Gastronomical Nonsense in Lewis Carroll's Alice Books

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The "EAT ME" cake and the "DRINK ME" potion are the most easily recognizable, memetically[1] reproducible, enchanted edibles consumed by curious, orally fixated little Alice during her Wonderland adventures. As memorable appetizers to the deliciously disturbing oddities which distinguish the chaotic dreamrealms imagined into being by Lewis Carroll's Victorian fairy-tale fantasy dilogy, cake and potion – both communicating in human language "beautifully printed on them in large letters" (Carroll 16) to urge their own destruction – function as iconic emblems of the very carnivalesque spirit, the sensorially stimulating, cognitively confusing surprise-effect of the nonsensical Wonderland experience. My chapter aims to explore how foods and drinks in the Alice books and their adaptations – besides eliciting the heroine's unpredictable magical metamorphosis by making her alternately shrink or grow – function as gustatory equivalents of the unstable signifiers of literary nonsense. They impose an impossible challenge for any interpretive attempts at solidifying meanings, yet they also tease appetites by promising that "*something* interesting is sure to happen […] whenever [we] eat or drink anything,"[2] whenever we dare to 'have a bite of nonsense,' to embark on unprecedented gourmet explorations of how a reinvented language or/and reinvented flavour tastes in our mouth.

The "DRINK ME" potion's label reminds of Victorian medicine bottles on John Tenniel's illustration and holds the suspicious aura of a potentially poisonous fluid, therefore Alice ventures to taste it only after she has carefully verified it is "not labeled poison." Her erroneous deduction (the fact that the bottle is *not marked* poison does not necessarily entail that it does *not contain* poison) belongs to the logical games of Carroll's mathematically motivated nonsense that revels in grotesque fooleries of a topsy-turvy world yet still manages to offer a lesson in logical reasoning to young readers. This ludic pedagogy often takes place through easily relatable gustatory experience.

Moreover, the taste of "DRINK ME" potion described as an unusual assortment

of flavors of "cherry-tart, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffy and hot buttered toast" (17) represents a proliferation of sense and an epitome of undecidability similar to the semiotic, syntactic confusion strategically generated by verbal maneuvers of literary nonsense's language games, like the whimsical Carrollian portmanteaus which merge two words into one to create revolutionary poetic neologisms.[3] The "EAT ME" cake's occasional interchangeability with pebbles blurs the edible/inedible divide to illustrate the unreliability of signifiers and the arbitrariness of meaning construction (i.e. whatever we call food, may become edible).

The Alice books consistently tease readers' imagination with culinary curiosities which can take a wide variety of different forms ranging from chimeric creatures reminiscent of Renaissance bestiaries' anomalous beings (like a sub-species of the Looking Glass insects, the endangered Bread-and-Butterfly that only lives on weak tea with cream so scarce that it is often sadly doomed to die of starvation) to logical impossibilities (like the Unicorn's plum cake that becomes bigger with each new slice cut from it) and category confusions (wine offered when there is nothing but tea). Some of the wondrous foods have been inspired by the specialties of the Victorian cuisine, like the plum cake made surprisingly not of plums but of hazelnut and apples, or the mock turtle soup, a broth prepared of a calf's head seasoned with brandy and thyme to simulate the taste of the much more expensive turtle meat.

This meal, the mock turtle soup inspired Carroll's figure of the Mock Turtle, a curious hybrid composite of a calf and a turtle, who cries without sorrows as if lamenting his genuine inauthenticity, while he melancholically performs a Lobster Quadrille and sings a song about the "Beau-ootiful Soo-oop of the e-e-evening." His "voice choked with sobs" (112) distorts the words of the lyrics to make them both recall and radically deviate from a conventional linguistic utterance in a way similar to how the faked flavor of the mock turtle soup recreates the taste of the original meal (the real turtle soup) with a difference while openly acknowledging its own pretense. One can draw a parallel between this culinary feat (it tastes like a fancy feast but is not the real thing) and nonsense language games' verbal stunts (it sounds/reads like language but "there is something wrong with it") which are both reminiscent of the *legerdemain* magic tricks so dear to Carroll (see Fisher 1973).

Many of the food items gain their enchanting quality because of immediate interconnection with Carrollian language games. The visualization of nourishment gains phenomenological philosophical implications in riddle-like dilemmas like "'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'" (73). The White Queen's mock-proverb "Jam to-morrow and jam yesterday--but never jam to-day" (206) creates a comic effect because of the interlingual humor involved in the mnemonic for the usage of the Latin word "iam" which means "at this time," but only in the future or past tense, not in the

present (which is "nunc" for "now" instead). By courtesy of the acoustic pleasures of literary nonsense foregrounding the sonic dimensions of signification through alliteration, rhyming, rhythm, or repetition, one can nearly feel the flavor of words. This is the case in the dormouse' tale about the treacle well where the three little maids live and learn to draw all manner of things beginning with an M like mouse-traps, and moon, and memory, and muchness (80).

