

## **Pictures and Colors: Contemporary *Wonderlands*, Design Aesthetics, and the Construction of the Child Reader**

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Discussion on visual aesthetics has often been dominated by its relation to art or nature. Bradley states that nature, “of course, is the source of beauty, and this natural beauty affects something within us which has or is the faculty of reproducing the cause of its emotion in a material form” (B). However, as noted by Irvin, “unless art and nature are construed quite broadly, they play a comparatively small role in many of our everyday lives” (29). Irvin goes on to suggest that “our everyday lives have an aesthetic character that is thoroughgoing and available at every moment, should we choose to attend to it” (30). It is this contemporary consideration of aesthetics in everyday experience that frames this discussion on aesthetics in children’s book design. Picturebooks specifically, are often at the centre of the young child’s everyday experience. By examining these books as both tactile objects, and storytelling devices, a sense of the real, lived experience of children and their books can be generated. Throughout this examination, Hutcheon’s words on adaptation are reflected upon: As readers when we engage with stories, we ‘engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture’ (28). The aim here is to highlight how visual design decisions determine narrative as well as readership. These narratives provide insights into how contemporary childhood is constructed through children’s literature via decisions made about color and illustration. Working together, these elements establish parameters for the story they represent, parameters which determine the age and gender of its potential readers.

A book’s front cover operates as a powerful tool to construct readerships, and in turn, ideas of childhood, by framing the stories we present to children. Stanton argues that “the children’s picture book is, in certain respects, one of society’s most valuable forms of art,” highlighting the sophistication that goes into their creation (15). Interpreting Stanton’s comment literally, it is true that children’s books can be found in art-infused domains such as museums or galleries, however the greater sum of interaction comes via the hands-on reading experience, and these books are no less sophisticated for their role here. The majority of children’s books can be found in bookstores, libraries, and personal collections. This everyday relationship with children’s books, combined with contemporary Western culture’s increasing emphasis on the visual, and the popularity of tactility in books for young children, provides the rationale for an investigation of aesthetics in contemporary picturebook adaptations of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. *Wonderland*’s flexibility, via illustration and written narrative, provides numerous ways for the story to be told, and these ways reflect what we believe is important, not only for the story, but also for its readers.

There are opportunities throughout *Wonderland* for authors, artists, and publishers to play with aesthetics; however the first opportunity lies with the front cover. The front cover can be a reader’s first encounter with a book – “the consumer’s initial reading of the text” (Yampbell 348), an encounter which may

become increasingly important as book buying moves online and the physical proximity between book and consumer is diminished. Therefore, in the world of *Wonderland* picturebook adaptation, where a potential reader could, realistically, be faced with an entire shelf, or several screens worth of retellings, a book's aesthetics will provide the initial connection. Examining the following five adaptations of *Wonderland* will demonstrate how stories and readers are created and identified through decisions made about illustration, and color: Robert Sabuda's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: A Pop-up Adaptation of Lewis Carroll's Original Tale*, Robert Ingpen's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Libby Hamilton and Richard Johnson's *Alice in Wonderland: A classic story pop-up book with sounds*, Harriet Castor and Zdenko Bašić's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: "Open Me for Curiouser and Curiouser Surprises"*, and Amanda Gulliver's *Alice in Wonderland*.

The above adaptations were selected for this discussion as each book approaches the consideration of aesthetics differently, through the choice of color and illustration, the style of font, and the relationship between image and text on the cover. They all re-tell the same recognizable story, that of Alice's adventure, yet all tell it differently. One of the reasons for these differences is the age of the intended reader. While each book is identified here as a form of picturebook, in that they each utilize a combination of visual and written narratives to tell the story, the age bracket across the five adaptations ranges from pre and early readers (Gulliver, Hamilton and Johnson), up to pre-teen (Sabuda, Castor and Bašić, and Ingpen). By using a range of books aimed at different readers, a study of how assumptions about age and gender results in different narratives being created, with different intentions, emerges.

Examining the front covers of picturebooks exposes the sophisticated methods of persuasion utilized by publishers to market a story – creating visual narratives which not only establish for the reader what the story is about, but who it is the book is 'supposed' to be read by. As Nodelman explains, "we can and do tell books by their covers; we use the visual information we find there as the foundation for our response to the rest of the book" (49). Through examining the front covers of the above adaptations, evidence emerges as to the number of narratives which can be produced for the potential reader from their initial encounter with a book. The two design elements discussed here have an emphasis on the visual, even when the element is forming words to be read. This shows that what the words say is not the only method of disclosing a narrative, as each adaptation of *Wonderland* contains essentially the same three words – Alice, Adventures, and Wonderland – with only slight variation.

