OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS Journal of Victorian Culture

Listening to the 'Alice' Books

Journal:	*Journal of Victorian Culture*
Manuscript ID	RJVC-2019-0085.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Lewis Carroll, sound, silence, music, illustration, voice

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Listening to the *Alice* Books

Abstract

Despite the 'acoustic turn' providing 'a corrective to the visualist bias of much scholarship on modern and postmodern culture', the *Alice* books and their author have been almost exclusively seen rather than heard by critics to date. Prompted by a collaboration with composer Paul Rissmann which resulted in a concert suite performed by the London Symphony Orchestra in 2015, in this article I undertake the first detailed exploration of the sonic dimension of these texts. This merits attention not only because of its very emphatic foregrounding within the frame narrative of *Wonderland*, but also because of authorial interests and preoccupations, and the quickly established and still enduring musical afterlife of the books. Although triggered in *Wonderland* by the pastoral and by the sounds of the natural world, a process of translation or transformation renders a very different sonic landscape within the narrative proper. The bucolic frames an often raucous modern core, with Carroll embedding not only catchy anodyne melodies but also the sounds of the everyday and of contemporary industry, transport, and material culture. Attending to the rich and varied soundscape of Carroll's best-known works sheds new light on their widely examined images but also restores a key dimension of the texts, essential to their Victorian reception. The detailed exploration of the full range of sonic phenomena within the works, from music to noise, and spanning both sound and silence, opens up new relationships between Carroll and his Victorian contemporaries, as well as further reinforcing his status as a proto-modernist.

Keywords: Lewis Carroll, sound, music, silence, voice, illustration

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Listening to the *Alice* Books

Don't you wonder sometimes/'Bout sound and vision?
David Bowie, 'Sound and Vision', *Low*, 1977[1]

When, in the final framing section of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Alice's elder sister conjures up mental images of the heroine both as a child and as a grown woman in 'the after-time', the centrality of vision, imagination and picturing to the narrative is sealed. Countless illustrators and artists, from Tenniel onwards, have similarly been prompted to visualise Alice in an endless stream of alternative editions and adaptations. In the latter, visual equivalences are often established between the dreamed world of Wonderland and the 'real' world of the narrative frame. Yet, her eyes closed in sleep, the dreaming heroine technically 'sees' nothing at all, and the connections forged between the two realms by her sister in a key act of translation are in fact sonic. She does not just *see* Alice and the spaces of her adventures, but also *hears* them. Taking in 'the very tones' of Alice's voice, her reconstruction of Wonderland is essentially sound-based, with grass rustling, the mouse splashing, teacups rattling, plates crashing, the pig-baby sneezing, the Gryphon shrieking, a pencil squeaking and a suppressed guinea pig choking.[2]

More elaborate and insistent foregrounding of the sonic is hard to imagine, and would in itself prompt a sustained and comprehensive examination of this dimension of the narrative proper as well as that of the subsequent *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found there* (1871). But the need for such an undertaking is further bolstered not only by the famed oral origins of the narrative, hammered out for the entertainment of the young Liddell sisters over a series of river outings in 1862, but also by hitherto neglected aspects of Carroll's life and approach to his most famous works. As well as having a lifelong interest in music, Carroll was adamant that the melodies he had in mind when writing the intercalated poems and songs of the books should be preserved in their subsequent adaptation to the stage. This is in sharp contrast with his considerably more relaxed approach to other aspects of the staging such as his heroine's appearance. The sonic afterlife of the books also underscores the importance of attending to their rich and varied soundscapes. Read not just silently but out loud, both in informal domestic settings and in public performances and recitations, their specifically musical potential was seized upon rapidly, and well before other adaptations began. William Boyd led the way with his music sheets (largely remembered now because they feature one of the earliest colourized versions of

[1] I am extremely grateful to the anonymous reviewer whose insightful comments helped strengthen this article. I would also like to thank my colleagues at Queen Mary University of London and in particular Will McMorran who read several iterations with his usual patience and perspicacity.
[2] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, ed. by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 131. All subsequent references to the written text of *Alice's Adventures* and to *Through the Looking-Glass* are to this edition, and are included in the main body of the article, identified by a W or LG preceding the page number.

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Tenniel's illustrations), published as early as 1870. To a much greater extent than other classic children's works of the period by the likes of Charles Kingsley and George MacDonald, which also combine illustration, verse and song, the *Alice* books have consistently inspired a vast array of musicians and composers.[3] The present article arises in large part from a collaboration with composer Paul Rissmann who created a concert suite based upon the refrains of a particular nineteenth-century music sheet, the arrangement of which enabled insight into how Victorians heard some of Carroll's key characters.[4] That project responded to John Picker's call for scholars to understand how the Victorians heard as well as saw themselves. [5] Rissmann's desire to pinpoint sounds within the narrative so as to incorporate them within his own music served as the catalyst to the approach adopted here, which listens as (much as) it reads.

Picker has been at the forefront of increased scholarly attentiveness to what he refers to as the 'varied and vast' Victorian soundscape.[6] This was, he argues, not only a period in which 'the gaze acquired a new degree of importance' but also one which 'experienced a rise in close listening.'[7] Thanks to scientific and technological developments, formerly inaudible sounds emerged in highly suggestive, inspirational ways, for the first time. The speculations such as those of physicist William Hyde Wollaston, that 'a secret realm of sound might be lurking behind the everyday soundscape and that it might reveal alternate "modes of existence"' were grist to the mill of a vast range of Victorian writers.[8] In a masterly study which takes in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sam Halliday argues for the co-existence and interdependence of 'visual,' 'verbal,' and 'sounded' 'cultures of sound', bringing literature firmly within the purview of sound studies.[9] Like bodies in the nineteenth century, books are increasingly being recognized as being 'alive with sound'.[10] A number of scholars following the cues of Picker, Halliday and others, have shown how Victorian literature both 'absorbed' and contributed to 'auditory culture',[11] with attention increasingly paid not only to the music which has formed the backbone of traditional comparative literary and intermedial approaches, but also to a much broader and more varied spectrum of sound.

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[3] Anna Kérchy, *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland: Curiouser and Curiouser New Forms of a Children's Classic* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), pp. 199-206, 226-27; Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History* (Farnham/Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 220-24.
[4] Paul Rissmann, 'Wonderland Suite' (2015) <https://soundcloud.com/paul-rissmann/sets/wonderland-suite> [accessed 22 September 2019]. Arthur Cleveland, *Wonderland Quadrille on Original Subjects suggested by Alice's Adventures Behind the Looking-Glass for pianoforte* (London: Lamborn Cock).
[5] John M Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 11.
[6] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 4.
[7] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 6.
[8] Kristie A. Schlauraff, 'Victorian gothic soundscapes', *Literature Compass*, 15.4 (Apr 2018), 1-11 (p. 2).
[9] Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2013), p. 3.
[10] W. H. Preece, quoted in Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 4.
[11] Schlauraff, 'Victorian gothic soundscapes', p. 4.

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Yet despite what has been referred to as an 'acoustic turn' providing 'a corrective to the visualist bias of much scholarship on modern and postmodern culture', the *Alice* books and their author have been much more readily seen than heard by critics to date.[12] To be sure, inherently sonic aspects of the language of these texts – their wordplay, parody, oral genesis, narrative stance, and interactivity – have all been widely examined. Yet the author and his best-known works are still much more readily associated with image than with sound. Extensive interest in the author's highly acclaimed photographic output fosters an impression of Carroll as an accomplished conjuror of still, soundless images. By contrast, there is to date only one short published piece on Carroll's musical interests and undertakings.[13] With respect to the *Alice* books specifically, scholars have repeatedly pored over their many sets of illustrations, and especially those of Tenniel, as is reflected in, and perpetuated by, critical apparatuses. While Martin Gardner's go-to *Annotated Alice* not only cites Quinten Massys's 'Ugly Duchess' as a source for Tenniel but reproduces it in the margins, there is no such treatment of the songs carefully embedded within the narrative. And whereas critics (myself included) have been at pains to underline the role of the images to supplement the details Carroll does not include in the written text, there seems to have been an almost wilful failure to attend to the extensive and meticulous detailing of intonation, timbre, delivery, and pitch that he does, very abundantly, provide.

Some work nevertheless provides a useful starting point for moving beyond the ocularcentrism which has characterised Carrollian scholarship to date. Alexandre Révérend's 'Lewis Carroll et la musique' website constitutes a precious, if dated and not comprehensive, resource, offering as it does recordings of nineteenth-century musical adaptations of the songs and poems embedded within the *Alice* books.[14] More recently, in his short monograph, Richard Elliott examines the 'noisy writing' of Carroll alongside that of Lear and Joyce, probing the role of sound in the operation of nonsense and in the demarcation of realms of consciousness.[15] Meanwhile, Anna Kérchy's 'The Acoustics of Nonsense in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Tales' provides a still more detailed exploration of language and wordplay in relation to sound.[16] But no critical work to date has ventured far beyond language or considered sound and music in relation to the *Alice* books *together*. Nor have their silences – which have been key to reflexions on, and renditions of, sound from Aristotle onwards –[17] been adequately acknowledged. Through its exploration of the music and noise, the sound and silences of the *Alice* books, whose 'total performance' depends on much more than the widely understood interrelation of text and image,[18] this article sets out to restore a key dimension of

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[12] Philipp Schweighauser, 'Literary Acoustics', in *The Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, ed. by Gabriele Ripp (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 475-93 (p. 476).
[13] Donald B. Eperson, 'No Ear For Music?', *The Carrollian*, 7 (Spring 2001), 3-8.
[14] Alexandre Révérend, 'Lewis Carroll et la musique' < http://areverend.free.fr/lesite/carroll/index.html> [accessed 19 September 2019]
[15] Richard Elliott, *The Sound of Nonsense* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 1, 24-8.
[16] Anna Kérchy's 'The Acoustics of Nonsense in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Tales', *International Research in Children's Literature*, 13: 1 supplementary issue (2020), pp. 175-90.
[17] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 21.
[18] Richard Kelly, ''If you don't know what a Gryphon is': Text and Illustration in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*', in *Lewis Carroll, A Celebration: Essays on the Occasion of the Birth of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*, ed. by Edward Guiliano (New York: Potter, 1976), pp. 62-74 (p. 62).

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the texts which was readily apparent to a Victorian audience. Moreover, close attention to sound (and silence) actually helps us see their celebrated images afresh. Periodic comparison with key contemporary works by Charles Kingsley (*The Water Babies*, 1863) and George MacDonald (*At the Back of the North Wind*, 1871) which, as noted above, are akin to the *Alice* books in their intercalation of images, verse and song within the surrounding prose, serves to underscore Carroll's particular achievements and innovations in this regard.