The treacle well illustrates the complexity of the meanings assigned to food in nonsense literature. The multiplication of Ms into "mmmm" creates a preverbal sound-effect to express gustatory satisfaction with a delightful flavor and embeds the sense impression of taste within the somatized text. Yet the treacle well also offers an example for the ambiguous in-between status of food and drinks. Treacle wells were believed to be invested with curative, restorative, even spiritual powers in Victorian England (treacle as a broader semantic category referred to healing water), while actual treacle was also traditionally used for medical purposes (to lower blood pressure). However, by the end of the 19th century cooks also started to use treacle similar to molasses as a culinary ingredient in savory-sweet recipes.

The embedded narrative's fictitious little girls' and their implied reader Alice's entrapment within the treacle also evoke the engendering of appetites, how raw, spicy, meaty food and voraciousness have been coded as masculine whereas having a sweet-tooth, finicky eating habits, and inappetence were regarded as feminine conforming to the binary dietary standards of patriarchal culture (Talaiarch-Vielmas 54). The adventuress Alice breaks these gender norms by curiously craving to taste all sorts of strange nourishments she comes across throughout her adventures. Her hunger to bite, to open her mouth to speak back also remind us how children have too often been hushed, reduced to the idea of sweetness, disempowered through the ideology of cuteness,[4] metaphorically consumed by adult parental figures willing to discipline youngsters according to their aetonormative restrictions (Nikolajeva 13).[5]

Alice mockingly recalls how infantile gluttony has been conventionally associated with disobedience. However, the recycling of the biblical or mythical alimentary prohibitions, resurfacing in cautionary fairy tales of consumption where the tasting of a forbidden food traditionally results in catastrophic consequences is left without punitive, disciplinary moralization in Carroll's anti-tales which reimagine curiosity in a positive, empowering new light. Alice's gustatory curiosity, a sign of her female adventurousness is not so much used as a warning but rather an invitation to a daring play to discover the taste of the world.

Talairach-Vielmas notices how the prefatory poem to *Wonderland* disrupts conventional expectations with "the metaphorization of storytelling as beverage" to quench the thirst of young female bodies who "are drying up the 'weary' male taller—as vampires might"

with their insatiable thirst for a female fantasy realm (51). ("And ever, as the story drained/ The wells of fancy dry" (Carroll 7)). Although Talairach-Vielmas later contends that this appetite is later contained to turn food into a trope that disciplines, diminishes, and tames the female body, nevertheless, we cannot help noticing how Carroll's tales find an anarchic joy in images of voraciousness as in the misquoted embedded poem where the little crocodile "welcomes little fishes in, with gently smiling jaws" (23). The slip of the tongue in Alice's incorrect recital (she is distorting an educational poem about a diligent busy bee) allows her repressed desires to come to surface.

Michael Heyman and Kevin Shortsleeve argue that nonsense literature's ancestral connection with the medieval carnivalesque tradition's transgressive intent, fantastic extravaganza, and grotesque (de)compositions (165) can be tracked in the genre's strategic destabilization of coherent meanings, conventional interpretive strategies, and logical reasoning. Victorian readers could indeed enjoy the carnivalesque breaking of bourgeois table manners prescribed by the era's popular conduct books: in scenes like the mad tea party participants systematically violate the dinner etiquette. The Hatter and his companions revel in impoliteness by shouting nonsensical riddles and random insults, running around the table, wasting, misusing and mocking food (putting butter in a pocket-watch, squeezing the dormouse in a teapot, throwing tea trays to make them fly like bats, and mistaking wine for tea), and dishonoring hospitality (inviting Alice to join the table and then denying her food and drink). Theirs is a harsh parody of the traditional British five o'clock tea, perhaps also evocative of how this custom was used as a therapeutical method in Victorian madhouses – often with chaotic consequences – by means of an attempt to train inmates how to reintegrate into normal society (Kohlt).

It might seem dubious how this carnivalesque parody benefits Alice herself, who somehow remains an outsider to the madness enacted by the adult figures, and eventually leaves the party behind without having appeased her appetite. However, Carroll's description of Alice-at-the-table simultaneously reveals his interest in child psychology and his awareness of the socio-culturally contextualized, affectively charged changing meanings of food and nourishment. Due to her bourgeois upbringing Alice is clearly upset by the lack of table manners, but within the brief "Mad Tea-Party" chapter she also expresses a wide range of other emotional responses to Wonderland's strange feeding habits. She oscillates between being indignant, angry, curious, puzzled, alarmed, thoughtful, offended, humbled, confused, and disgusted. Carroll uses more than a dozen terms to describe her affective reactions to the absurd presentation of ordinary or fictitious meals and hence directs the attention to a largely neglected participant of social gatherings, the child with a taste and a will of her own. Alice gains agency, as she "helps herself to a little bread and butter and tea," reflects on her culinary interests upon realizing how she had "always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking"

(78), and eventually leaves the tea-partyers to venture on nibbling mushrooms –magic food items instead of mundane meals – which help her to enter the garden where she longs to be. Even Alice's positioning as a "non-eater" amidst a Feast of Fools is not necessarily a stigma of her debilitating marginalization as non-belonging other, but rather a sign of the relativity of social constructions of normativity, the malleability of cultural significations (even bread-and-butter can become bizarre if served in a twisted manner), and a symbol of her superiority, as she is the one who dreams into being the adventures which function as enactments of her anxieties and desires.