The focus on the design elements of a reader's first encounter with these books is important as the development of visual literacy skills in young children is considered vital by academics and educators, particularly in the visually-dominated West. Matulka discusses how visual literacy "allows people to actively participate in making meaning of images instead of being passive receptacles" (142). Meanings and messages are embedded in images, and as identified by Giorgis et al., readers of picturebooks look at "individual components of the art in order to gain an understanding of how each artistic element works in conveying meaning" (146). These components can include "the artists' use of line, color, space, shapes, and properties of light and dark" (Giorgis et al. 146). While Giorgis et al. are referring to the illustrations within a picturebook, the same method of interpretation operates on

the front cover, to an even greater extent because the amount of written text is minimal, and what is there is not necessarily part of the story's internal narrative.

The front cover a book acts as a frame for the entire story. It plays a considerable part in the "playground of the peritext", which in picturebooks is considered "a more conscious part of the book" than in adult literature, where the body of the book is the printed text (Higonnet 47). The front cover has a dual role in picturebooks, acting as a feature which works to enhance the book's existence as an object, as well as a frame, to emphasize and present the intended agenda of the story. As defined by Entman, to frame is to:

Select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (52).

Using this definition, how a front cover of a picturebook functions as a frame for the enclosed story becomes clear. The front covers of *Wonderland* adaptations – themselves a frame for all contemporary literary adaptations of the story – use certain aspects of the narrative, interpreted differently, to promote messages similar to those listed by Entman. This is achieved through choices in illustration such as which scene from the story is going to represent all other scenes combined; and through colour choices related to what kind of audience the book seeks to attract. Answers to these questions determine the design of a book's front cover.

The value of a book's cover should not be underestimated by readers, or publishers. Yampbell discusses how the "materiality of a text is often taken for granted" (348). She goes on to explore the idea that what is considered valuable or significant about a book, is the inner text, the "kernel", leaving the cover to be viewed "merely as a protective husk" (Yampbell 348). The value, a deliberately chosen monetary description, of a book's cover is well understood by the publishing industry, who takes advantage of a multitude of opportunities during a popular book's lifespan to modify its cover. When a new edition of a book is published, the cover will change, when a book is adapted into a film, the cover will reflect this, and as a story's cultural significance, or readership transforms, so will the cover. With the publication of each new retelling of a story with as lengthy a history as *Wonderland*, an opportunity for new authors and artists to visually, as well as textually, re-create Alice's adventure is possible. But what happens to the front cover of a book that has already been adapted hundreds of times? And how does the presentation of the front cover work to reflect the story inside, and its readers? In an attempt to answer these questions, the following examination is divided into three sections. The first considers the use of Alice and the White Rabbit as primary figures in front cover illustration, chosen by Gulliver, Sabuda, and Ingpen. The second section continues the analysis of illustration, but looks at narratives which emerge from a focus on the Tea Party, used by Castor and Bašić and Hamilton and Johnson. The third section brings the five adaptations together to consider the historical and contemporary cultural position of particular colors, and their effectiveness on the use of front covers. What is interesting when studying these adaptations of *Wonderland* is how through the use of color and illustration a new identity for the story, as well as the identity of the intended reading audience is created.

### **Illustration - Alice and the White Rabbit**

Front cover of *Alice in Wonderland*, designed by Amanda Gulliver and Parragon Books (2010) -

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=Y4VRCQAAQBAJ&pg=PT4&lpg=PT4&dq=amanda+gulliver+alice+in+wonderland&source=bl&ots=avnx7kot5K&sig=8T6di8mGTQyxfk49reSBpKcvOto&hl=en&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwi7-bDci4XKAhXjhaYKHZsBKKQ6AEITTAJ#v=onepage&q=amanda%20gulliver%20alice%20in%20wonderland&f=false>

Front cover of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, designed by Robert Sabuda and Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing (2003) -

<http://books.simonandschuster.com/Alices-Adventures-in-Wonderland/Lewis-Carroll/Aladdin-Classics/9780689847431>

Front cover of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, designed by Robert Ingpen and Sterling Publishing (2009) -

[https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Alice\\_s\\_Adventures\\_in\\_Wonderland.html?id=\\_FdBpGAAcAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Alice_s_Adventures_in_Wonderland.html?id=_FdBpGAAcAAJ&redir_esc=y)

The popularity of *Wonderland* with readers and academics around the world is well known, and easily conceptualized through both the variety of adaptations, and the volume of scholarly papers published each year. However, it is perhaps because of this scale of discussion and interpretation that the story can be easily diluted into a number of 'key' scenes, and the identification of these key scenes is supported through their inclusion on the front covers of literary adaptations. Dyckhoff discusses this idea, stating that new editions of a book which has sold well "may highlight particularly popular themes on the cover, which, in time, become reinforced." Dyckhoff's analysis of the potential for this uniformed highlighting of limited themes can be seen in the picturebook adaptations of *Wonderland* chosen for this aesthetic study. The original cover of *Wonderland* uses a version of Tenniel's illustration of Alice holding the Duchess' baby who has turned into a pig. This particular image, whether adapted by new artists or not within the text, does not feature on any of the front covers of the selected adaptations. The chapter which contains this illustration is "Pig and Pepper", and at ten pages, including illustrations, in the original text it is one of the longer chapters. Yet considering the significance of a book's front cover design, Alice's encounter with the Duchess, her baby, and the cook has not been marked by contemporary adapters as being as meaningful to the story, nor the reader, as Carroll understood it to be.