1. The Sense-Scape of the *Alice* Books

Originating in Antiquity, rankings of the senses remained 'a mainstay of much subsequent commentary' on the subject until at least the early nineteenth century.[19] Within the *Alice* books, the different senses hold varying levels of importance and can be similarly hierarchised. Thus, despite the prominence of gardens and flowers, readily associated not just with pleasing sights but sweet smells, the place of the olfactory is negligible at best. And although critics have made much of the role of food in the books, taste sensations are actually detailed only twice, albeit memorably in the case of the first shape-altering liquid imbibed, with its 'sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast' (W, 17). Few, on the other hand, would notice, let alone remember, the intensely dry biscuit the Red Queen forces Alice to eat or the sensation of choking it triggers (LG, 175). Here, the emphasis is on how the biscuit *feels* rather than how it tastes, and physical sensation and touch do feature slightly more prominently than either smell or taste, especially in *Looking-Glass*. In the first book, physical contact between characters is rare, and although Alice holds various things, we rarely know what they feel like: a slippery table leg (W, 18), and the Duchess's sharp chin (W, 95) are the notable exceptions. In *Looking-Glass*, however, in accordance with the chess conceit which underpins Alice's progress and the characters she encounters in the narrative proper, handling and physical contact are more important. Indeed, in the opening chapter, Alice manifests herself through touch alone. The White King and Queen can neither see nor hear Alice, but, as she lifts them up, puts them down and dusts them off, they can certainly feel her.

It is the so-called distant, as opposed to proximate, senses of vision and hearing which are most closely and frequently delineated throughout the two works. Alice is under constant scrutiny in terms of her behaviour and physical appearance. The title of the second book of course foregrounds the visual, and in chapter five of that volume, in the scene which takes place in 'a little dark shop' (LG, 210), the focus is very much on looking at things, which here have the particularity of moving when they come under inspection. Moreover, in line with Halliday's observation that sound is 'not opposed to but harnessed with and ratcheted up by other forms of sensation' in literary works, seeing and hearing often work in tandem in the *Alice* books.[20] These two prime senses are repeatedly shown in conjunction and are, as Halliday remarks of Proust's *À la recherche*, 'cooperative

[19] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 22.
[20] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 30.

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and complementary'.[21] As discussed in the opening of this article, Alice's sister both sees and hears the heroine in the imaginative recapitulation and projection of the frame narrative. Similarly, although less widely remarked upon, Alice is herself regularly engaged in close viewing *and* active listening. An attentive listener, she possesses what Schlauraff, via Picker, refers to as an important navigational skill of the Victorian age.[22] On the strength of a single hearing, Alice is able to recall and repeat part of Humpty Dumpty's verse in her subsequent discussions with the two Queens some three chapters and two chess moves later (LG, 269). Anticipating and embodying the '[e]ager eye and willing ear' of the very final epilogue poem, Alice simultaneously looks on and listens as the White Knight sings: 'all this she took in like a picture, as, with one hand shading her eyes, she leant against a tree, watching the strange pair, and listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song' (LG, 256).

Alice is, of course, a child desirous of 'pictures *and* conversations' in her own reading matter, and the texts in which she herself exists amply deliver both. Although Humpty Dumpty questions the possibility of visualising song ('‘If you can *see* whether I'm singing or not, you've sharper eyes than most' (LG, 228)), the texts nevertheless endeavour to render sound and its effects visible in different ways via illustration, typography, and page layout. Tenniel shows several characters in the process of generating sound or responding to it. The White Rabbit, for instance is shown both in disarray crashing into the cucumber frame (AAIW48),[23] and, as a much more composed courtier, issuing three blasts on the trumpet to initiate the trial proceedings (AAIW166). In the second book, an eery, flat, pattern-rich image, corresponding to the sonic dimension of the nursery rhyme which the narrative is literalising, shows Alice covering her ears from the 'dreadful uproar' of the surrounding drums (TTLG156).

[Figure 1: John Tenniel, 'Alice putting her hands over her ears', *Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 243 (TTLG156).]

Elsewhere, with mouths wide open, characters are captured in the ungainly sonic acts of singing (AAIW103), bellowing (AAIW117, TTLG133), howling (AAIW81), or snoring (TTLG80, TTLG198). An absence of sound can be similarly rendered: the White King was 'far too much astonished to cry out, but his eyes and his mouth went on getting larger and larger; and rounder and rounder' (TTLG17; LG, 152-3). The similarity of the orientation, expression, and positioning of hands in the images of howling baby and dumbstruck king suggests that Tenniel reworked the one in the creation of the other. Attending to sound reveals the previously unregistered visual connection between the seemingly diametrically opposed noisy infant, on the one hand, and silent grown up, on the other.

[21] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 7.
[22] Schlauraff, 'Victorian gothic soundscapes', p. 7.
[23] Here and throughout Tenniel illustrations are referred to according to the Lastoria system. See Amanda Lastoria, 'Lastoria List of Titles for Tenniel's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* Illustrations', *The Carrollian*, 26 (2010), 43-51; 'Lastoria List of Titles for Tenniel's *Through the Looking-Glass* Illustrations', *The Carrollian*, 29 (2017), 60-68.

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[Figure 2: John Tenniel, 'Hatter singing', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 76 (AAIW103).]

[Figure 3: John Tenniel, detail from 'Queen of Hearts pointing at Alice', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 86 (AAIW117).]

[Figure 4: John Tenniel, 'Humpty Dumpty sending a message', *Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 230 (TTLG133).]

[Figure 5: John Tenniel, detail from 'Duchess nursing the baby', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 62 (AAIW81).]

[Figure 6: John Tenniel, detail from 'Alice picking up White King', p. 152 (TTLG17).]

Sound can be depicted in other interesting ways in these texts. In the case of the Mouse in the first book, the act of speech is marked not by an open mouth but by gesture and posture (AAIW29). Here, the reader has access to two versions of the same moment: Tenniel's illustration shows the speaker and his audience, whilst the typographical layout shows the sinuous formation of the words that Alice, prompted by the tail/tale homonym, sees as she listens. On one occasion, Carroll also avails himself of typography as an index to sound levels: the 'little voice' of the Gnat is rendered in a noticeably smaller font than the speech of his interlocutors and indeed the rest of the text (LG, 180, 181). Sound and vision are thus tightly fused here and in several instances throughout the two books.

Yet as Picker in his discussion of Hermann von Helmholtz and Eliot makes clear, hearing was sometimes elevated to pole position in the sensory rankings of the nineteenth century, and likewise at crucial points in the *Alice* books, it edges out in front of vision.[24] In key scenes, Alice's visual perception is curtailed or severely hampered, her senses limited entirely to what she can hear. Thus, it is too dark for her to see back up into the well down which she has fallen (W, 14) and, having grown exponentially, she cannot properly see her own feet (W, 20) or, later, anything but her serpentine neck (W, 56). When she finds herself wedged embryonically into the White Rabbit's house, hearing is the only sense available to her. We may see the rabbit crashing into the cucumber frame, but Alice can only hear the animals' attempts to oust her. She effectively navigates and interprets the silences, sounds and voices from beyond, defending herself from incursions and eventually freeing herself. Her expert manoeuvres demonstrate that sight is not everything, and that important events may occur and be understood without necessarily being seen. This will eventually be confirmed by the frame narrative, which reveals the same overarching sensory reduction. But rather than curtailing or constricting, this instead seems to serve as creative constraint.

2. Performative Origins and the Place of Music, Song and Recitation within the Books

[24] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, pp. 84-89.

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The images discussed above provide a clear and effective indication of the sheer variety of the soundscape of these books, ranging from melodious song to noisome din, and from loudness to silence. Sound played an important role in both the author's life and the genesis of the books. Music was central to Carroll's social and cultural activities; throughout his life he attended concerts, operas and theatrical performances heavily imbued with music and song. Donald B. Eperson argues that Carroll was far more discriminating than he himself sometimes professed and that by his early twenties he had already 'given considerable thought to the subject of music in general.'[25] References to, and reflexions on, music can be found within both his diaries and published works such as *Sylvie and Bruno*, and it formed an important part of his private exchanges and friendships. Music-related curios were amongst Carroll's extensive and varied repertoire of gifts and modes of entertainment and, as with other facets of surrounding material culture, these could provide grist to the mill of his absurdist humour and whimsy (for instance in an account of an orguinette going backwards and serving to reverse time).[26] Music was regularly performed in the course of his social visits to friends (including the Liddell sisters) and he himself wrote songs, often drawing parodically on existing melodies, for domestic entertainments.

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In 1857 Carroll was elected a member of Oxford's Choral Society, which gave him access to concerts, and it was here that he met the talented singer Robinson Duckworth, who would become a regular member of some of the most famous boating parties in literary history. The oral origins of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are now quasi-legendary but nevertheless worth recalling in the present context. The tale was elaborated over the course of several river outings for the three Liddell sisters conducted by Carroll, often with Duckworth and others in tow, involving singing by adults and children as well as storytelling and general conversation. These were, then, live performances, with the teller able to respond to the responses and interjections of his young, familiar audience. At Alice's behest, Carroll wrote the story down, the originally sung and spoken words becoming the handwritten words of the manuscript and eventually, after small-scale circulation and consultation, the typeset and published words of the books. This was by no means a linear process representing the obliteration of the spoken by the written word, but instead saw a regular to-and-fro between writing and performance (cf the MacDonald family reading it out loud together). Moreover, the final works maintained much of the intimacy, direct address, shared jokes and allusions of the extempore tellings.

That music, song and voices of many descriptions find their way into the *Alice* books is therefore unsurprising. In line with the oneiric framework, the music of the texts is unconventional and fantastical: instruments are noisome rather than musical, while melodious sound and song issues forth from the natural world (LG, 191) or without any discernible source (LG, 273). As we will see, strange things happen to the lyrics of the songs in these books in their passage from the shared world of an initially tight-knit audience into the dream narrative. Because of the absence of notation, and the passage of time, the songs can evaporate altogether.

[25] Eperson, 'No Ear For Music?', p. 4.
[26] Isa Bowman, *Lewis Carroll As I Knew Him* (New York: Dover, 1972 [1899]), pp. 21, 48.

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But as Table 1 makes abundantly clear, Carroll plotted the four songs which feature in the second half of each of the two texts with great care.