Another example for the carnivalesque overturning of the hierarchical power structures emerges in the final feast beyond the Looking Glass where the lamb chop and the pudding speak up and rebel against being eaten at the royal dinner organized for Queen Alice's celebration. The food talking in human speech (the pudding has "thick, suety sort of voice" (276)) might be an allusion to emerging vegetarian movements and animal rights activism, a common controversial topic of public debate often parodied in Alice-illustrator Tenniel's *Punch* magazine illustrations too. But the blurring of the boundaries between species (humans, animals, and even flowers are seated side-by-side at the table) also holds posthumanist philosophical implications challenging the anthropocentric assumption about humankind's supremacy above all the other earthly lifeforms (see Jaques).

In a delightfully troubling finale simultaneously reminiscent of a silly nursery rhyme imagery and a biblical apocalyptic vision, even the animate and the object worlds mingle, as candles grow up to the ceiling "like a bed of rushes with fireworks at the top," bottles fit on plates as wings and forks as legs and flutter bird-like in all directions, and the White Queen transforms into the leg of mutton and disappears in the soup. This scene of culinary chaos represents the peak of nonsensification. Unsurprisingly, Alice decides to jump up, seize the tablecloth with both hands, and with one good pull, makes "plates, dishes, guests and candles all come crashing down together in a heap on the floor" (279). Her vehement undoing of the table elicits the moment of waking up, a transitioning from the dream-realm to the consensual reality. Here, in waking life, food has more mundane implications: Alice remembers that she must feed her cat in the morning and promises that she will repeat to Kitty the story of the Walrus and the Carpenter, so that the dear pet "can make believe" it is eating oysters (285). With a democratic gesture of infantile imaginativeness, even animals are attributed the gift of gustatory fantasizing.

A memetic marker of Alice's dinner party, the final Looking Glass Feast is the gaping mouth. The mouth is an orifice connected to devouring, then digesting, and defecation, as well as rebelliously speaking back, singing, and laughing is the embodied metaphor of carnivalesque subversion in Mikhail Bakhtin's cultural historical analysis of medieval festivities' earthly stagings of cosmic merriment. Curiously, we find traces of the carnival festivities' low-cultural transgressive tradition in Carroll's fantasy narrative targeting an

educated bourgeois readership.

However, the recurring references to eating, hunger, and starvation in the *Alice* books also hold specifically Victorian cultural implications and attest Carroll's scientific curiosity: they symptomatically indicate the interest in the Darwinian theory by staging the relativization of our position on the food chain, the possibilities of alternately becoming predator or prey throughout the struggle for the survival of the fittest. Already during her fall down the rabbit hole, Alice speculates if "cats eat bats or bats eat cat" (14) and hence playfully introduces the dilemma caused by the perplexing multifunctionality of the animal ambiguously positioned in the human world both as food, pet, predator, trophy, alternately demonized, bestialized, or anthropomorphized. Alice is frightened by the Cheshire Cat's sharp claws and big teeth, but she also enjoys pretending that she is a hungry hyena, and her nurse is a bone she will eat. Thus, the fear of being eaten and the desire to devour are immediately intertwined with one another in her childish games (see Lovell-Smith; Kérchy).

Edibles in Wonderland also reflect the era's increased interest in children's relation to food: these range from egalitarian political concerns about working class youngster's rights for proper alimentation, and medical examinations of a healthy diet,[6] or psychological anamnesis of gluttonous and picky eaters,[7] to the association of infantile imaginative agency and "the utter trust only children have" (Carroll 1887, 223) with daring culinary endeavors – exemplified by Alice's readiness to drink a bottle of unidentifiable liquid and her fantasmatic analytics in describing its curious taste. On the other hand, Alice's wondering about whether the DRINK ME bottle's contents are dangerous illustrates how Carroll's novel records the anxieties concerning food adulteration that became a public health concern of the 1850s' lived realities. As Anthony Wohl puts it, the list of poisonous additives in regular Victorian food items "reads like the stock list of some mad and malevolent chemist," ranging from strychnine in beer, copper in bread, lead chromate in mustard, lime sulphate of iron in tea, and chalk in milk to mercury in confectionary and bedbugs, lice, doghair and cocci bacilli in ice cream (53). These unwanted ingredients are represented in *Wonderland* by the Duchess's cook contaminating her dishes with sneeze-inducing, bitter ground pepper. As a *Punch* magazine's caricature attests, even a single

Fig. 1

Punch Magazine: A drop of Thames water, 1850

drop of London water was believed to abound in bacteria and parasites (fig. 1) – a whole microcosm of monstrosities perceived only by the curious scientific gaze peeping through the microscope to discover a wonderland of oddities invisible to the naked eye and consumed on a daily basis (see Seibold-Bultmann).