In a discussion of "rhythm" in narrative, Bal highlights the difficulty in calculating the narrative rhythm, or passing of time, within a text, and suggests that a similar method be employed as that which is used to calculate speed in traffic (98-99). This amounts to the time covered by the fabula being juxtaposed with the sum of the space in the text each event requires - the number of words, lines, or pages. Bal's proposition may be appropriated for an examination of the significance of a character to a story, to explain how particular characters or scenes in *Wonderland* have come to be seen as more significant than others. This is a useful method for analyzing the change in focus from Alice and the baby pig on the original cover, to

contemporary covers which predominantly feature, beyond the choice of Alice – the White Rabbit, Hatter and March Hare.

Discussion in the following section considers the use of the White Rabbit and Alice. Of the five adaptations discussed here, three feature the White Rabbit on the front cover – Gulliver, Sabuda, and Ingpen, while all five feature Alice. In terms of frequency of appearance, after Alice, the White Rabbit is the central figure in *Wonderland*, and it is Alice’s curiosity about the White Rabbit which drives the narrative. Alice would have arguably remained seated next to her sister on the river bank that day had the White Rabbit not ran past, and even if Alice had gotten sufficiently tired of having nothing to do, she likely would not have thought much of the rabbit-hole (assuming she noticed it), had she not seen the White Rabbit “pop down” it (Carroll 10). Alice’s relationship with the White Rabbit, while not close – in Carroll’s text the two characters do not converse with one another until Chapter Eight (not including their encounter in Chapter Four, where the White Rabbit mistakes Alice for his maid Mary Ann) – is the primary relationship of the narrative. The White Rabbit appears across six of the twelve chapters, including the first and final, making him the character with whom Alice has the greatest interaction.

Beyond his relationship to Alice, the White Rabbit has characteristics which are appealing to children. Carroll’s description and Tenniel’s illustration of a white rabbit with pink eyes, wearing a waist-coat and carrying a pocket watch is an amusing introduction for the reader as to the type of fantastical characters which will emerge out of *Wonderland*. The White Rabbit is physically positioned in similar ways (as active) on Gulliver, Sabuda, and Ingpen’s covers, and this similarity manifests in the color choice of the White Rabbit’s clothing. Carroll did not provide a color in his original description, leaving it open to interpretation, which makes it interesting to consider how similar decisions regarding color are made across different adaptations.

All three covers position Alice and the White Rabbit either physically close and/or interacting, depending on Alice’s characterization of active or passive. The White Rabbit’s waist-coat on the three covers run across the red spectrum – Gulliver’s rabbit wears red, Sabuda’s orange, and Ingpen’s maroon. Using red shades for an illustration of the White Rabbit, who is positioned as an active character draws on well-documented connections between the color red and activity. In a study on color decisions to create an optimum study environment in schools, red was allocated as the soundest choice for areas such as the gymnasium, athletic facilities, and drama and art spaces, because of its association with vitality, passion, and activity (Daggett, Cobble, & Gertel 2-3). The choice of variations of red will also appeal to the young readers of these adaptations, as research has shown that red – along with blue, green and yellow – compose a “fourfold color-name organization of the spectrum” (Bornstein 73) first mastered by children. By using colors that will be familiar to a young child, these covers create a sense of joy which stems from recognition. Recognition is identified by Hutcheon as “part of the very real pleasure” (111) of adaptation, but beyond this, the use of these colors also assists in positioning the White Rabbit as a potential favored character through the child’s recognition of the color of his waist-coat.

Gulliver’s White Rabbit displays the more juvenile features of a bunny, rather than the traditional adult, serious figure found on the other adaptations discussed in this paper. Despite his nervousness and concern about being late, the original

narrative presents the White Rabbit as a figure of some authority and importance through, for example, the depiction of his house (Carroll 31), his having a maid to whom he can quickly dictate (Carroll 31), and his role in the trial of the Knave of Hearts who stole the Queen's tarts (Carroll 96). On Gulliver's cover the White Rabbit is physically small, looking no taller than Alice's knee. His lack of stature and the basic depiction of his face – two black circles for eyes, and another of the same size for his mouth – reflect his lack of stature in the narrative of this adaptation, where he appears very briefly, and with no characterization, at the beginning and end of the story. His appearance on the cover at all, despite his absence throughout the narrative, can be explained however by considering the intended readership of Gulliver's text. Of the five adaptations, Gulliver's is the most 'child-like' in terms of the simplistic illustrative style, and the extent to which the text has been abridged. The White Rabbit then serves as a source of comforting recognition for young readers, as a soft animal with which they are likely to have already become familiar.