Table 1: The Songs of the *Alice* Books

Song	**Location**	**Performer**	**Original poem/rhyme**
Speak roughly to your little boy	AAiW c6	Duchess (with accompaniment by Cook and Baby)	Authorship contested (possibly David Bates), 'Speak Gently'
Twinkle twinkle little bat	AAiW c7	Hatter (opening lines taken up by Dormouse)	Jane Taylor, 'The Star'
Will you walk a little faster?	AAiW c10	Mock Turtle	Mary Howitt, 'The Spider and the Fly'
Beautiful soup	AAiW c10	Mock Turtle	James M. Sayles, 'Star of the Evening'
Here we go round the mulberry bush	TTLG c4	Alice	'Here we go round the mulberry bush'
The White Knight's Song	TTLG c8	White Knight	Parody by Carroll of Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence'
Hush a by lady	TTLG c9	Red Queen	'Hush a by baby'
Queen Alice	TTLG c9	Unidentified (shrill voice and chorus)	Sir Walter Scott, 'Bonny Dundee' from the play *The Doom of Devorgoil*

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As with Tenniel's images, the songs are no mere ornamental flourishes, but intrinsically connected to, and embedded within, the narrative. Thus, characters like the Mock Turtle, the White Knight and Humpty Dumpty feature implicitly or explicitly within the songs. Lyrics can serve to move the action on or otherwise relate to the specific narrative moment in which they occur. The Gryphon and the Mock Turtle sing about a forthcoming dance *as* they dance, and the song heralding the beginning of Queen Alice's party is an invitation to that very event. Several songs have a reflexive quality in that they are about tone of voice and about the act of (distracted) listening. The aged man heard sporadically at best by the White Knight has 'accents mild' (LG, 257) and speech that is 'slow' (LG, 259). In the first book, the Duchess's 'sort of lullaby' (W, 64) is based on a poem all about appropriate demeanour towards others, encapsulated in manner of address and tone of voice. Carroll sweeps away the 'accents soft and mild', low whispers of love, and the kind voice of affection, replacing the desirability of speaking 'gently' with that of speaking 'roughly' and 'severely'. Clashing not only with the poem on which it is based but also the music to which it is sung, the incongruity of the Duchess's 'sort of lullaby' is thus twofold.

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As even the most cursory glance at contemporary children's books makes clear, Carroll was by no means alone in his incorporation of songs within his prose: Kingsley's *Water Babies*, which began publication in the very year of the river outings, begins with a song in each of its first two chapters and continues to feature several more throughout. Likewise, in MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*, song plays an integral role, enabling and forging links to the idyllic otherworld realm at the text's core. Yet in neither work is there much or usually any indication at all as to the music behind these songs, and it is in this regard that Carroll's work differs substantially from that of his peers. We know from his correspondence with the likes of Arthur Sullivan no less, that Carroll had pre-existing tunes in mind for the songs of the *Alice* books.[27] Although specific versions still need to be excavated for some, we can nevertheless be fairly sure of their general nature, based on those we do know (Beautiful Star' and 'Will you walk into my parlour?') and bearing in mind Carroll's general taste in music.[28] In correspondence with stage producer Henry Savile Clarke, he writes of the 'old sweet air' which is the basis of the Mock Turtle's first song. We are not dealing here with the grand or elaborate – what Carroll refers to as 'first rate music' which generates 'a sense of anxiety and labour' – but instead the 'unsatisfactory music' which is more enjoyable and can be taken as it comes.[29] The music of the books is catchy, simple and regular, like the 'words of the old song' which ring through Alice's own head 'like the ticking of a clock' (LG, 189). These are songs familiar to Alice whose schooling, we are told, incorporates music: 'I've heard something like it' she answers when the Hatter enquires whether she knows 'Twinkle, twinkle' (W, 77); and she is well aware that the White Knight's 'tune *isn't* his own invention […] it's '*I give thee all, I can no more*' (LG, 256). Familiar and accessible, the songs could be readily activated by contemporary readers for whom Alice is a surrogate, explaining in part the absence of notation, which would have been superfluous. Printed words are enough to 'trigger the melody of the song […] in the reader's inner ear'.[30] In his first letter to Savile Clarke, Carroll insists repeatedly upon the fact that these are old songs, which thus bring a sense of tradition and timelessness.[31] Alice might be a modern heroine wearing the latest fashions, but she nevertheless moves in a musical realm of venerability. Kingsley also repeatedly alludes to the same simple, archaic tradition in the *Water Babies*, but in marked difference to Carroll, he backs away from musical specifics, claiming that while the words or body of a song can be included, its 'sweet old air' or soul 'alas! one cannot put on paper.'[32] In the *Alice* books, Carroll begs to differ.

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[27] 1 Dec 1871 to William Boyd (*The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, ed. by Morton N. Cohen, 2 vols, (London: Macmillan, 1979) I, p. 168); 5 July 1877 to Arthur Sullivan (*Letters* I, p. 278); 30 Aug 1886 to Henry Savile Clarke (*Letters* II, p. 637), 7 and 28 Nov 1886 to Henry Savile Clarke (quoted in Charlie Lovett, *Alice on the Stage: A History of the Early Theatrical Productions of* Alice in Wonderland (Westport/London: Meckler, 1990), pp. 42, 43.)
[28] Lovett, *Alice on the Stage*, p. 43. Further scholarly efforts are required to establish the specific music Carroll had in mind for the other songs, and to make these accessible to readers today.
[29] *Lewis Carroll's Diaries: The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*, 10 vols, ed. by Edward Wakeling (Luton: Lewis Carroll Society, 1993-2007), I, pp. 127-8.
[30] Schweighauser, 'Literary Acoustics', p. 481.
[31] 30 Aug 1886 (*Letters*, II, p. 637).
[32] Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 44.

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In addition to, and often blurring with, the songs embedded within Carroll's texts are a number of other vocal performances. Certain chapters in the two books (namely, W chapter 10, LG chapters 4 and 9) are indeed intensely performative, incorporating as they do both verse recitation (or repetition which is Carroll's favoured term) and song. The two can be difficult to distinguish: they are presented identically in terms of typography and treated synonymously (when the White Knight offers to sing Alice a comforting 'song', she is less than enthusiastic, having 'heard a good deal of poetry that day' (LG, 255)). Subsequent adapters did indeed often treat the poems as such, setting them to music and thereby further increasing the musicality of the texts. Equally, though, from the 1870s onwards, the poems would also be widely recited without music in all manner of prize-givings, summer fêtes and evening soirées in venues across the world.

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Table 2: The Spoken Recitations of the *Alice* Books

Poem	Location	Speaker	Original poem
How doth the little crocodile	AAiW c2	Alice	Isaac Watts, 'Against Idleness and Mischief'
You are old Father William	AAiW c5	Alice	Robert Southey, 'You are old Father William'
'Tis the voice of the Lobster	AAiW c10	Alice	Isaac Watts, 'The Sluggard'
The Walrus and the Carpenter	TTLG c4	Tweedledee	Carroll's invention
Jabberwocky	TTLG c6	Alice	Carroll's invention
In winter, when the fields are white	TTLG c6	Humpty Dumpty	Unknown
First the fish must be caught	TTLG c9	White Queen	Carroll's invention

Within the texts, spoken performance builds narrative cohesion and layering as on several occasions there is a reference back to the previous instance of recitation, which itself draws on a pre-existing poem. As has been very widely remarked, many of the recitations are parodies of familiar household works, in which Alice is spoken through, like a diminutive clairvoyant. These are intensely unsettling, despair-inducing experiences for the heroine, light years away from the beneficial (non-parodic) nonsense produced by the divinely inspired Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind*. In the *Alice* books, if the sonic skeleton – the rhythm and metre – of the original poems is retained and even strengthened, Carroll's new words evoke an entirely different scene (of, for example, predation rather than industry in both 'How doth the little crocodile' and ''Tis the voice of the lobster'). Yet over the course of the two books, there is a marked movement away from Alice as unwilling, unsuccessful performer to unwilling listener, and

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from parodies to original creations, as though Carroll becomes more confident but reluctant to associate his heroine with the less anchored products of his imagination. As with the songs discussed above, the poems declaimed are often *about* the process of communication and its inherent difficulties. Thus, like the White Knight's song, 'You are old, Father William' consists of a not wholly successful, and impatiently and abruptly curtailed, exchange between two characters:

> *"I have answered three questions, and that is enough,"*
> *Said his father, "Don't give yourself airs!*
> *Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?*
> *Be off, or I'll kick you downstairs!"* (W, 54)

Similarly, Humpty's poem is all about messages and failed communication, instructions issued but not heeded: 'I told them once, I told them twice:/They would not listen to advice'. The messenger stolidly bears the sonic weight of his ire and frustration without giving way:

> *I said to him, I said it plain,*
> *"Then you must wake them up again."*
>
> *I said it very loud and clear:*
> *I went and shouted in his ear.* (LG, 229)

Over the course of the two books, recitations featuring a single voice steadily give way to others characterised by interjection, interruption and commentary from others. As a result, in the scenes with the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon in *Wonderland* or with Humpty Dumpty in *Looking-Glass*, recitation and conversation (discussed below) start to blur.

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3. Speech & Other Voice Sounds

All of these important and relatively frequent vocal performances, present in 9 out of 24 chapters, depend on some form of prior knowledge and memory, and reach backwards to pre-existing (or nominally pre-existing) works. But what dominates these texts are all the speech acts, from orders to threats to conversations, which happen 'live', in the present moment of the narrative and which depend on wit rather than recall, just as the original story was initially elaborated as an impromptu entertainment for the Liddell sisters. The books contain a great many voices with a range of different pitches and inflections – the tone being set, as it were, even in *Wonderland*'s prefatory poem where 'imperious', 'gentler', 'happy' and 'weak' voices are set against each other (W, 7-8). Statistically, and revealingly, the five most common word types in the books are 'voice' (86 instances), 'tone' (81), 'cried' (76), 'exclaimed' (74) and 'shouted' (13). Almost everyone and everything is endowed with human speech in these books. This includes inanimate objects (cards, chess pieces, foodstuffs) and living forms which are normally either silent (such as flowers) or inaccessible or incomprehensible to human ears. This generous bestowal of speech is informed both by literary convention stretching back to Aesop and beyond and by scientific possibility, at a

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time when interest in sense perception was enabling 'embodied subjects to experience themselves as objects, and objects reciprocally to function as subjects', leading to 'a mutual perviousness between self and world'.[33] Interestingly, with one fleeting exception, Carroll makes no effort to align speech to species. The appearance of the Sheep morphing out of the Queen does coincide with speech transformed into 'a long bleat': '"Oh much better!" cried the Queen, her voice rising into a squeak as she went on. "Much be-etter! Be-etter! Be-e-e-etter! Be-e-ehh!"' (LG, 210) But conversational abilities are then immediately assumed with the question, '"What is it you want to buy?"' This brief moment aside, and as opposed to Kingsley's concerted efforts to reproduce the sounds of cock-grouses and dragon-flys, there is no miaowing or squawking or clucking; all the animals and objects sound just like humans.