Contemporary readers are likely to associate Alice's appetites with further intriguing connotations. Here, I wish to provide just a small appetizer to the rich variety of critical approaches which attempt to make sense of food, eating, and orality in the Alice tales. While Björn Sundmark (1999) has convincingly demonstrated that the oral performance of songs, rhymes, and tales embedded within Alice's stories indicate the Carrollian narrative's indebtedness to the oral storytelling tradition, the psychoanalytically motivated interpretations argue that omnivorous delights belong to the oral phase of the Freudian account of human psychosexual development where the mouth of the infant is her primary erotogenic zone, and the urge to consume the world is a basic libidinal drive foundational of the ego's constitution through its social repression (see Schilder). Apart from contrasting the biologically innate, evolutionary imprinted versus the culturally conditioned nature of taste, the Western aesthetical tradition metaphorically connects the critical appreciation of Arts and Nature to the gustatory experience of "fine taste." Still other philosophical readings, comment on the ethics of eating well, like Jacques Derrida, who argues for the human species' moral obligation towards the more vulnerable lifeforms it feeds on and relates table manners to the imperative to respect differences by learning to distinguish between trophy and food.

The philosophical interest of linguists in the difficulty of verbalizing sense impressions concerning odors, flavors, and textures (to make words mean what we want them to, as Humpty Dumpty claimed), highlights how Alice's description of the DRINK ME potion's taste reminds of a sommelier's "aesthetic evaluation based upon fanciful associations" (Sweeney 29). As Kevin Sweeney contends, the specialized vocabulary in wine reviews – a hybrid discourse that mingles scientific *terminus technicus* (oxidation, sulfide, acetonic) with poetic metaphors (mousy, rotunde, airy) and neologisms (cinchonous, cherish, peely, tautening) – largely relies on imaginative associations, the defamiliarization of the familiar, and the creative wording of sensual-corporeal intensities, just like literary nonsense does. This whimsical mode of gustatory writing pleases the taste buds of language-erudite (sophisticated fans of wines/haute cuisine) and language-gamers (curious, omnivore, orally fixated childish consumers) alike. The resulting ambiguous effect evokes how Carrollian nonsense delights both readers interested in the self-reflective metalinguistic and the sensorially stimulating, transverbal, acoustic dimensions of signification.

Alice's Culinary Nonsense and Transmedia Storytelling

Culinary translations of literary nonsense take a wide variety of forms throughout

transmedia storytelling practices whereby the easily recognizable, canonical fictional universe of Wonderland expands beyond the pages of the print and paper book, and through media transitions is adapted into different cultural entertainment forms – film, puppet play, computer game, graphic novel, theme park attraction, cookbook, and so forth – which enter into dialogue with one another to enhance the source-text with new multimodal/multisensory experience (see Jenkins; Kérchy). We can talk about transmediation with a culinary metaphor: the source-text can be regarded as a recipe that includes a list of ingredients and instructions about the preparation of dish, but this recipe can be realized in individual ways. There is place for improvisation, deviation, creativity, a pinch of this can be added, a constituent ignored or replaced, and the outcome will never be fully identical with the original authorial intention. As Angela Carter, a veritable master of postmodern rewritings and an expert in the "demythologizing business" put it with a culinary metaphor: "There is no definite recipe for potato soup. This is how *I* make potato soup" (10).

If language games seem untranslatable to non-verbal media, how can the sensorially stimulating oral/acoustic energies of literary nonsense be still remediated into other artforms? Nonsense literature invites us to feel the taste of words, but remediations continue teasing our tastebuds in inventive new ways: Tim Burton's cinematic Wonderland foregrounds food as simulated spectacle, Jan Švankmajer's surrealist puppetry plays with tactile impressions and haptic visuality synesthetically connected to gustatory experience, the cookbook adventure *Alice Eats Wonderland* presents a faux food history fantasized by a voracious child, while masterchef Heston Blumenthal transforms nonsense into a stunning culinary *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total work of art"). In the following sections, I offer a brief comparative analysis of transmediations of Wonderland food in these artworks moving from the least complex towards more challenging adaptations.

Tim Burton's 2010 3D CGI cinematic adventure movie *Alice in Wonderland* has often been criticized for radically deviating from the original non-moralizing, non-teleological nonsensical agenda by transforming Carroll's dream vision into a coming-of-age fantasy that communicates a postmillennial feminist message while simplifying original ambiguities to fairy tales' dialectics: the Jeanne-d'Arc-like action heroine saves Underland by slaying the queen's evil dragon, and flees the Victorian marriage market to sail away towards mysterious Oriental seas in search of new adventures. The movie omits most of the trademark language games but recreates in another medium the defamiliarization effect of Carrollian nonsense discourse. By courtesy of the 3D CGI technology a hyperrealistic replica of 'what has never been' creates life-like, nearly tangible beasts, and distorts in uncanny ways familiar features of star actors. Burton recreates nonsense's humorous surprise effects by visually staging the self-contradictory meanings generated by parody, pastiche, a hybrid ambiguity of the familiar and the unfamiliar. This process is

particularly interesting when the intermedial shift (from verbal to visual) is combined with an intersensorial translation (of flavor into image/text).