Sabuda, and Ingpen's White Rabbits are depicted on the front covers as active, clearly in motion. While not necessarily aware of Alice, they are nonetheless interacting with her – Sabuda's rabbit is being chased by Alice, and Ingpen's is running beside her. The position of the White Rabbit here makes Alice's position interesting too. Labbe argues that "Alice functions as a palimpsest upon which Carroll's and his illustrator's assumptions about femininity and the development of female identity are inscribed" (21). It is a proposition which can also be put to any adaptation of the text, but beyond a single author or illustrator's individual interpretation, *Wonderland* adaptations "seem to channel a broader way of seeing and responding to the book and its central character" (Brooker 201-202). Included in this broader way of seeing and responding are cultural ideologies. These adaptations do not exist in a vacuum; rather they are products and representations of the experiences and beliefs of their author, illustrator, and publisher. Alice begins her adventure "with gusto and independence; bored with being still [...] she takes the first opportunity of escape" (Labbe 23). She chooses to run, and to fall, and by doing this Labbe identifies her "reject[ion] of the most common feminine accomplishment of her century – doing nothing attractively" (23). Alice, now a twenty-first century girl in these adaptations, is not quite so restricted by these particularly rigid feminine ideologies; however she is still bound by certain gender stereotypes surrounding the female body. Young outlines these boundaries, describing the kinds of messages young girls are taught to internalise: "that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her" (153). Young states that children of both sexes "categorically assert that girls are more likely to get hurt than boys, and that girls ought to remain close to home, while boys can roam and explore" (153). With these cultural messages in mind, it is interesting to compare Alice's active position on Sabuda and Ingpen's cover, and Gulliver's passive Alice.

It is only on Sabuda's and Ingpen's covers that Alice is active. On the remaining three covers, she is seated, either on the floor (Gulliver), or in a chair (Hamilton and Johnson, and Castor and Bašić). Alice's active characterization on Sabuda's cover is shown through the position of her body. Alice is leaning forward, rather than standing upright, one leg is on the ground and the other is lifted behind her, and her long blonde hair is fanned out behind her head. These actions work together to indicate Alice is mid-stride in her attempt to catch up to the White

Rabbit. It is also reflective of my earlier claim that the White Rabbit is the driver of the narrative through Alice's curiosity about him. Ingpen's White Rabbit is pictured similarly to Sabuda's. He is running, but he is also looking at his pocket watch, which creates the impression he is not aware of Alice's presence. This is despite Ingpen's cover moving Alice forward so she is running beside the White Rabbit. Again, movement is depicted through the body – Alice is leaning forward, with one arm bent upward in front of her, and the other bent downwards behind. Alice is the most active in this illustration, and she is leading the White Rabbit, and is seemingly as oblivious to his presence as he is to hers. For the reader, the idea created with this cover is Alice's subjectivity. This is of course the story of her adventure, and it is Alice who will lead the reader through. Rather than the White Rabbit being the source of her curiosity and the driver of the narrative, it is Alice's sense of adventure which will shape the story to come. That these two adaptations are intended for readers older than Gulliver's adaptation creates an interesting intersection between age, gender, and activity.

It has already been identified that Gulliver's front cover Alice's as passive. The passivity of Gulliver's Alice is highlighted here over Castor and Bašić, and Hamilton and Johnson's potentially passive Alice's because although Alice is sitting on the front cover of these two texts, as she is on Gulliver's, and therefore physically inactive, she remains a participant in the scene through her character's role in the Tea Party. Gulliver's Alice is seated on the floor of the great hall, and having grown through her consumption of the cupcake in her hand, she is unable to leave. Alice looks worried, and she has been captured in the moment before she begins to cry, flooding the hall which inadvertently leads to her escape. It is a similar image as that which is used on the title page of the book, with the difference being in the second image Alice has begun to shed tears. It is worth noting that this particular illustration is of the first moment in the story where Alice appears vulnerable, having previously demonstrated an adventurous and eager spirit through her quick decision to follow the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole, and accepting her subsequent long fall with little concern. This Alice is in direct contrast to the Alice on Ingpen and Sabuda's covers, and consequently a different narrative develops as to who this Alice is, as well as the tone of the story to come. Alice may still be having an adventure here, but she does not look happy about it.