But they are by no means the same for all that. Rather, Carroll stages an astonishing range of speakers, from the loquacious and verbose Pigeon and Humpty to the tight-lipped, blunt, and unexpansive Caterpillar. The texture of these multiple voices and their modes of delivery are delineated with enormous care and attention to detail. A lifelong and highly committed theatre-goer, Carroll proves himself a skilled dramatist, making use of a range of verbs, adjectives and adverbial tagging as well as metaphor and typographic emphasis.[34] Thus in a single chapter, Alice repeatedly 'cries' and 'says', her lines enlivened by exclamation marks and italics. But timbre, tempo, tonalities, inflections and pitch are also detailed via speech tags and adverbs: Alice cries 'hastily', calls 'softly' (W, 26, 27), adopts 'a low and timid voice', and a 'soothing' or 'sorrowful' tone (W, 22, 26, 27). In contrast, and in response, the Mouse's voice ranges from 'shrill' and 'passionate' to 'low trembling' (W, 28). Throughout these texts, with their decidedly script-like qualities, Carroll is at pains to help us hear not just what his characters say but how they say it, and thus to be better able to reproduce their speech, whether in our heads or out loud.

Characters, and especially Alice, happily and often extensively talk to themselves. But invariably unsatisfactory conversation with one or more interlocutors dominates and structures both texts. As Gillian Beer, in her detailed exploration of the dialogic dimension of different levels of the diegesis makes clear, the pages of the works are indeed 'scored for conversation.'[35] It is quickly established that Alice will talk with whomsoever she meets, or will at least try to – her initial attempt to engage the White Rabbit in conversation is entirely abortive. The rapid, quickfire exchanges, the thrusts and repartee, ensure pace and momentum. Although 'live' and improvised, such exchanges nevertheless draw upon an implicit, underlying script, familiar to the reader and to Alice – who know how conversations should unfold. Like the songs and recitations, however, these exchanges – or 'dissident dialogues' in Beer's pithy phrase – depart from the standard conversational script in significant ways.[36] This can be gestural and

[33] W. A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 6.
[34] See Richard Foulkes, *Lewis Carroll and the Victorian Stage: Theatricals in a Quiet Life*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
[35] Gillian Beer, *Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 114.
[36] Beer, *Alice in Space*, p. 115.

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volume-related, as when a character shouts after elaborately adopting the posture of whispering (LG, 237). Characters can fail to listen, to answer, or simply to speak at all, leaving Alice at a loss and thrown back on her own resources. When conversation is underway it is frequently abrasive, hostile and combative, 'an obstacle to understanding rather than tending to resolution', according to Beer.[37] In addition to, and compounding, the contrasting temperaments and motives of the characters, one of the major obstacles preventing satisfactory exchange is the slipperiness of language, the *sound* of words. Indeed, 'sounded', with its blurring of seeming and the sonic, is another of the most common word types in these books. Homonyms (axes/axis, flower/flour) breed obfuscation and confusion. Meaning can be wilfully jettisoned in favour of what 'sounded best' (W, 125), entirely flouting the Duchess's famous sound-shifting injunction, which switches the p's of the original saying, to 'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves' (W, 96).

But these characters are highly versatile in their sound-making, and by no means reliant on words alone. Indeed non-verbal sounds can in some cases be considerably more meaningful than words. The books are liberally peppered with ughs and ohs!, with panting, sobbing and shrieks. These express a wide range of emotions, from pleasure and amusement to – more often – sadness, pain, distaste, surprise and fear. Manners and politesse dictate that certain sounds be masked as others, thus Alice converts laughter into coughing (LG, 201). Many such sounds are fairly transparent while others, though evocative, are nevertheless difficult to interpret. The Gryphon's neologistic 'Hjckrrh!' is entirely open to interpretation, a pure sound emptied of sense (W, 100). Alice cannot establish whether the baby is hurt by the various missiles launched at it by the cook since it 'was howling so much already' (W, 63). Sounds issuing from mouths unconsciously and involuntarily which are entirely outside the realm of signification also contribute to the soundscape of the works. Thus, as well as the sneezes which accompany and signal the arrival of the Cook, snores play an important role in the books. Edging into the bestial and mechanical, they can also morph into music and song.

Given Carroll's well-known aversion to coarseness, amply reflected in Tenniel's decorous images, involuntary physical sounds such as these might come as something of a surprise. But as in the best-known work of Kingsley, lead promulgator of 'muscular Christianity', the *Alice* books are in fact full of noises made by bodies and body parts, often evoked through lively and inventive use of onomatopoeia. Attendance to this sonic dimension of Carroll's work helps restore the fundamental physicality and mobility downplayed or erased by Tenniel's images. (Compare for instance Carroll's image of an energetic, zany Gryphon and Turtle, leaping into the air with the earthbound, ponderous Tenniel equivalent.) Sounds issuing from bodies in the texts range in their resonance from heavy, dense thumps and crashes to lighter scratches, scrabbles and patters. Both the White Rabbit (as we have seen) and the Cook are granted signature physical sounds. At the end of chapter three, when Alice 'again heard a little pattering of footsteps in the distance' (W, 37), the attentive reader alerted by that 'again' will not need to turn the page to know this is the Rabbit whose 'little pattering of feet in the

[37] Beer, *Alice in Space*, p. 112.

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distance' (W, 21) was established in the previous chapter. Most recurrent and significant is the sound of falling bodies. The movement of Alice's body falling onto the ground ('thump! thump!' W, 14) or into water ('splash!' W, 24) generates some of the earliest sounds, giving onomatopoeic substance to – literally fleshing out – the oneiric realm. Several other characters also undergo noisy falls. The 'heavy crash' which 'shook the forest from end to end' (LG, 231) is Humpty's preordained destiny, while the White and Red Knights' repeated dismounts from their 'quiet' horses, sounds to Alice '[j]ust like a whole set of fire-irons falling into the fender! (LG, 246) 'What a noise they make when they tumble!' she exclaims to herself as she watches their battle from behind a tree.

4. Sonic Extremes & Variation

At the very beginning of that second narrative, in the opening frame section, Alice draws her kitten's attention to a very different kind of sound, that of 'the snow against the windowpanes'. 'How nice and soft it sounds!' she observes (LG, 146). Within the narrative proper, as we have seen, horses can be quiet and feet no more than pattering, but, on the whole, the soundscape of both books tends very much towards the strident and discordant – the collision of metal (fire-iron) on metal (fender) far more typical than the gentle embrace of snow on glass. The music embedded within the text may be anodyne and easy on the ear but this is offset and counterbalanced by the crashing of glasses, dishes and oversized animate eggs (W, 42, 43, 60; LG, 231), squeaking of pencils (W, 115), rattling of pebbles (W, 45) and blasting of trumpets (W, 116). In terms of instruments, these are worlds of drums, trumpets and rattles, rather than flutes and cellos. The whole narrative is intra- and extradiegetically prompted by the pastoral and the sounds of the natural world so much the focus of Romantic sensibility and auditory attention,[38] and very much the overarching feature of a work like *At the Back of the North Wind.* Yet a process of translation or transformation renders a very different sonic landscape within the narrative proper of the *Alice* books, where the bucolic frames an often raucous modern core. Carroll draws extensively on the everyday and the mundane – what Charles Lamb earlier in the century referred to as 'honest, common-life sounds' – and on contemporary industry, transport and material culture.[39] The notoriously noisy emblem of the Victorian age, the steam engine, which Carroll used regularly in his journeys to London and elsewhere, is repeatedly invoked. It provides an analogy for the snorting of the pig baby (W, 65), while the snores of the Red King sound to Alice like the puffing of a train (LG, 197) and the screams of the White Queen are likened to its whistle (LG, 208).

In the latter case, the sound is so intense that 'Alice had to hold both of her hands over her ears' (LG, 208). As Elliott notes, these are indeed often cacophonous books, encompassing moments of 'dreadful uproar' (LG, 244).[40] As in Kingsley's *Water Babies*, sheer din and boisterousness characterize some of their best-known and most memorable scenes – in the pool of tears, the Duchess's kitchen, or on the croquet ground, in the railway carriage and at Alice's banquet. In *Wonderland*, the Duchess's house is *defined* by intense noise: Alice does not just

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[38] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 7.
[39] Quoted in Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 8.
[40] Elliott, *The Sound of Nonsense*, p. 24.

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hear a crash but a 'great crash' and the howling emitted by the baby is 'constant' (W, 60). With its slippage between human and animal, there is something distinctly primal-scream-esque about the soundscape here. On the croquet ground, there is a general amplification of volume as characters including Alice struggle to make themselves heard. The Queen's initial shout sets off a chain of shouting by the soldiers, Alice and the Queen herself, culminating in a regal roar.

If Carroll can effectively turn up the volume, he can also turn it down, and use varying sound levels to comic effect. *Wonderland*'s much-remarked shifts in physical scale and dimension are thus accompanied by variations in volume which also extend into the second book. Carroll sometimes simultaneously plays with size and volume together, as with the (smaller) talking flowers who so take the (larger) Alice's breath away that they speak louder than she does (LG, 166). Incongruent levels of sound can produce absurdity and comedy. In the *Looking-Glass* frame narrative we learn that Alice herself is by no means immune to noisy and somewhat sinister flights of fancy: 'once she had really frightened her old nurse by shouting suddenly in her ear, "Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyæna, and you're a bone!"' (LG, 147) This clearly echoes the aforementioned scene in the narrative proper where the Messenger adopts the posture of someone about to whisper, before simply yelling in the King's ear. When the latter compares it to an earthquake, Alice observes that it 'would have to be a very tiny earthquake!' (LG, 237). These are books in which the paradoxical nature of a cry for silence – issued twice in the trial scene – become very much apparent (W, 115, 125).