In Burton's film the EAT me! cake and DRINK me! potion gain nonsensical names: they are called Upelkuchen and Pishsalver respectively. Hence their meanings are simultaneously fixed and destabilized: instead of things without names, they become names without things, referent-less signifiers where curious neologisms of nonsense words have no real-life referents. While in Carroll, the origins of these food/drink items remain unknown, in the movie it is the White Queen who prepares the potion to help gigantic Alice regain her normal size.

Fig. 2

The White Queen (Anne Hathaway) making a magic potion for Alice

The White Queen is the rightful heir removed from her reign by her evil sister the Red Queen; she is a good monarch beloved by her subjects who assist her in reclaiming her throne. Dressed in an all-white dress, with white hair, in a white castle she resembles a fairy-figure, yet the immaculate purity of her radiant whiteness is contrasted by the disgusting, dirty, abject ingredients of her spectacular potion recipe she is describing as "a pinch of worm fat, urine of a horsefly, buttered fingers, three coins from a dead man's pocket, and two teaspoons of wishful thinking." The recipe reaches the peak of abjection when, as a final ingredient, she spits her own saliva in the potion and offers it to drink for Alice with a gentle smile.[8]

Burton cunningly plays with weaving a parodic web of intertextual references: the Queen's kitchen recalls a fairy-tale castle, an alchemist laboratory, and a perfume factory. Her graceful dancing movements provide a tongue-in-cheek reenactment of Disney princesses' recherché fragile femininity's mannerisms. But they also mockingly evoke

female cooking show hosts' television performances, which associate culinary feats with both a commodified version of old-school domestic femininity and creative, rebellious feminist empowerment. The White Queen seems like a fantasy-version of Nigella Lawson, the sexy celebrity star chef, mocking her epitaph of the "queen of food porn" by turning the sensual excitement of culinary degustation from delight to disgust. The taste of the potions surpasses and challenges the five taste modalities – sweet, sour, salty, bitter, savory – by blurring referential meanings with metaphorical and abstract ones. The Queen's cooking performance combines food magic with word magic. Gastronomical nonsense is created by making-up a taste that resists representability and imaginability.

Jan Švankmajer's stop-motion animation *Alice* (1987) adaptation takes menacing meals to surrealist extremes. A leader of the Czech neo-surrealist movement, Švankmajer is interested in nonsense fantasies' breaking of bodily boundaries, transgressing limits of language, and experimenting with sensorial stimuli. His animated films are renowned for their tactile dimensions. "Heads devour one another in devastating conversations, objects collide painfully with mismatched intentions, lovers' bodies melt into one in tender embrace," as Cathryn Vasseleu puts it. He combines audiovisual sensations with tactile stimuli, permeating tactile visuality with gustatory impressions. This multisensorial agenda is encapsulated in his *ars poetica*: "I am a hand with six fingers with webs in between. Instead of fingernails I have petite, sharp, sweet-toothed little tongues with which I lick the world" (Vasseleu 91).

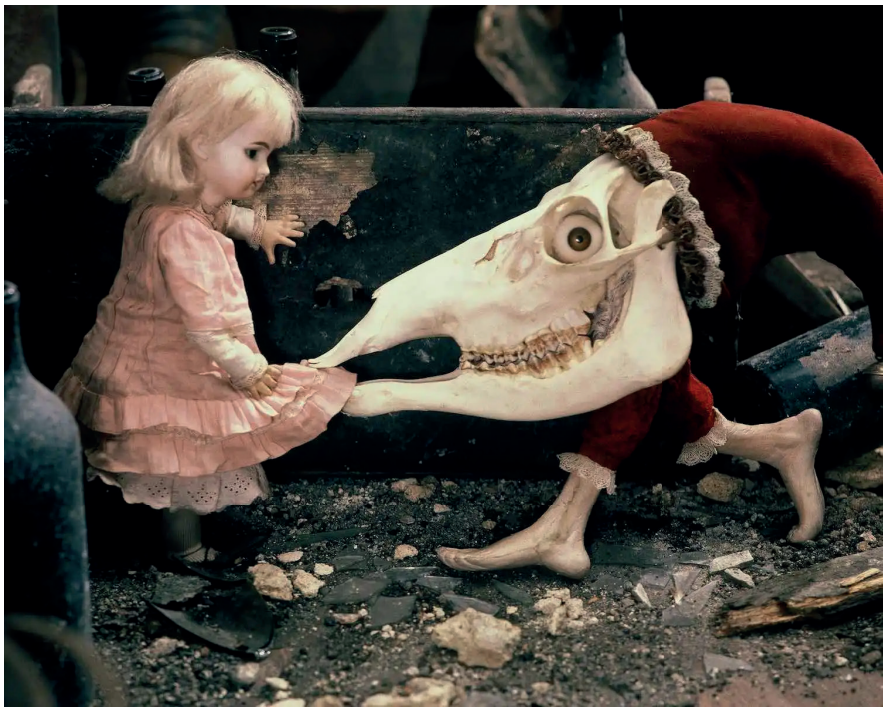

Fig. 3

Jan Švankmajer's stop-motion animation *Alice* (1987).