Nodelman discusses how "many picture books have covers which merely contain duplicates of pictures also found inside" (50). This is the case for Gulliver's adaptation, and Nodelman goes on to explain how "those pictures still often seem to have been chosen to convey the essence of the story inside and thus to set up appropriate expectations for it" (50). The message created by selecting this illustration for the front cover establishes not only a safe space for young children to read Alice's story, but offers a subtle warning as well. If readers are to identify with Alice, how are they to interpret this vulnerable young girl, and their own subsequent interpretation of the story? Alice sits underneath the elaborate title; therefore a direct connection is made between who Alice is, and what Wonderland is. The message on Gulliver's front cover is that this seemingly helpless girl is Alice, and that Wonderland is not a place of adventure (although 'adventure' has already been removed from the title), but rather a source of potential anxiety. It is an image and message which is in direct contrast with the empowered Alice found on Ingpen and Sabuda's covers.

## Illustration - The Tea Party

Front cover of *Alice in Wonderland*, designed by Richard Johnson and The Five Mile Press (2010) -

[https://books.google.com.au/books?id=skhuzgAACAAJ&dq=richard+johnson+wonderland&hl=en&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.au/books?id=skhuzgAACAAJ&dq=richard+johnson+wonderland&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y)

Front cover of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, designed by Zdenko Bašić and Hardie Grant Egmont (2010) -

[https://books.google.com.au/books?id=lxhPuQAACAAJ&dq=Zdenko+Ba%C5%A1i%C4%87+wonderland&hl=en&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.au/books?id=lxhPuQAACAAJ&dq=Zdenko+Ba%C5%A1i%C4%87+wonderland&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y)

The Tea Party scene is captured on the front cover of Hamilton and Johnson and Castor and Bašić's adaptations. Two rationales for why this scene works as a representation of the entire story are discussed below. The first is how the Hatter and March Hare's characterization as 'mad' has functioned in a positive way to endear them to readers. Following on from this is how the use of these male-identified characters on the cover operates to 'even out' a perceived gender imbalance, when considering how young children identify 'girls' and 'boys' books. Using Bal's theory of rhythmic narrative (98-99), the Hatter and March Hare, only appearing in two out of twelve chapters may not initially appear to be significant characters. However, their role in Alice's adventure has become one of the most iconic scenes in the story, and Bal's examination, this time of characters, lends a useful criterion by which to consider the Hatter and March Hare's well-recognized role in *Wonderland*. Bal states that characters do not exist: "they are fabricated creatures made up from fantasy, imitation, memory: paper people, without flesh and blood" (113). How the reader comes to think of the character as real comes via the narrative producing "character-effects" (Bal 113). What these character-effects do is enable the reader to identify or empathize, and laugh or cry with a character – to, in essence, forget they are fabricated figures. Whatever the semantics of a character, "repetition is an important principle of the construction of a character" (Bal 126). When looking at the qualities of the Hatter and March Hare, it is the continuing reference to them being 'mad' which establishes the most memorable aspect of their character.

How the reader comes by their information about a character can happen in several ways. Bal states that "characteristics are either mentioned explicitly by the character itself, or we deduce them from what the character does" (131). This is not the case for the Hatter and March Hare however, as the content of their character is established by Carroll before they enter the scene, even before the story begins. The chapter in which these characters appear is entitled "A Mad Tea-Party" and in the previous chapter when both characters are introduced by name, the Cheshire Cat provides Alice with two options:

"In *that* direction," the Cat said, waving its right paw round, "lives a Hatter: and in *that* direction," waving the other paw, "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad" (Carroll 56-57, original emphasis).

Without having met these characters, Alice begins to also stress their mad dispositions. In a discussion with herself about which direction to take, she states, “[T]he March Hare will be much the most interesting, and perhaps, as this is May, it wo’n’t be raving mad – at least not so mad as it was in March” (Carroll 58). And on the following page, “Suppose it [the March Hare] should be raving mad after all! I almost wish I’d gone to see the Hatter instead!” (Carroll 59). The Hatter and the March Hare appear unaware of their characterization as ‘mad’, until the Hatter comments to Alice about when it was the March Hare went mad, confirming Alice’s suspicion that March is the Hare’s month for madness (Carroll 63). This characterization of ‘mad’ does not work against the characters in terms of their popularity with readers and popular culture. It is not employed in the narrative as an offensive term, and instead makes the characters intriguing and therefore memorable to the reader.

Hamilton and Johnson and Castor and Bašić use the Tea Party scene, featuring the Hatter and March Hare on their covers. Highlighting the Tea Party on the front cover of an adaptation is a measured decision when it comes to potential young readers. Dutro explores how boy’s rejection of the feminine is documented by researchers who suggest that “early in life boys realize that things associated with girls and women are devalued by society and thus, it is important that they define themselves against these things” (377). Reading is one of the most vital ways children learn; therefore an effective and common way young boys can learn to define themselves as separate to girls and women is through reading books about other boys and men, and discarding those books whose narratives are female dominated. A book’s cover is heavily indicative to the potential reader of details about the story inside, including style and genre, and who the publisher has determined should be reading it. Who a book is aimed at is divided along age and gender lines, and in terms of gender is a practice, which continues into adulthood and its associated literature. Therefore it is easy to see how the ideas and processes of performing gender are passed from one generation to the next and how these messages become internalized.