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Indeed, alongside recognition of the rich, varied, noisiness of the texts, it is also vitally important to register their silences. Almost entirely overlooked by critics distracted by noisiness when they do occasionally consider sound, and generally crowded out in adaptations, silences are both frequent and significant. As a broad-brush indication, the words 'silent' and 'silence' are over four times more frequent than 'noise' or 'noisy'. Moments of silence occur throughout: when Alice is alone, but also during conversations and in social settings. They are interspersed in many of the loudest and most vocal scenes of the books, such as when Alice is trapped in the White Rabbit's house, the animals outside talk over each other on a range of topics, forming a cacophony nevertheless frequently punctuated by silence. At the tea party, all the characters are shown pausing to reflect (W, 74) and Alice later falls silent upon running out of ripostes. As here, silence in the books tends to be an absence of speech specifically and occurs in relation to the openings of, and protocol surrounding, conversation. This is particularly the case in Alice's encounter with the Caterpillar which begins with the pair eyeing each other up 'for some time in silence' (W, 49). When they do finally embark upon a conversation, the Caterpillar frequently clams up, whilst Alice waits patiently for him to continue. Similarly, the Mock Turtle takes so long to embark on his story that Alice is on the point of walking away. What results from all this is an acute awkwardness and sense of desolation which, as Kérchy also points out, Carroll, with his lifelong speech hesitation, must have known only too well.[41] Moreover, if, as Beer argues, 'talk is the life of the books', these conversational aporia clearly

[41] Kérchy, p. 181.

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contribute to their morbid undertones.[42] Overall, silence is as noisome as extreme sound, a source of torment and irritation rather than relief or comfort: Alice is disconcerted and alarmed by the 'dead silence' she faces (LG, 245, 274).

In these works, silence and sound are not positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum but instead shown to be closely bound to each other. Taking place within dreams so that everything that so vividly occurs beyond the frame narrative does so within Alice's vivid, hyæna-producing imagination, the books are an even more sustained reflection on the relationship between internal and external processes of perception, between mind and world than those of Kingsley and MacDonald. What Carroll probes in particular is the complex intertwining of sounded speech and silent thought. In the closing paragraphs of *Wonderland*, sound is shown to move between the realms of mind and world and back, albeit undergoing creative transformation in the process, just as the passage from the spoken and sung river-trip version to the written manuscript and printed book preserves rather than dispenses with sound. In line with 'one of the major theories of dreaming' in the period, 'that sleep does not prevent perception, and that dreams are caused by sense-impressions reaching the mind from the external world during sleep', Alice converts external sensory stimulae into the sounds and episodes of her dream.[43] Her sister then performs a back translation, holding in her mind the sounds of Wonderland and her own world, revealing the correspondences between the two. Alice's sister first 'really' listens to the heroine's story of her adventures and then listens, so to speak, within her 'mind's ear' ('listened, or seemed to listen' (LG, 131)), remembering and reactivating Alice's narrative. In this closing scene, Carroll draws attention to the mind's roving ability to penetrate not only time but also other people's dreams and experiences. Similarly, at several points within the narratives of both texts, the distinction between internal thought and external speech seems to break down. Minds are frequently read – and not, as is standard, by the omniscient narrator but by characters as, for instance, in the exchange between Alice and the Caterpillar. Alice speaks her thoughts aloud, but she also thinks about speech (e.g., that of the White Rabbit, after the event), and 'I declare' can be thought rather than said (W, 24). In conversation with the Cheshire Cat, Alice declares that 'they all quarrel so dreadfully one ca'n't hear oneself speak' (W, 90), which makes more sense than the common phrase, and which, by bringing the other word to mind through its replacement, playfully connects speech and thought. The tight binding of thinking, speaking and dreaming is most readily apparent in the railway-carriage scene of *Looking-Glass* where Alice has access to the thoughts of the various disembodied voices of insects and vice versa. If, then, thought is made audible and becomes part of the soundscape, so too is music and song heard silently. Alice, and to a lesser extent her sister, is the model for this since she repeatedly hears songs and nursery rhymes in her head, which are then externalised in the events and characters of the plot. Those reading the *Alice* books to themselves were placed in a similar position with respect to the poems and songs running through the books.

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[42] Beer, *Alice in Space*, p. 109.

[43] Nicola Bown, 'What is the stuff that dreams are made of?' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 151-72 (p. 160).

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Conclusion

The *Alice* books are not just lavishly illustrated books but emphatically audio-visual, multimedia works. Carroll goes further than his contemporaries by incorporating not only verse and song but also music, taking up the gauntlet thrown down by Kingsley's assertions about the limitations of the written text to reproduce sound. The hitherto neglected music and song threaded with infinite care through Carroll's best-known works mean that they are 'portable units of complete domestic entertainment', to adopt Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's expression.[44] Recognition of the sonic aspects of the texts not only extends our understanding of them but allows us to see their familiar images in a new light. The rich and varied soundscape of these works is moreover by no means limited to the traditional realm of music. Instead, it runs the full gamut from old, timeless, reassuring songs to the dissonant and often unsettling sounds of modernity. In Carroll's taut, lean narrative, sound is never a merely ornamental detail. It works hard, contributing to characterisation, pace, and plot. Voices of a multitude of tones, timbres and inflections predominate. Howsoever deployed, whether in song, recitation, or conversation, self-reflexivity frequently characterises the vocal performances of these texts, so that Carroll emerges as an expert and intensely self-aware ventriloquist. But as we have seen, these books encompass invariably awkward silences as well as sound. They repeatedly probe the sonic relationship between mind and world, blurring absolute distinctions. At a time when the boundaries of sound were being pushed back and the possibilities of preserving and recording sound were developing apace, Carroll reveals the sonic qualities of the seemingly silent processes of thinking, dreaming and reading. Giving access to the thoughts and feelings of characters is the generally accepted role of the writer, especially in the realist tradition of the nineteenth century. Through his fictional explorations, Carroll takes this mission seriously, and indeed literally. Attendance to sound thereby serves to forge connections between Carroll and his contemporaries and situates the books firmly within a culture habituated to and desirous of music, words and images working together. At the same time, it points to further ways in which his work is innovative and distinctive and, given subsequent endeavours to unsettle distinctions between the audible and inaudible, and between sound and music,[45] it also serves to substantially reinforce Carroll's status as a proto-modernist.

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[44] Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'A Modern Poetry of Sensation: Three Christmas Gift Books and the Legacy of Victorian Material Culture' in *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Collette Colligan and Margaret Linley, pp. 107-136 (p. 125).
[45] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 11.

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Listening to the *Alice* Books

Abstract

Despite the 'acoustic turn' providing 'a corrective to the visualist bias of much scholarship on modern and postmodern culture', the *Alice* books and their author have been almost exclusively seen rather than heard by critics to date. Prompted by a collaboration with composer Paul Rissmann which resulted in a concert suite performed by the London Symphony Orchestra in 2015, in this article I undertake the first detailed exploration of the sonic dimension of these texts. This merits attention not only because of its very emphatic foregrounding within the frame narrative of *Wonderland*, but also because of authorial interests and preoccupations, and the quickly established and still enduring musical afterlife of the books. Although triggered in *Wonderland* by the pastoral and by the sounds of the natural world, a process of translation or transformation renders a very different sonic landscape within the narrative proper. The bucolic frames an often raucous modern core, with Carroll embedding not only catchy anodyne melodies but also the sounds of the everyday and of contemporary industry, transport and material culture. Attending to the rich and varied soundscape of Carroll's best-known works sheds new light on their widely examined images but also restores a key dimension of the texts, essential to their Victorian reception. The detailed exploration of the full range of sonic phenomenon within the works, from music to noise, and spanning both sound and silence, opens up new relationships between Carroll and his Victorian contemporaries, as well as further reinforcing his status as a proto-modernist.

Keywords: Lewis Carroll, sound, music, silence, voice, illustration

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Listening to the *Alice* Books

Don't you wonder sometimes/'Bout sound and vision?
David Bowie, 'Sound and Vision', *Low*, 1977

When, in the final framing section of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Alice's elder sister conjures up mental images of the heroine both as a child and as a grown woman in 'the after-time', the centrality of vision, imagination and picturing to the narrative is sealed. Countless illustrators and artists, from Tenniel onwards, have similarly been prompted to visualise Alice in an endless stream of alternative editions and adaptations. In the latter, visual equivalences are often established between the dreamed world of Wonderland and the 'real' world of the narrative frame. Yet, her eyes closed in sleep, the dreaming heroine technically 'sees' nothing at all, and the connections forged between the two realms by her sister in a key act of translation are in fact sonic. She does not just *see* Alice and the spaces of her adventures, but also *hears* them. Taking in 'the very tones' of Alice's voice, her reconstruction of Wonderland is essentially sound-based, with grass rustling, the mouse splashing, teacups rattling, plates crashing, the pig-baby sneezing, the Gryphon shrieking, a pencil squeaking and a suppressed guinea pig choking.[1]

More elaborate and insistent foregrounding of the sonic is hard to imagine, and would in itself prompt a sustained and comprehensive examination of this dimension of the narrative proper as well as that of the subsequent *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found there* (1871). But the need for such an undertaking is further bolstered by hitherto neglected aspects of Carroll's life and approach to his most famous works. As well as a lifelong interest in music, he was adamant that the melodies he had in mind when writing the intercalated poems and songs of the books should be preserved in their subsequent adaptation to the stage. This is in sharp contrast with his considerably more relaxed approach to other aspects of the staging such as his heroine's appearance. The sonic afterlife of the books also underscores the importance of attending to their rich and varied soundscapes. Read not just silently but out loud, both in informal domestic settings and in public performances and recitations, their specifically musical potential was seized upon rapidly, and well before other adaptations began. Ever since the first music sheets by William Boyd, published as early as 1870, a vast array of musicians and composers have sought inspiration in the books.[2] The present article arises in large part from a collaboration with composer Paul Rissmann who created a concert suite based

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[1] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, ed. by Martin Gardner, London: Penguin([1865, 1871] 2001), p. 131. All subsequent references to *Alice's Adventures* and to *Through the Looking-Glass* are to this edition, and are included in the main body of the text, identified by a W or LG preceding the page number.

[2] Anna Kérchy, *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland: Curiouser and Curiouser New Forms of a Children's Classic* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), pp. 199-206, 226-27; Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History* (Farnham/Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 220-24.

upon the refrains of a particular nineteenth-century music sheet, the arrangement of which enabled insight into how Victorians heard some of Carroll's key characters.[3] That project responded to John Picker's call for scholars to understand how the Victorians heard as well as saw themselves.[4] Rissmann's desire to pinpoint sounds within the narrative so as to incorporate them within his own music served as the catalyst to the approach adopted here, which listens as (much as) it reads.

