that the adventures are 'too extravagantly absurd to produce more diversion than disappointment and irritation' (Carroll 259), but neither mentions anything about morality. They seem to regret that the book deviates from the realistic nature of other children's literature. The reviewer of the *Literary Churchman* on the other hand writes very enthusiastically about this nonsense book 'without aim or object other than pure amusement, and unburdened by any moral whatsoever' (Carroll 265). This reviewer acknowledges that there is no moral but he does not disapprove of this. The same opinion is uttered in the *Sunderland Herald*. The reviewer regards the lack of a moral, a didactic

purpose and facts as an advantage and he concludes with the advice that children must be rewarded with some easy nonsense reading after having spent several hours on studying. (Carroll 265-66)

Most reviewers agree on the nonsensical nature of *Alice in Wonderland* that contrasts with conventional juvenile literature. Yet none of the reviews I read mentions the word 'satire' or links the mad tea party to tea parties in traditional children's literature. This is striking and one might wonder whether the reviewers did not notice the parody or whether they decided not to mention it.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I discussed the non-conformist nature of the "Mad Tea-Party" chapter in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. A textual analysis of this chapter in the context of Victorian etiquette manuals has proven that there are a lot of etiquette rules violated by the March Hare, the Mad Hatter and, to a limited extent, the Dormouse. Surprisingly, Alice seems to adapt herself to the social rules of the company which are nothing alike the rules of the above-ground upper and middle classes and this sometimes results in very uncivil behaviour and utterances. The fact that Carroll turns these etiquette rules upside down turned out to be very rebellious, because etiquette manuals were published to avoid disagreement and impoliteness among individuals and they pretended to be fundamental for the proper functioning of Victorian society. There are two more subversive elements which indicate that *Alice in Wonderland* explicitly deviates from traditional children's literature: the lack of a model young heroine and the lack of a moral system of punishment and reward. These two elements were based upon the Victorians real life ideals and principles. The absence of them and the violations of etiquette rules become very

problematic when one keeps in mind that novels had a didactic function and that they served as moral exempla. Alice in Wonderland does not teach its little readers anything, except that bad behaviour is never punished. The reason why a modest and quiet Oxford don and mathematician wrote such a chapter is first of all the result of his lifelong love for satire. "A Mad Tea-Party" is a parody on the traditional tea parties in children's books and magazines that encouraged children to re-enact tea parties to prepare them for their later lives. Secondly, Carroll's mockery of etiquette might have to do with his preoccupation with sincerity, which was especially expressed in his religious considerations. Although contemporary reviewers do not mention the aspect of satire or the possibility of social critique, I think that the most important underlying message of "A Mad Tea-Party" is that one should prefer real human affection and respect to conventional forms as prescribed by society.

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