In her study, Dutro interviews a mixed class of fifth graders, and one of the more loaded questions asked was “what makes a “girls’ book?”” (382). Dutro reports that “all of the children are adamant that the presence of girls on the cover marks the book as a girls’ book” (382). The use of pink is also cited by the children as a way of identifying a girls’ book (Dutro 382). These markers, of colour and character, are part of the socialising process of constructing gender binaries, and one result of this construction is the revealing ways children learn to interpret and divide literature into books they ‘can’ read and books they ‘shouldn’t’, based on conventional gender lines. The Hatter and March Hare are male, identified as “he” during the Tea Party scene (Carroll 60-62), and while the Dormouse is unassigned, referred to as “it” (Carroll 61), it remains a safe character in terms of its lack of specified female identity. With the Hatter and March Hare’s presence on the cover, the gender split is now 2:1 male. This alteration to the gender ratio creates a ‘safer’ space for boys who are under pressure to avoid being labelled a ‘girl’. Results from classroom research conducted by Merisuo-Storm compliments that of Dutro, finding that “a big part of the problem is that many groups of boys have come to regard school literacy as ‘un-masculine’ and thus undesirable, a threat to their masculinity” (114). Merisuo-

Storm emphasizes the long-term effects this kind of pressure can have on boys, stating that “boys are easily caught in a harmful cycle. Peer pressure discourages a boy from reading, an activity that is not considered ‘cool’. His reluctance to read leads to a decline in his reading skills” (113).

There is an ideological bias in children’s literature which has gained wide acceptance, that boys will not read books which feature female protagonists. If a boy manages to overcome this peer pressure to avoid reading, he then faces a further challenge in ensuring the books he does choose are suitably masculine. Selecting a book with a male hero/protagonist is not the challenge here, as Western literature is dominated by male characters. Rather, it is this marginalisation of female characters that exist outside of a relationship with a male character, which contributes to the pressure on young boys to avoid these uncommon narratives.

Author Shannon Hale, in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* discusses this issue, and the assumption that her books are only suitable for girls. Hale highlights the belief that:

Boys won’t like books with female protagonists, the shaming that happens – from peers, parents, teachers – when they do, the idea that girls should read about and understand boys but that boys don’t have to read about girls, that boys aren’t expected to understand and empathize with the female population of the world [...] It’s not fair to boys. We’re asking them to grow up in a world with 50 per cent girls and women, and we’re setting them up for failure (Stevens).

Although the solution to these issues involves changing social ideologies surrounding gender so that reading can become an inclusive activity for all young children, a starting point could be the marketing of existing stories to a wider audience thereby shifting conventional thought processes. Ultimately, while the best outcome would be for boys, and parents and guardians of boys, to feel confident in selecting *Wonderland* as a story, regardless of how the it is positioned, by introducing two significant male characters in a front cover illustration, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* becomes a more likely contender to be chosen by young, male readers.

## Use of Color

In his book, *Reading Pictures*, Manguel discusses the history humans have with colors, in terms of pleasure and symbolism (32). Manguel states that colors are “emblems of our emotional relationship to the world” (32), and looks back to the Middle Ages for the attribution of symbolic values to different recognized colors. Today, this connection between colors and symbolism has been “largely forgotten or replaced by the superficial and transitory jargon of commercial and political advertising” (Manguel 34). However, there does remain, to a certain extent, an understanding of and connection between particular colors and particular cultural ideologies. These different ideologies are briefly outlined by Daggett, Cobble, and Gertel - red can initiate feelings of danger (U.S.), aristocracy (France), death (Egypt), creativity (India), anger (Japan), or happiness (China). Blue can mean masculinity (U.S.), peace (France), faith (Egypt), and villainy (Japan). Green can mean safety (U.S.), criminality (France), fertility (Egypt), prosperity (India), and youth (Japan).

Yellow can mean cowardice (U.S.), temporary (France), happiness (Egypt), success (India), and nobility (Japan). White can mean purity (U.S.), neutrality (France), joy (Egypt), and death (India and Japan) (7-8).

The following section will consider the use of color on the front covers of the selected adaptations of *Wonderland*. These adaptations were all published in Western countries, primarily the United States and the United Kingdom. With these countries in mind, in examinations of areas such as color, where meaning changes across cultures (as identified above), the ideologies discussed will be from a Western perspective, with an assumed Western audience. As with any culture which produces objects, that object's origins will most often reflect the dominant discourse of its culture, what Nodelman refers to as being "culturally coded" (59). Whatever the culture may be, "all pictures in color [...] evoke a code of signification and speak either satisfyingly or disturbingly of matters beyond meaning or intention" (Nodelman 59). Therefore while it is acknowledged here that a similar study conducted in a different culture would likely yield different results, it is a deliberate choice here to focus the examination from a Western perspective only.