His adaptation of Carroll's classic, a combination of stop-motion puppetry and live action shots holds metamedial implications: it begins with a close-up on Alice's lips uttering "Alice thought to herself…. Now, you will see a film made for children perhaps. But I almost forgot, you must close your eyes, otherwise you won't see anything". This insistence on orality predominating visuality is enhanced by the camera's browsing through a random collection of Alice's treasure trove of worthless object: buttons, dead bugs, apple cores, a wooden mushroom, needles, pins, shells, pebbles, and dismembered doll heads. Waste residue becomes the protagonists of the movie as non-edible things are offered to be tasted to evoke the "decay at the heart of Wonderland" (Cherry) and mock the 'bad taste' of the cineaste's provocative anti-aesthetics. Švankmajer alienates us from our customary numbness, arouses our curiosity, to bring us closer to the child's intense way of communicating with the world conceived as an infinite playground plentiful of surprises.

Food ceases to be boring alimentation and is rather used for absurd or monstrous ends. Alice throws pebbles in her teacup instead of drinking. The white rabbit behaves in a masochistic cannibalistic manner: transformed into a taxidermized object, it stages the animation of the inanimate when it cuts open its own belly with huge scissors and feeds on the sawdust pouring out from its insides. Alice tastes her own bodily fluids: on pricking her finger she licks off her blood, then gulps from her pool of tears. Instances of disembodiment, abjectification and mutilation occur in a disturbing sequence of images: Alice drinks ink to shrink into a tiny puppet replica of herself, animal skulls wearing jester hats persecute her trying to devour her miniaturized body mistaken for meat, and when she finally grows up again a rat makes campfire on the top of her head to cook his meal in a cauldron placed on the tripod of sticks he hammered into her skull before he sets her hair on fire. Objects come alive to feed on each other, as hungry shoes chase socks and bite them, or tongues separated from bodies lick scratchy, thorny, sharp, dusty surfaces. Food is associated with violent corporeal impressions: Alice sticking her finger into an orange marmalade jar filled with nails provokes in spectators a gut reaction of food horror and a sense of extreme vulnerability.

These shots offer par-excellence examples for Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. They stage a crisis of the self, a violation of the bodily boundaries, and a return of the repressed psychic contents. As the nauseously un-eatables are consumed, the eaten turns against the eater, and the human flesh is reduced to meat, the aggressive and libidinal impulses, unspeakable dreads, desires and anxieties surface. The disturbing confrontation with the taboo aspects of corporeality contributes to the destabilization of the socially solidified, sanitized speaking subject. The recurring close-ups on Alice mouth focus on her lips, teeth, and tongue – body parts connecting bodily inside and outside, creating spatial and temporal confusion, opening up cavities which are associated in the Bakhtinian theory of

heteroglossia with carnivalesque rebellion (metonymically marked by the crying, yawning, shouting, singing, biting, devouring, munching, kissing mouth). They allow a peep into the dark depths of meaning, while associating storytelling with gustatory experience, getting a troubling *taste* of the sound of words, of unintended meanings, unconscious subtexts, accidental discursive byproducts of sleep talking, slips of the tongue, glossolalia of baby language, and speaking in tongues, or delusionary gibberish.

Švankmajer's art provides a political commentary on regimes of oppression in gleefully absurd or nightmarishly grotesque filmic fantasies which are difficult to comprehend yet were still censored at the time of their making for their anti-Stalinist message. His surrealist visions of "food turning against its eater" rebel against the social realist propaganda art to ruthlessly criticize the rigid communist system of the 1980s' Czechoslovakia that "devoured" differences stigmatized as deviant by the ruling party. His thematization of the revengeful return of the "undigestable" coincides with the celebration of children's curious appetites – the spontaneous desire to lick, slurp, and nibble – as a token of daring, empathic openness towards the wondrous diversity of being.

August Imholtz's and Alison Tannenbaum's *Alice Eats Wonderland: An Irreverent Annotated Cookbook Adventure in which a Gluttonous Alice Devours Many of the Wonderland Characters* shares a sense of dark humor with Švankmajer. In this book childish insatiable voraciousness is a decisive character-feature of a predatory yet naively innocent Alice whose hunger motivates all her actions. Right at the beginning of the storybook-turned-cookbook, she abandons the pursuit of the rabbit to rush home and get a snack; and after gulping down the all too tiny EAT ME cake, she yearns for more. Her journey is all about her seeking something to eat. She is experimenting with Victorian recipes and fantasizes about the meals she could prepare practically from all the Wonderland inhabitants whom she encounters throughout her dream voyage. It seems as if the cookbook Alice wanted to compensate for her having been too often denied the simple joys of eating and the pleasurable satisfaction of hunger in Carroll's original novels.