Picker has been at the forefront of increased scholarly attentiveness to what he refers to as the 'varied and vast' Victorian soundscape.[5] This was, he argues, not only a period in which 'the gaze acquired a new degree of importance' but also one which 'experienced a rise in close listening.'[6] Thanks to scientific and technological developments, formerly inaudible sounds emerged in highly suggestive, inspirational ways, for the first time. The speculations such as those of physicist William Hyde Wollaston, that 'a secret realm of sound might be lurking behind the everyday soundscape and that it might reveal alternate "modes of existence"' were grist to the mill of a vast range of Victorian writers.[7] In a masterly study which takes in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sam Halliday argues for the co-existence and interdependence of 'visual' 'verbal' and 'sounded' 'cultures of sound', bringing literature firmly within the purview of sound studies.[8] Like bodies in the nineteenth century, books are increasingly being recognized as being 'alive with sound'.[9] A number of scholars following the cues of Picker, Halliday and others, have shown how Victorian literature both 'absorbed' and contributed to 'auditory culture',[10] with attention increasingly paid not only to the music which has formed the backbone of traditional comparative literary and intermedial approaches, but also to a much broader and more varied spectrum of sound.

Yet despite what has been referred to as an 'acoustic turn' providing 'a corrective to the visualist bias of much scholarship on modern and postmodern culture', the *Alice* books and their author have been almost exclusively seen rather than heard by critics to date.[11]Extensive interest in the author's highly acclaimed photographic output has encouraged an impression of Carroll as an accomplished conjuror of still, soundless images. By contrast, there is to date only one short published piece on Carroll's musical interests and undertakings.[12] With respect to the *Alice* books specifically, scholars have repeatedly pored over

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[3] Paul Rissmann, 'Wonderland Suite' (2015) <https://soundcloud.com/paul-rissmann/sets/wonderland-suite> [accessed 22 September 2019].
[4] John M Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 11.
[5] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 4.
[6] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 6.
[7] Kristie A. Schlauraff, 'Victorian gothic soundscapes', *Literature Compass*, 15.4 (Apr 2018), 1-11 (p. 2).
[8] Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2013), p. 3.
[9] W. H. Preece, quoted in Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 4.
[10] Schlauraff, 'Victorian gothic soundscapes', p. 4.
[11] Philipp Schweighauser, 'Literary Acoustics', in *The Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, ed. by Gabriele Ripp (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 475-93 (p. 476).
[12] Donald B. Eperson, 'No Ear For Music?', *The Carrollian*, 7 (Spring 2001), 3-8.

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their many sets of illustrations, and especially those of Tenniel, as is reflected in, and perpetuated by, critical apparatuses. While Martin Gardner's go-to *Annotated Alice* not only cites Quinten Massys's 'Ugly Duchess' as a source for Tenniel but reproduces it in the margins, there is no such treatment of the songs carefully embedded within the narrative. And whereas critics (myself included) have been at pains to underline the role of the images to supplement the details Carroll does not include in the written text, there seems to have been an almost wilful failure to attend to the extensive and meticulous detailing of intonation, timbre, delivery, pitch and so on that he does, very abundantly, provide.

Some work nevertheless provides a useful starting point for moving beyond the ocularcentrism which has characterised Carrollian scholarship to date. Alexandre Révérend's 'Lewis Carroll et la musique' website constitutes a precious, if dated and not comprehensive, resource, offering as it does recordings of nineteenth-century musical adaptations of the songs and poems embedded within the *Alice* books.[13] More recently, the most sustained examination of the sonic dimension of these works to date is provided by Richard Elliott in his short monograph *The Sound of Nonsense*. In a chapter which considers the 'noisy writing' of Carroll alongside that of Lear and Joyce, Elliott examines the role of sound in the operation of nonsense and in the demarcation of realms of consciousness.[14] But no critical work to date has considered sound and music in relation to the Alice books *together*. Nor have their silences – which have been key to reflexions on, and renditions of, sound from Aristotle onwards –[15] been adequately probed. Through its exploration of the music and the noise, the sound and the silences of the *Alice* books, whose 'total performance' depends on much more than the widely understood interrelation of text and image,[16] this article sets out to restore a key dimension of the texts, and the ways in which they were received and understood by a Victorian audience. What's more, close attention to sound (and silence) actually helps us see their celebrated images afresh.

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1. The sense-scape of the *Alice* books

Originating in Antiquity, rankings of the senses remained 'a mainstay of much subsequent commentary' on the subject until at least the early nineteenth century.[17] Within the *Alice* books, the different senses hold varying levels of importance and can be similarly hierarchised. Thus, despite the prominence of gardens and flowers, readily associated not just with pleasing sights but sweet smells, the place of the olfactory is negligible at best. And although critics have made much of the role of food in the books, taste sensations are actually detailed only twice, albeit memorably in the case of the first shape-altering liquid

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[13] Alexandre Révérend, 'Lewis Carroll et la musique' < http://areverend.free.fr/lesite/carroll/index.html> [accessed 19 September 2019]

[14] Richard Elliott, *The Sound of Nonsense* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 1, 24-8.

[15] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 21.

[16] Richard Kelly, ''If you don't know what a Gryphon is': Text and Illustration in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*', in *Lewis Carroll, a celebration: essays on the occasion of the birth of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*, ed. by Edward Guiliano (New York: Potter, 1976), pp. 62-74 (p. 62).

[17] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 22.

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imbibed, with its 'sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast' (W, 17). Few, on the other hand, would notice, let alone remember, the intensely dry biscuit the Red Queen forces Alice to eat or the sensation of choking it triggers (LG, 175). Here, the emphasis is on how the biscuit *feels* rather than how it tastes, and physical sensation and touch do feature slightly more prominently than either smell or taste, especially in *Looking-Glass*. In the first book, physical contact between characters is rare, and although Alice holds various things, we rarely know what they feel like: a slippery table leg (W, 18), and the Duchess's sharp chin (W, 95) are the notable exceptions. In *Looking-Glass*, however, in accordance with the chess conceit which underpins Alice's progress and the characters she encounters in the narrative proper, handling and physical contact are more important. Indeed, in the opening chapter, Alice manifests herself through touch alone. The White King and Queen can neither see nor hear Alice, but, as she lifts them up, puts them down and dusts them off, they can certainly feel her.

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It is the so-called distant, as opposed to proximate, senses of vision and hearing which are most closely and frequently delineated throughout the two works. Alice is under constant scrutiny in terms of her behaviour and physical appearance. The title of the second book of course foregrounds the visual, and in chapter five of that volume, in the scene which takes place in 'a little dark shop' (LG, 210), the focus is very much on looking at things, which here have the particularity of moving when they come under inspection. Moreover, in line with Halliday's observation that sound is 'not opposed to but harnessed with and ratcheted up by other forms of sensation' in literary works, seeing and hearing often work in tandem in the *Alice* books.[18] These two prime senses are repeatedly shown in conjunction and are, as Halliday remarks of Proust's *A la recherche*, 'cooperative and complementary'.[19] As discussed in the opening of this article, Alice's sister both sees and hears the heroine in the imaginative recapitulation and projection of the frame narrative. Similarly, although less widely remarked upon, Alice is herself regularly engaged in close viewing *and* active listening. An attentive listener, she possesses what Schlauraff, via Picker, refers to as an important navigational skill of the Victorian age.[20] On the strength of a single hearing, Alice is able to recall and repeat part of Humpty Dumpty's verse in her subsequent discussions with the two Queens some three chapters and two chess moves later (LG, 269). Anticipating and embodying the '[e]ager eye and willing ear' of the very final epilogue poem, Alice simultaneously looks on and listens as the White Knight sings: 'all this she took in like a picture, as, with one hand shading her eyes, she leant against a tree, watching the strange pair, and listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song' (LG, 256).

Alice is, of course, a child desirous of 'pictures *and* conversations' in her own reading matter, and the texts in which she herself exists amply deliver both. Although Humpty Dumpty questions the possibility of visualising song (''If you can *see* whether I'm singing or not, you've sharper eyes than most,' (LG, 228)),

[18] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 30.
[19] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 7.
[20] Schlauraff, 'Victorian gothic soundscapes', p. 7.

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the texts nevertheless endeavour to render sound and its effects visible in different ways via illustration, typography and page layout. Tenniel shows several characters in the process of generating sound, or responding to it. The White Rabbit, for instance is shown both in disarray crashing into the cucumber frame (AAIW48),[21] and, as a much more composed courtier, issuing three blasts on the trumpet to initiate the trial proceedings (AAIW166). In the second book, an eery, flat, pattern-rich image, corresponding to the sonic dimension of the nursery rhyme which the narrative is literalising, shows Alice covering her ears from the 'dreadful uproar' of the surrounding drums (TTLG156).

[Figure 1: John Tenniel, 'Alice putting her hands over her ears', *Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 243 (TTLG156).]

Elsewhere, with mouths wide open, characters are captured in the ungainly sonic acts of singing (AAIW103), bellowing (AAIW117, TTLG133), howling (AAIW81), or snoring (TTLG80, TTLG198). An absence of sound can be similarly rendered: the White King was 'far too much astonished to cry out, but his eyes and his mouth went on getting larger and larger; and rounder and rounder' (TTLG17; LG, 152-3). The similarity of the orientation, expression, and positioning of hands in the images of howling baby and dumbstruck king suggests that Tenniel reworked the one in the creation of the other. Attending to sound reveals the previously unregistered visual connection between the seemingly diametrically opposed noisy infant, on the one hand, and silent grown up, on the other.

[Figure 2: John Tenniel, 'Hatter singing', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 76 (AAIW103).]

[Figure 3: John Tenniel, detail from 'Queen of Hearts pointing at Alice', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 86 (AAIW117).]

[Figure 4: John Tenniel, 'Humpty Dumpty sending a message', *Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 230 (TTLG133).]

[Figure 5: John Tenniel, detail from 'Duchess nursing the baby', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 62 (AAIW81).]

[Figure 6: John Tenniel, detail from 'Alice picking up White King', p. 152 (TTLG17).]

Sound can be depicted in other interesting ways in these texts. In the case of the Mouse in the first book, the act of speech is marked not by an open mouth but by gesture and posture (AAIW29). Here, the reader has access to two versions of the same moment: Tenniel's illustration shows the speaker and his audience,

[21] Here and throughout Tenniel illustrations are referred to according to the Lastoria system. See Amanda Lastoria, 'Lastoria List of Titles for Tenniel's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* Illustrations', *The Carrollian*, 26 (2010), 43-51; 'Lastoria List of Titles for Tenniel's *Through the Looking-Glass Illustrations* Illustrations', *The Carrollian*, 29 (2017), 60-68.