Of the five adaptations of *Wonderland* chosen for this examination of aesthetics, four use gold for the book title: Ingpen, Johnson and Hamilton, Castor and Bašić, and Sabuda. The use of gold in the production of books has a long history. Cowley and Williamson discuss how gold was used in manuscript production during the Middle Ages, and flourished in centres around Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly seen in Books of Hours, which typically contained adapted devotional texts (14). Bradley similarly identifies the Middle Ages as a significant period in the "art of illumination", describing how "plates of beaten gold, studded with gems, formed the covers of the Gospel-book of Hormisdas" (27). The use of silver and gold became associated with religious texts, with such decoration interpreted as "lighting up", or "illuminating the sacred Word of God." And while not solely limited to the use of these glowing decorations, it was in part this interpretation that led to the term "illuminated manuscripts" (Cowley and Williamson 9). Bradley further explains that it was in the twelfth century "as far as we know," that the word illuminator was first applied to "one who practiced the art of book decoration" (3). The long and culturally significant history of the use of gold on book covers, and Carroll's use of gold on the original cover of *Wonderland* (for the title and illustrations), suggests that the use of gold for these contemporary titles can work as both a nod to the history of the story, and to add an air of authenticity and even authority to the works.

The use of gold on Ingpen, Hamilton and Johnson, and Castor and Bašić's covers listed mimics the traditional use of gold leaf found in illustrated manuscripts. The surface of the lettering is smooth, solid, and reflects the light. This impression of authenticity and authority is particularly effective on Ingpen's cover, with the amalgamation of gold lettering and traditional typography – Ingpen's particular variation of gold also matches with the style of illustration, created using pencil and watercolor (State Library of Victoria). There is a harmony between the three elements – muted color, gold, traditional font, and watercolor illustrations, where each works with the other to create a classically designed cover.

The tint for Hamilton and Johnson is yellow-gold, and its appearance is brasher than Ingpen's. This particular tint, combined with the use of a wider font, creates a mirror-like surface. The aim of this variation of gold is to appeal to child

readers. “Very young children are attracted more strongly to bright colors, shiny things, glitter, and the sparkle effects of marbles, soap-bubbles, kaleidoscopes [...] In kindergarten, sparkle is one of the main components of decoration and aesthetic delight” (Leddy 269-270). The overall tone of this cover is along the yellow spectrum, and maintains the bright, shiny impression created by the gold lettering of the book title. The field in which the Tea Party is taking place is bathed in yellow, creating the impression it is an afternoon tea. The grass is made up of shades of yellow-green, as are the trees. Alice’s hair is lemon-yellow, her chair is orange, and orange is combined with yellow to create the sash on the Hatter’s hat, the March Hare’s waist-coat and his hair. The vine-like frame, which features leaves and flowers, is also yellow, outlined in black.

In a study on how 127 children between the ages of three and four detected relationships between colors and facial expressions of emotions, Zentner found that the majority of these young children made connections between a happy emotional expression and bright colors (yellow, red, green), and dark colors (blue, brown, black) for a sad emotional expression (393). In this study, yellow was the second most favored color by children to represent happiness, and the least favorable to represent sadness, across both genders (393). Burkitt, Barrett, and Davis conducted a similar investigation of the connections 330 older children (between the ages of four and eleven) made between color choices when coloring drawings of affectively characterized images. Children were asked to use color choices to represent the following emotions – “nice”, “nasty”, and “baseline”, in order to determine the child’s preferred color. From the colors available - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, white, brown, and black - the primary colors of red, yellow, and blue were associated with “nice” or chosen as the “baseline” preferred colors (Burkitt, Barrett & Davis 451-452). These two studies demonstrate that children between the ages of three and eleven are attracted to bright colors, and associate these types of colors with positive emotions, such as happiness or niceness. As a primary color, yellow is one of the first colors children learn to recognize, and this makes it an effective color choice for Hamilton and Johnson’s adaptation.

The four adaptations that used gold all demonstrate how differently the color can appear and be used to different effect. While Ingpen, and Hamilton and Johnson’s gold tint always appears gold, with its color undeterred by the angle of the light source, the gold used by Castor and Bašić is tinted green, and the effect created is one of mutability. Although the title of the story can reflect light, it can also appear matte, and easily shifts between the two forms. The shift helps display a three-dimensional quality to the font, which the shadowing around the characters had already begun to establish. The use of a tint which connects to the natural world also reflects the other color choices on the front cover, which are not as bold as those found on Hamilton and Johnson’s cartoon-style cover. The differences in color are connected to the differences in how the illustrations were created, with Castor and Bašić using a variety of techniques.