Alice dreams of Mumbled Rabbit, Pickled Oysters, Pigeon Pie, Stuffed Dormouse, Gypsy-Style Roast Hotchi-Wichi (the latter made from a hedgehog stolen from the Queen's croquet ground). The preparation of these meals is introduced to the readers in archaic recipes. Alice's thoughts are playfully associative and increasingly ravenous: cutting her finger with a knife while preparing the currant cakes reminds her of the recipe her grandmother had used for blood pudding. She does not shy away from toying with the idea of cooking the anthropomorphic creatures of Wonderland, considering how she could transform into a dish the baby turned pig, or bake a King Cake and Queen Cake, too. Her imagination runs wild towards nonsensical vistas of weird gustative blends, coining culinary portmanteau, pondering how "She heard of an elegant poultry dish called TurDuckEn, which consisted of a stuffed boned chicken inside a boned duck, inside

a boned turkey, all roasted together. It would be a little complicated but perhaps she could do something similar with the species at hand, the dodo, the duck, and the mouse, and perhaps create a DoDuckMus?" (23)

In her cookbook adventure, the recipes' instructions are complemented by annotations on the natural and social history of the animals, food ingredients and culturally specific culinary practices thematized by Carroll. We learn about myths associated with the curative powers of treacle wells, Victorian butchers' techniques for dissecting meat, the chemical composition of black pepper, as well as the anatomical components of the human heart. All mix with historical recipes to reach fantastic gustatory registers (Pig Uterus Sausage from Ancient Rome, Roman Roast Flamingo, with the original recipe in Latin), exotic delicacies from international cuisine (Silkworm Omelet from China, Iguana Tamales from El Salvador) and British national meals which might surprise American target audiences (marmite soldiers). Like the DRINK ME potion blending incompatible flavors, *Alice Eats Wonderland* presents a curious international composite of odd bites from a variety of different fields.

Spilling way beyond the page of the book, the experimental culinary art-project of transforming eating into a surprising adventure is the aim of British celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal. He is a pioneer of multisensory cooking, food pairing and flavor encapsulation, an advocate of a new scientific attitude to cuisine called "molecular gastronomy." He unsettles established alimentary habits "to realize the full expressive potential of food and cooking" as a "comprehensive performative art" combining the finest ingredients, fantastic design, and historical tradition with cutting-edge scientific innovations, and (retro)futuristic "techniques, appliances, information, and ideas" (Blumenthal). His revolutionary agenda is reflected in the titles of his TV programs *Kitchen Chemistry* (2002), *Adventures in Search of Perfection* (2004-2007), *Heston's Feasts* (2010), *Heston's Mission Impossible* (2011), or *Heston's Fantastical Food* (2012).

Blumenthal's imaginativeness earned him the label "the Lewis Carroll of cooking whose snail porridge and egg and bacon ice-cream lured a skeptical public through a door into a Wonderland of fantasy food" (Gerard). His show *Heston's Feasts* recreated famous Victorian period dishes for a 21st century banquet, paying a tribute to the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. The master chef's mission combined myth, science, and history to create a multisensory food adventure.

Blumenthal's Wonderland menu opened with an aperitif served in flamingo-shaped glasses, a DRINK ME potion that combined the five incongruent flavors of Alice's original drink in a layered way so that guests could never find out what they were drinking because with each new sip they reached a new layer, a different taste of the all too complex gustatory experience. The Mock Turtle Soup was served in a china cup with a watch-shaped, ticking "tea bag" – that actually comprised consommé (beef broth from a cow's

head) covered in golden leaf – that dissolved into soup under a cascade of hot water, and had to be poured into a bowl where turnip mousse mimicking an egg, a terrine of pressed, cured pork fat and oxtail, and enoki mushroom were arranged in homage of Wonderland's hookah-smoking caterpillar. An Edible Insect Garden gained inspiration from a Victorian cookbook for the poor to turn creepy crawlies into a feast and included undersoil made of bread, anchovies, and chopped herbs; soil made out of grape nuts, pumpkin seeds and black olives; a gravel path made of fried eel, tapioca, and waffle cones, baby vegetables, potato pebbles, and fried insects – silk moth pupa, crickets and grasshoppers – injected with onion cream and tomato concentrate "to give a realistic ooze when bitten into." The dessert was an absinthe-based jello with a giant wobbling fluorescent centerpiece powered by vibrators Victorians invented for the therapeutical treatment of hysteric women.

Blumenthal's new cuisine aims to combine taste, smell, spectacle, and sound to transport the diner, through an integrated appeal to the senses and the mind, to another world. His meals exercise imaginative faculties and invite to reconsider preconceptions and initial meanings for the sake of entertaining ambiguities. Food is made to look and to taste different, it calls forth fanciful idiosyncratic associations, memorial/fantasmatic agency, and sensorial delights. Eating turns into a magical experience, a real fall down the rabbit hole, evoking the dreamy feel of transformation. This new post-postmodern culinary art combines skills of scientists, food chemists, psychologists, artisans, performing artists, architects, designers, and industrial engineers to produce a multimodal adaptation of Wonderland as a *Gesamkunstwerk*. It pays a genuine homage to the gourmandise of Alice's "discriminating palate" (Sweeney 17) distinguished by a spontaneously 'acquired taste' that can differentiate between distinct layers of flavors and appreciate radically unfamiliar gustatory sensations which are first considered unpleasant by most and usually need substantial exposure to learn to enjoy. Through a curious feat of culinary transmediation, the surprise effect caused by the strangely uncategorizable taste is reminiscent of nonsense language games' strategic destabilization of endlessly proliferating meanings.

