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The Victorian "orderly" classroom was built upon the foundations of Utilitarianism and a strict adherence to what was deemed "useful knowledge." During this era, educational accountability was often managed through systems like "Payment by Results," where government grants were strictly tied to students' ability to pass standardized examinations in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Rapple). This model, famously satirized as "Gradgrindism," viewed children as empty vessels to be filled with objective facts, leaving no room for imaginative or critical deviation. This environment was one of certainties where the learner was expected to remain a passive vessel for the state's values. Knowledge was treated as a static commodity, a finished product to be consumed rather than a process to be engaged with. The focus on "useful knowledge" was often a limiting factor, as it emphasized intellectual development only insofar as it served moral and industrial discipline (Koropchak). In this setting, the teacher held unquestioned authority, and the "lesson" always preceded the question, effectively stifling the child's natural curiosity. Alice's repeated attempts to recite her lessons, such as her mangled version of "How Doth the Little Busy Bee," illustrate the deep-seated conditioning of the Victorian student, for whom knowing is inextricably linked to obeying and reciting. This system did not aim to educate in the sense of drawing out the individual; rather, it sought to domesticate the child into a predictable social role.

This institutionalized passivity resulted in what can be termed the "erasure of the subject." In the Victorian model, the learner's identity was secondary to the curriculum. By requiring passive reception, the system ensured that the student remained a vessel for external values rather than an independent thinker. Alice's initial crisis of identity in Wonderland, "Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!" is a direct consequence of this educational confinement. Her sense of self is so tightly bound to her ability to perform

learned facts that when those facts fail her, her very existence feels threatened. The rigid rules of the Victorian classroom functioned as a method of pre-determining identity; if a child could not fit into the "orderly" framework of the schoolroom, they were socially and ontologically lost. This cognitive atrophy occurred because the student's active cognition was never truly engaged; they were never asked to synthesize or challenge information, only to store and retrieve it. Consequently, the Victorian classroom was not just a place of learning but a site of ontological confinement, where the boundaries of the child's world were strictly defined by the authority of the teacher and the sacred nature of the textbook.

Wonderland serves as the antithesis to this model, functioning as a chaotic classroom where the primary curriculum is the subversion of logic itself. This subversion is not merely for entertainment; it is a deliberate pedagogical tool designed to trigger cognitive dissonance. A key mechanism in this process is the breakdown of readability. As Ślęzak-Świat argues, Carroll's work provides an early record of readability computations, where the text intentionally becomes difficult or unreadable to jolt the reader, and Alice, out of auto-pilot mode. In the Victorian classroom, Alice recites without thinking; in Wonderland, she is forced to decode. When the linguistic frameworks she relies on are deconstructed, such as the Mock Turtle's puns on "Reeling and Writhing," Alice can no longer rely on rote memorization. The difficulty of Wonderland's logic is, therefore, a pedagogical feature; it is a form of intellectual "weightlifting" that the Victorian model completely lacks. By making the world unreadable, Carroll forces Alice to develop her own internal logic to navigate the confounding experiences she encounters. As Proulx's research suggests, absurdist literature pushes our brains to be more flexible, making us more creative, and quicker to learn new ideas (qtd. In Robson).

Furthermore, the "comic absurdity" of Wonderland functions as what Hansen and Phelan describe as a "profane act" against rigid institutional learning. In their analysis,

absurdity is not a lack of sense, but a tool used to "profane" or strip power from sacred structures. When Alice encounters characters who treat logic with irreverence, the sacred rules of her Victorian upbringing lose their ability to demand blind compliance. Laughter becomes a form of intellectual autonomy; it creates a psychological space where Alice is no longer intimidated by the teacher or the lesson. This subversive power of nonsense allows Alice to dismantle her Victorian conditioning. As Hansen and Phelan suggest, comic absurdity in education can open up new ways of being and thinking that are not permitted within orderly systems. By laughing at the absurdity of the Queen's trial or the Mad Hatter's tea party, Alice distances herself from the authority of the rule and begins to assert her own perspective. This shift moves the burden of meaning-making from the instructor to the student, transforming the educational experience from one of consumption to one of active creation.

The figures Alice encounters in Wonderland, the Caterpillar, the Cheshire Cat, and the Mad Hatter, act as Socratic irritants rather than traditional Victorian teachers. Unlike the schoolmasters of Alice's world who provide answers before questions are even asked, these figures provide confounding experiences that offer no direct answers. The Caterpillar's inquiry, "Who are you?", is the ultimate pedagogical challenge to a child raised on rote memorization. It forces Alice to confront the instability of her own identity, which has been destabilized by the physical and logical shifts of Wonderland. This pedagogy of the paradox ensures that Alice cannot remain a passive recipient. The Caterpillar does not teach Alice facts about her identity; he forces her to experience the process of self-definition. By refusing to provide a stable framework, these characters force Alice to stop searching for external certainty and instead begin the work of internal synthesis.

Similarly, the Mad Hatter's tea party represents a rejection of linear knowledge structures. In the Victorian world, time and social protocol were rigid, linear, and orderly.

The Hatter's riddles without answers and the cyclical nature of the tea party subvert these expectations entirely. This environment forces Alice to abandon the search for a point or a lesson at the end of every interaction. Without the rules of Victorian etiquette and logic to guide her, Alice must invent her own ways of interacting. By engaging in this chaos, Alice learns that knowledge is not a destination to be reached through compliance but a dynamic and often frustrating relationship with the world around her.

The culmination of Alice's journey is a profound cognitive turn from passivity to agency. This transition is best understood through Anna Kérchy's lens of intersemiotic play and hybridity. Kérchy argues that Alice's adventures represent a shift from learning about the world to playing with the world. In the Victorian model, knowledge was a static fact; in Wonderland, it is a dynamic performance. Alice becomes a hybrid meaning-maker, learning to navigate and synthesize information across different and often conflicting semiotic systems, the logic of the cards, the riddles of the Hatter, and the physical changes of her own body. She moves from being a reliable subject of the empire to an active agent who can challenge the Queen's arbitrary authority with the realization: "Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!"

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