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## Carroll: 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'

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Reflections on the various works in the exhibit

## Imprints and Impressions: Milestones in Human Progress

Highlights from the Rose Rare Book Collection, Sept. 29-Nov. 9, 2014

Roesch Library, University of Dayton

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Lewis Carroll

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

- New York, 1969
- Portfolio of illustrations by Salvador Dalí; signed by the artist

In 1969, the work of two artists who died one hundred years apart came together when Maecenas Press—Random House issued Lewis Carroll's famous story published as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with illustrations by surrealist painter Salvador Dalí. The pairing of a nineteenth-century logician's tale of a little girl who wanders down a rabbit hole and a master of twentieth-century modern art might seem, by turns, shocking and a stroke of genius. That is precisely what makes this rare collaboration so remarkable.

What links Carroll and Dalí is their shared fascination with the fantastic, the dream world, and their respective cultures' reliance on space and time to order human experience. What better way to turn staid convention topsy turvy than to envision the world through the imagination of a child? And who better than a surrealist to express the world of unconscious desire, counter logic, and alternate realities that Alice encounters on her journey?

Dalí was not the first surrealist to be attracted to Carroll's oeuvre, nor was he the first to recognize Carroll as a kindred spirit (Schulz 14). In 1936, André Breton observed, "Swift is Surrealist in malice, ... Poe is Surrealist in adventure. ... Carroll is Surrealist in nonsense" (Stern 133).

Dalí's revisionings for *Alice's Adventures* include a four-color etching of Alice as the frontispiece and twelve heliogravures (a photographic engraving process)—one for each chapter. To be sure, many of the familiar characters Alice meets in Wonderland appear in these illustrations—the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, the Mock Turtle, and the Queen of Hearts. And so do many of Dalí's signature touches—a melting watch, butterflies, bifurcated crutches, and objects out of proportion to one another.

Dalí brings Alice's wonder-dream to life while drawing on many of Carroll's narrative tropes. Alice meets a March Hare, a Hatter, and a sleepy Dormouse at "A Mad Tea Party" where it is always teatime and Time controls its own measurement. Dalí

depicts this absurdity by creating a scene in which a tree has grown through the center of a wilting timepiece piece fixed at six o'clock. In her conversation with a hookah-smoking caterpillar, Alice learns she can adjust her size by eating bits of mushroom—from different sides of the plant. Dalí renders the transformations from Alice's point of view by painting two caterpillars—one realistic in green, the other gargantuan in electric blue, yellow, and red. The juxtaposition of the two caterpillars allows the viewer to experience the natural and phantasmic worlds co-existing on the same plane.

As the central character, Alice appears in all thirteen images, consistently portrayed as a small, shadowed figure jumping rope. Her outline—always with the rope raised midair—suggests a capital A. In this way, Dalí captures Alice's experimentation with changing her size while suggesting a child's perspective of an adult world. Dalí's illustrations of Carroll's story remind us of the permeability of boundaries and the riches of imagination.

—Margaret Strain, PhD,  
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### Works Cited

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