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whilst the typographical layout shows the sinuous formation of the words that Alice, prompted by the tail/tale homonym, sees as she listens. On one occasion, Carroll also avails himself of typography as an index to sound levels: the 'little voice' of the Gnat is rendered in a noticeably smaller font than the speech of his interlocutors and indeed the rest of the text (LG, 181). Sound and vision are thus tightly fused here and in several instances throughout the two books.

Yet as Picker in his discussion of Hermann von Helmholtz and Eliot makes clear, hearing was sometimes elevated to pole position in the sensory rankings of the nineteenth century, and likewise at crucial points in the *Alice* books, it edges out in front of vision.[22] In key scenes, Alice's visual perception is curtailed or severely hampered, her senses limited entirely to what she can hear. Thus, it is too dark for her to see back up into the well down which she has fallen (W, 14) and, having grown exponentially, she cannot properly see her own feet and hands (W, 20) or, later, anything but her serpentine neck (W, 50). When she finds herself wedged embryonically into the White Rabbit's house, hearing is the only sense available to her. We may see the rabbit crashing into the cucumber frame, but Alice can only hear the animals' attempts to oust her. She effectively navigates and interprets the silences, sounds and voices from beyond, defending herself from incursions and eventually freeing herself. Her expert manoeuvres demonstrate that sight is not everything, and that important events may occur and be understood without necessarily being seen. This will eventually be confirmed by the frame narrative, which reveals the same overarching sensory reduction. But rather than curtailing or constricting, this instead seems to serve as creative constraint.

2. Music, Song & Recitation

The images discussed above provide a clear and effective indication of the sheer variety of the soundscape of these books, ranging from melodious song to noisome din, and from loudness to silence. Sound played an important role in both the author's life and the genesis of the books. Music was central to Carroll's social and cultural activities; throughout his life he attended concerts, operas and theatrical performances heavily imbued with music and song. Donald B. Eperson argues that Carroll was far more discriminating than he himself sometimes professed and that by his early twenties he had already 'given considerable thought to the subject of music in general.'[23] References to, and reflexions on, music can be found within both his diaries and published works such as *Sylvie and Bruno*, and it formed an important part of his private exchanges and friendships. Music-related curios were amongst Carroll's extensive and varied repertoire of gifts and modes of entertainment and, as with other facets of surrounding material culture, these could provide grist to the mill of his absurdist humour and whimsy (for instance in an account of an orguinette going backwards and serving to reverse time).[24] Music was regularly performed in the course of his social visits to friends and he himself wrote songs, often drawing parodically on existing melodies, for domestic entertainments. Carroll's visits to

[22] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, pp. 84-89.
[23] Eperson, 'No Ear For Music?', p. 4.
[24] Isa Bowman, *Lewis Carroll As I Knew Him* (New York: Dover, 1972 [1899]), pp. 21, 48.

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the Liddells regularly involved musical performances by the children, and their river trips, during which the story of Alice was initially elaborated, involved singing by adults and children as well as storytelling and general conversation.

That music, song and voices of many descriptions find their way into the Alice books is therefore unsurprising. In line with the oneiric framework, the music of the texts is unconventional and fantastical: instruments make noise while melodious sound and song issues forth from the natural world (LG, 191) or without any discernible source (LG, 273). As we will see, strange things happen to the lyrics of the songs in these books in their passage from the shared world of an initially tight knit audience into the dream narrative. Because of the absence of notation, and the passage of time, the songs can evaporate altogether. But as Table 1 makes abundantly clear, Carroll plotted the four songs which feature in the second half of each of the two texts with great care.

Table 1: The Songs of the *Alice* Books

Song	Location	Performer	Original poem/rhyme
Speak roughly to your little boy	AAiW c6	Duchess (with accompaniment by Cook and Baby)	Authorship contested (possibly David Bates), 'Speak Gently'
Twinkle twinkle little bat	AAiW c7	Hatter (opening lines taken up by Dormouse)	Jane Taylor, 'The Star'
Will you walk a little faster?	AAiW c10	Mock Turtle	Mary Howitt, 'The Spider and the Fly'
Beautiful soup	AAiW c10	Mock Turtle	James M. Sayles, 'Star of the Evening'
Here we go round the mulberry bush	TTLG c4	Alice	'Here we go round the mulberry bush'
The White Knight's Song	TTLG c8	White Knight	Parody by Carroll of Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence'
Hush a by lady	TTLG c9	Red Queen	'Hush a by baby'
Queen Alice	TTLG c9	Unidentified (shrill voice and chorus)	Sir Walter Scott, 'Bonny Dundee' from the play *The Doom of Devorgoil*

As with Tenniel's images, the songs are no mere ornamental flourish, but instead intrinsically connected to, and embedded within, the narrative. Thus, characters like the Mock Turtle, White Knight and Humpty Dumpty feature implicitly or explicitly within the songs. Lyrics can serve to move the action on or otherwise relate to the specific narrative moment in which they occur. The Gryphon and Mock Turtle sing about a forthcoming dance *as* they dance, and the song

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heralding the beginning of Queen Alice's party is an invitation to that very event. Several songs have a reflexive quality in that they are about tone of voice and about the act of (distracted) listening. The aged man heard sporadically at best by the White Knight has 'accents mild' and speech that is 'slow'. In the first book, the duchess's 'sort of lullaby' (W, 64) is based on a poem all about appropriate demeanour towards others, encapsulated in manner of address and tone of voice. Carroll sweeps away the 'accents soft and mild', low whispers of love, and the kind voice of affection, replacing the desirability of speaking 'gently' with that of speaking 'roughly' and 'severely'. Clashing not only with the poem on which it is based but also the music to which it is sung, the incongruity of the Duchess's 'sort of lullaby' is thus twofold.

We know from his correspondence with the likes of Arthur Sullivan no less, that Carroll had pre-existing tunes in mind for these songs.[25] Although specific versions still need to be excavated for some, we can nevertheless be fairly sure of their general nature, based on those we do know (Beautiful Star' and 'Will you walk into my parlour?') and bearing in mind Carroll's general taste in music.[26] In correspondence with stage producer Henry Savile Clarke, he writes of the 'old sweet air' which is the basis of the Mock Turtle's first song. We are not dealing here with the grand or elaborate – what Carroll refers to as 'first rate music' which generates 'a sense of anxiety and labour' – but instead the 'unsatisfactory music' which is more enjoyable and can be taken as it comes.[27] The music of the books is catchy, simple and regular, like the 'words of the old song' which ring through Alice's own head 'like the ticking of a clock' (LG, 189). These are songs familiar to Alice whose schooling, we are told, incorporates music: 'I've heard something like it' she answers when the Hatter enquires whether she knows 'Twinkle twinkle' (W, 77); and she is well aware that the White Knight's 'tune *isn't* his own invention […] it's '*I give thee all, I can no more*' (LG, 256). Familiar and accessible, the songs could be readily activated by contemporary readers for whom Alice is a surrogate, explaining in part the absence of notation which would have been superfluous. Printed words are enough to 'trigger the melody of the song […] in the reader's inner ear'.[28] In his first letter to Savile Clarke, Carroll insists repeatedly upon the fact that these are old songs, which thus bring a sense of tradition and timelessness.[29] Alice might be a modern heroine wearing the latest fashions, but she nevertheless moves in a musical realm of venerability.

In addition to, and often blurring with, the songs embedded within the text are a number of other vocal performances. Certain chapters in the two books (namely,

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[25] 1 Dec 1871 to William Boyd (*The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, ed. by Morton N. Cohen, 2 vols, (London: Macmillan, 1979) I, p. 168); 5 July 1877 to Arthur Sullivan (*Letters* I, p. 278); 30 Aug 1886 to Henry Savile Clarke (*Letters* II, p. 637), 7 and 28 Nov 1886 to Henry Savile Clarke (quoted in Charlie Lovett, *Alice on the Stage: A History of the Early Theatrical Productions of* Alice in Wonderland (Westport/Lon: Meckler, 1990), pp. 42, 43.)
[26] Lovett, *Alice on the Stage*, p. 43. Further scholarly efforts are required to establish the specific music Carroll had in mind for the other songs, and to make these accessible to reader's today.
[27] *Lewis Carroll's Diaries: The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*, 10 vols, ed. by Edward Wakeling (Luton: Lewis Carroll Society, 1993-2007), I, pp. 127-8.
[28] Schweighauser, 'Literary Acoustics', p. 481.
[29] 30 Aug 1886 (*Letters*, II, p. 637).

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W chapter 10, LG chapters 4 and 9) are indeed intensely performative, incorporating as they do both verse recitation (or repetition which is Carroll's favoured term) and song. The two can be difficult to distinguish: they are presented identically in terms of typography and treated synonymously (when the White Knight offers to sing Alice a comforting 'song', she is less than enthusiastic, having 'heard a good deal of poetry that day' (LG, 255)). Subsequent adapters did indeed often treat the poems as such, setting them to music and thereby further increasing the musicality of the texts. Equally, though, the poems would also be widely recited without music in all manner of prize-givings, summer fêtes and evening soirées in venues right across the world from the 1870s onwards.

Table 2: The Spoken Recitations of the *Alice* Books

Poem	Location	Speaker	Original poem
How doth the little crocodile	AAiW c2	Alice	Isaac Watts, 'Against Idleness and Mischief'
You are old Father William	AAiW c5	Alice	Robert Southey, 'You are old Father William'
'Tis the voice of the Lobster	AAiW c10	Alice	Isaac Watts, 'The Sluggard'
The Walrus and the Carpenter	TTLG c4	Tweedledee	Carroll's invention
Jabberwocky	TTLG c6	Alice	Carroll's invention
In winter, when the fields are white	TTLG c6	Humpty Dumpty	Unknown
First the fish must be caught	TTLG c9	White Queen	Carroll's invention

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Within the texts, spoken performance builds narrative cohesion and layering as on several occasions there is a reference back to the previous instance of recitation, which itself draws on a pre-existing poem. As has been very widely remarked, many of the recitations are parodies of familiar household works, in which Alice is spoken through, like a diminutive clairvoyant. If the sonic skeleton – the rhythm and metre – of the original poems is retained and even strengthened, Carroll's new words evoke an entirely different scene (of, for example, predation rather than industry in both 'How doth the little crocodile' and ''Tis the voice of the lobster'). Yet over the course of the two books, there is a marked movement away from Alice as unwilling, unsuccessful performer to unwilling listener, and from parodies to original creations, as though Carroll becomes more confident but reluctant to associate his heroine with the less anchored products of his imagination. As with the songs discussed above, the poems declaimed are often *about* the process of communication and its inherent difficulties. Thus, like the White Knight's song, 'You are old Father William'

consists of a not wholly successful, and impatiently and abruptly curtailed, exchange between two characters:

'I have answered three questions, and that is enough,'
Said his father, 'Don't give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
Be off, or I'll kick you downstairs!' (W, 54)

Similarly Humpty's poem is all about messages and failed communication, instructions issued but not heeded: 'I told them once, I told them twice:/They would not listen to advice'. The messenger stolidly bears the sonic weight of his ire and frustration without giving way:

'I said to him, I said it plain,
"Then you must wake them up again."