In Place of a Conclusion

Lewis Carroll's original nonsensical storyworld is distinguished by a unique interactive quality that invites readers to fill in narrative gaps with their own meanings. The appeal to audience participation prevails particularly strongly in contemporary transmedia adaptations of the Wonderland franchise designed for children: the Mad Tea Party spinning teacups family ride in Disneyland theme parks, the Alice's Wonderland Bakery computer game, a spin-off to the animated television series created for Disney Junior (2022-24), the Cooking Wonderland chef play, or the numerous useful online tips and hints on how to host an Alice in Wonderland Tea Party with mismatched teacups, minuscule desserts, DIY decorations and surprising combinations of flavors all urge readers turned players

to try theirs hands at 'making potato soup' to their own liking, to return to our earlier culinary metaphor. These programs offer an immersive experience: their pro-baking message represents the kitchen as a site of creative play, cooking and eating as means of intergenerational bonding, and – as blogger GeekMom puts it – they "celebrate diversity through the use of food to highlight culture, collaboration, and the value of community" (2023). Unlike the Red Queen in Carroll's Wonderland, today no one complains any longer about who stole the tarts, because the point of culinary artistic edutainment is to show that the true joy of food resides in preparing it in as many inventive ways and sharing it with as many people as imaginable.

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Notes

[1] Here the term "memetic" refers to meme-like reproduction, or spreading, of an idea, based on Jack Zipes's argument that fairy tales are like memes: units of knowledge culturally repeated, transmitted and co-evolving with humanity (5-16).

[2] Alice is the epitome of the bold gourmet reader: "I know *something* interesting is sure to happen," she said to herself, "whenever I eat or drink anything; so I'll just see what this bottle does" (Carroll 39).

[3] For example, the poem "Jabberwocky" abounds in portmanteaus. Slithy toves are both lithe and slimy, the furious Bandersnatch both fuming and furious, and "brillig means four o'clock in the afternoon, the time when you begin broiling things for dinner." Humpty Dumpty's explanation in this latter definition is hilarious because its confident matter-of-fact tone disregards the ambiguity involved in the term, perplexing readers.

[4] As Sianne Ngai convincingly argued, our Western notions of cuteness are deeply asscociated with softness, roundness, the infantile, the feminine and represent an aestheticizing of powerlessness (814). The child figure is an epitome of vulnerability, innocence, sweetness, and helplessness. The 19th century nursery rhyme perfectly illustrates this cultural heritage: "What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice, and Everything nice." Recent cognitive scientific research and consumer habits analysis have agreed that images of cute babies semantically and somatically activate embodied memory traces of sweetness and induce a preference for sweeter food (see Moore et al.).

[5] Adult control appears as a straightforward cannibalistic act in the embedded song about the Walrus and the Carpenter who manipulate the oyster babies to obediently walk onto their plates and into their mouths.

[6] Throughout her adventures Alice is aware that she must eat in order to grow up, but she also pays special attention to the kind of food she is eating. Her distinction between "the right thing to eat" and "the right thing to eat under the given circumstances" sheds light on how certain Victorian social groups had to reconsider their dietary choices because of the shortage of food. "I suppose I ought to eat or drink something or other; but the great question is 'What?'" The great question certainly was "What?" Alice looked all round her at the flowers and the blades of grass, but she could not see anything that looked like the right thing to eat or drink under the circumstances" (Carroll 47). According to Dan Ratner, eating mushroom as a gift from nature or even the very experience of hunger attest the malnutrition the era had to witness and illustrate the author's search for possible ways of saving his starving society. Alice's curiosity about what Looking Glass Insects live on, and the Gnat's confirmation that they must often die because of starvation portray hunger as a universal,

inevitable, global experience (Ratner).

[7] The psychologically ambiguous relation to food is illustrated by Alice's admitting to eating eggs as part of a healthy diet and her being ashamed when the pigeon mistakes her for a serpent because of her egg consumption. Eating eggs even has cannibalistic implications considering that Humpty Dumpty is an anthropomorphic eggman Alice meets beyond the Looking Glass. According to Anna Krugoyov Silver, Alice's shapeshifting body (that is often eating to become smaller) validates the pre-pubescent girl's body over that of the adult woman; Carroll's symbolically arresting the development of her heroine parallels the behavior of the anorexic woman who starves herself in order to forestall sexual maturation (Krugoyov-Silver 1).

[8] Her gesture reminds us of the ambiguous biocultural value of saliva: although it is made up 98% of water and has an essential role in digestion and sensing taste, the spitting of saliva is largely prohibited and tabooed in the name of politeness and sanitary reasons, for fear of repulsion and contamination. Archaic societies however have likely used human saliva to ferment alcoholic drinks (see Kragh-Furbo and Tutton).