Sabuda’s gold lettering differs in that the surface is faceted, recreating the effect of a sparkling diamond. The reflective nature of the title on Sabuda’s front cover creates a connection between Leddy’s discussion on the aesthetic qualities of sparkle and shine, and a study done on reflective surface finishes and the mouthing activity of infants and toddlers (Coss, Ruff, and Simms). The researchers on this study make note of the human ability, shared with our predecessors, to detect water,

a crucial aspect of our survival as a species (Coss, Ruff, and Simms 198). They use this information as the basis for demonstrating young children's preference for reflective surfaces, making a connection between these and glistening water. The same correlation is made by Leddy who discusses how our "appreciation of nature is strongly associated with sparkle and shine" (262). Ultimately the study suggests that potentially dangerous products manufactured with shiny surfaces be repackaged with matte surfaces (Cos, Ruff, and Simms 211). Although this argument is not directly relevant to this paper, the notion of children's attraction to shiny objects is significant. If the attraction is strong enough for researchers to suggest a change in product manufacturing, then it stands to reason that the choice of font color on Sabuda's cover would be effective in appealing to a child's aesthetic. Particularly when as Leddy states, sparkle and shine are "qualities that pervade our lives aesthetically" (259).

The colors used on the front cover of Gulliver's adaptation mark this retelling as one that is being marketed specifically toward young, female readers. The use of a solid, bright pink for the title is particularly telling in regard to the construction of a specific audience. The gendered stereotype that boys like blue and girls like pink is part of a constructed process of gender performance that begins from birth. Pomerleau et al., in a study of the physical environment of 120 girls and boys, examined how gendered ideologies began to be actively established in children from as young as five months. The study showed that these differential environments impacted on the development of specific abilities and preferential activities in children (Pomerleau et al. 359). One of the ways these differential environments were created was through the use of color. Girls were found to wear more pink and multi-colored clothing, have pink pacifiers and yellow bed linen, whereas boys wore blue, red, or white clothing, had blue pacifiers, and blue bed linen (Pomerleau et al. 359). The results of this study are not unique in Western culture, where the binary of male and female is woven through all aspects of everyday life, and the solid pink of Gulliver's title is part of this authoritative social narrative.

Sabuda uses a similar tone of bright pink for the background of his *Wonderland* adaptation front cover. The decision to use this particular color in significant areas of a cover, such as the background and book title, creates a persuasive impression for where these adaptations will be placed in the book marketplace. An assertive use of pink on the front cover of *Wonderland* can also be associated with the story's protagonist – Alice – and the reading practices of young girls and boys. In using a color with such a strongly constructed gendered ideology surrounding it, Sabuda and Gulliver have embraced the male-female dualism which exists around reading choices, playing up *Wonderland's* potential positioning as a "girls' book", with its young, female protagonist, marketing their adaptations towards the similarly aged female reader.

One common aspect found across the *Wonderland* adaptations discussed in this paper is that, however it is done; all of the front covers feature a variety of colors. Even a brief scan of the picturebook section of a bookstore or library reveals the prevalence of color in the creation of books for young children. Studies, such as Wichmann, Sharpe, and Gegenfurtner's demonstrate the effectiveness of color in pictures, compared to black and white images. The study undertaken by the above researchers investigated the contribution of color to recognition memory, stating that "color is a highly salient visual attribute" (516). It was found that colored images

increased a subject's attention, and therefore improved performance on recognition memory (514-516). As Nodelman states, colors "can work to convey mood more exactly than any other aspect of pictures. A non-narrative effect thus develops profound narrative implications" (59-60). What this analysis of the use of color on the front covers of *Wonderland* adaptations demonstrates is how colors can impact on a reader's understanding of a text. Through design decisions made regarding color and illustration, additional information, outside of what is contained in the text, is generated.

This analysis of the aesthetics of front cover design, through the use of color and illustration, has demonstrated the variety of narratives that can be established through primarily visual means. The five adaptations discussed all use a configuration of the same three words: Alice, Adventure, and Wonderland, yet despite the uniformity of the words themselves, no two covers look alike. This fact reflects the diversity of the narratives inside the covers, further highlighting the flexibility of Carroll's story. The formation of these front covers however moves beyond a frame for new interpretations of Carroll's story, to reflect social and cultural conventions regarding children and childhood. Books are a cultural product, and popular conventions will influence what appears on a front cover and how it is presented. This is evident through the clear and frequently witnessed division between girls' books and boys' books, simultaneously reflecting conventional social constructions of gender, and reinforcing those same conventions. Front covers therefore can also be considered social frames. As stated by Wiesner, picturebooks "tell stories in a visual language that is rich and multileveled, sophisticated in its workings despite its often deceptively simple appearance" (foreword). It is this deceptively simple appearance that can fuel doubts as to the depth of meaning picturebooks have to offer. However, picturebooks, like other products, embody and reflect the culture of their creation. This is how they operate as tools for learning, whether purposefully didactic, or marketed as entertainment. Front covers provide the first insight into the aim of a story, and are as diverse as the stories they contain.

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