I said it very loud and clear:
I went and shouted in his ear.' (LG, 229)

Over the course of the two books, recitations featuring a single voice steadily give way to others characterised by interjection, interruption and commentary from other voices. As a result, in the scenes with the Mock Turtle and Gryphon in *Wonderland* or with Humpty Dumpty in *Looking Glass*, recitation and conversation (discussed below) start to blur.

3. Speech & Other Voice Sounds

All of these important and relatively frequent vocal performances, present in 9 out of 24 chapters, depend on some form of prior knowledge and memory, and reach backwards to pre-existing (or nominally pre-existing) works. But what dominates these texts are all the speech acts, from orders to threats to conversations, which happen 'live', in the present moment of the narrative and which depend on wit rather than recall, just as the original story was initially elaborated as an impromptu entertainment for the Liddell sisters. The books contain an incredible number of voices with a range of different pitches and inflections – the tone being set, as it were, even in *Wonderland*'s prefatory poem where 'imperious', 'gentler', 'happy' and 'weak' voices are set against each other (W, 7-8). Almost everyone and everything is endowed with human speech in these books. This includes inanimate objects (cards, chess pieces, foodstuffs) and living forms which are normally either silent (such as flowers) or inaccessible or incomprehensible to human ears. This generous bestowal of speech is informed both by literary convention stretching back to Aesop and beyond and by scientific possibility, at a time when interest in sense perception was enabling 'embodied subjects to experience themselves as objects, and objects reciprocally to function as subjects', leading to 'a mutual perviousness between self and world'.[30] Interestingly, with one fleeting exception, Carroll makes no effort to

[30] W. A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian literature and the senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 6.

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align speech to species. The appearance of the Sheep morphing out of the Queen does coincide with speech transformed into 'a long bleat': '"Oh much better! cried the Queen, her voice rising into a squeak as she went on. "Much be-etter! Be-etter! Be-e-e-etter! Be-e-ehh!"' (LG, 210) But conversational abilities are then immediately assumed with the question, '"What is it you want to buy?"' This brief moment aside, there is no miaowing or squawking or clucking; all the animals and objects sound just like humans.

But they are by no means the same for all that. Rather, Carroll stages an astonishing range of speakers, from the loquacious and verbose Pigeon and Humpty to the tight-lipped, blunt, and unexpansive Caterpillar. The texture of these multiple voices and their modes of delivery are delineated with enormous care and attention to detail. A lifelong and highly committed theatre-goer, Carroll proves himself a skilled dramatist, making use of a range of verbs, adjectives and adverbial tagging as well as metaphor and typographic emphasis.[31] Thus in a single chapter, Alice repeatedly 'cries' and 'says', her lines enlivened by punctuation and italics. But timbre, tempo, tonalities, inflections and pitch are also detailed via speech tags and adverbs: Alice cries 'hastily', calls 'softly' (W, 26, 27), adopts 'a low and timid voice', and a 'soothing' or 'sorrowful' tone (W, 22, 26, 27). In contrast, and in response, the Mouse's voice ranges from 'shrill' and 'passionate' to 'low and trembling' (W, 26, 28). Throughout these texts, with their decidedly script-like qualities, Carroll is at pains to help us hear not just what his characters say but how they say it, and thus to be better able to reproduce their speech, whether in our heads or out loud.

Characters, and especially Alice, happily and often extensively talk to themselves. But invariably unsatisfactory conversation with one or more interlocutors dominates and structures both texts. As Gillian Beer, in her detailed exploration of the dialogic dimension of different levels of the diegesis makes clear, the pages of the works are indeed 'scored for conversation.'[32] It is quickly established that Alice will talk with whomsoever she meets, or will at least try to – her initial attempt to engage the White Rabbit in conversation is entirely abortive. The rapid, quickfire exchanges, the thrusts and repartee, ensure pace and momentum. Although 'live' and improvised, such exchanges nevertheless draw upon an implicit, underlying script, familiar to the reader and to Alice – who know how conversations should unfold. Like the songs and recitations, however, these exchanges – or 'dissident dialogues' in Beer's pithy phrase – depart from the standard conversational script in significant ways.[33] This can be gestural and volume-related, as when a character shouts after elaborately adopting the posture of whispering (LG, 237). Characters can fail to listen, to answer, or simply to speak at all, leaving Alice at a loss and thrown back on her own resources. When conversation is underway it is frequently abrasive, hostile and combative, 'an obstacle to understanding rather than tending to resolution',

[31] See Richard Foulkes, *Lewis Carroll and the Victorian Stage: Theatricals in a Quiet Life*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
[32] Gillian Beer, *Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 114.
[33] Beer, *Alice in Space*, p. 115.

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according to Beer.[34] In addition to, and compounding, the contrasting temperaments and motives of the characters, one of the major obstacles preventing satisfactory exchange is the slipperiness of language, the *sound* of words. Homonyms (axes/axis, flower/flour) breed obfuscation and confusion. Meaning can be wilfully jettisoned in favour of what 'sounded best' (W, 125), entirely flouting the Duchess's famous sound-shifting injunction, which switches the p's of the original saying, to 'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.' (W, 96)

But these characters are highly versatile in their sound-making, and by no means reliant on words alone. Indeed non-verbal sounds can in some cases be considerably more meaningful than words. The books are liberally peppered with ughs and ohs!, with panting, sobbing and shrieks. These express a wide range of emotions, from pleasure and amusement to – more often – sadness, pain, distaste, surprise and fear. Manners and politesse dictate that certain sounds be masked as others, thus Alice converts laughter into coughing (LG, 201). Many such sounds are fairly transparent while others, though evocative, are nevertheless difficult to interpret. The Gryphon's neologistic 'Hjckrrh!' is entirely open to interpretation, a pure sound emptied of sense (W, 100). Alice cannot establish whether the baby is hurt by the various missiles launched at it by the cook since it 'was howling so much already' (W, 63). Sounds issuing from mouths unconsciously and involuntarily which are entirely outside the realm of signification also contribute to the soundscape of the works. Thus, as well as the sneezes which accompany and signal the arrival of the Cook, snores play an important role in the books. Edging into the bestial and mechanical, they can also morph into music and song.

Given Carroll's well-known aversion to coarseness, amply reflected in Tenniel's decorous images, involuntary physical sounds such as these might come as something of a surprise. But the books are in fact full of noises made by bodies and body parts, and attendance to this sonic dimension of the text helps restore the fundamental physicality and mobility downplayed or erased by Tenniel's images. (Compare for instance Carroll's image of an energetic, zany Gryphon and Turtle, leaping into the air with the earthbound, ponderous Tenniel equivalent.) Sounds issuing from bodies in the texts range in their resonance from heavy, dense thumps and crashes to lighter scratches, scrabbles and patters. Both the White Rabbit (as we have seen) and the Cook are granted signature physical sounds. At the end of chapter three, when Alice 'again heard a little pattering of footsteps in the distance' (W, 37), the attentive reader alerted by that 'again' will not need to turn the page to know this is the Rabbit whose 'little pattering of feet in the distance' (W, 21) was established in the previous chapter. Most recurrent and significant is the sound of falling bodies. The movement of Alice's body falling onto the ground ('thump! thump!' W, 14) or into water ('splash!' W, 24) generates some of the earliest sounds, giving onomatopoeic substance to – literally fleshing out – the oneiric realm. Several other characters also undergo noisy falls. The 'heavy crash' which shook the forest from end to end' (LG, 231) is Humpty's preordained destiny, while the White and Red Knights' repeated

[34] Beer, *Alice in Space*, p. 112.

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dismounts from their 'quiet' horses, sounds to Alice 'Just like a whole set of fire-irons falling into the fender! (LG, 246) 'What a noise they make when they tumble!' she exclaims to herself as she watches their battle from behind a tree.

4. Sonic Extremes & Variation

At the very beginning of that second narrative, in the opening frame section, Alice draws her kitten's attention to a very different kind of sound, that of 'the snow against the windowpanes'. 'How nice and soft it sounds!' she observes (LG, 146). Within the narrative proper, as we have seen, horses can be quiet and feet no more than pattering, but, on the whole, the soundscape of both books tends very much towards the strident and discordant – the collision of metal (fire-iron) on metal (fender) far more typical than the gentle embrace of snow on glass. The music embedded within the text may be anodyne and easy on the ear but this is offset and counterbalanced by the crashing of glasses, dishes and oversized animate eggs (W, 42, 43, 60; LG, 231), squeaking of pencils (W, 115), rattling of pebbles (W, 45) and blasting of trumpets (W, 116). In terms of instruments, these are worlds of drums, trumpets and rattles, rather than flutes and cellos. Although prompted in *Wonderland* by the pastoral and the sounds of the natural world so much the focus of Romantic sensibility and auditory attention, a process of translation or transformation renders a very different sonic landscape within the narrative proper.[35] The bucolic frames an often raucous modern core: Carroll draws extensively on the everyday and the mundane – what Charles Lamb earlier in the century referred to as 'honest, common-life sounds' – and on contemporary industry, transport and material culture.[36] The notoriously noisy emblem of the Victorian age, the steam engine, which Carroll used regularly in his journeys to London and elsewhere, is repeatedly invoked. It provides an analogy for the snorting of the pig baby (W, 65), while the snores of the Red King sound to Alice like the puffing of a train (LG, 197) and the screams of the White Queen are likened to its whistle (LG, 208).

In the latter case, the sound is so intense that 'Alice had to hold both of her hands over her ears' (LG, 208). As Elliott notes, these are indeed often cacophonous books, encompassing moments of 'dreadful uproar' (LG, 244).[37] Sheer din and boisterousness characterizes some of their best-known and most memorable scenes – in the pool of tears, the Duchess's kitchen, or on the croquet ground, in the railway carriage and at Alice's banquet. In *Wonderland*, the Duchess's house is *defined* by intense noise: Alice does not just hear a crash but a 'great crash' and the howling emitted by the baby is 'constant' (W, 60). With its slippage between human and animal, there is something distinctly primal scream-esque about the soundscape here. On the croquet ground, there is a general amplification of volume as characters including Alice struggle to make themselves heard. The Queen's initial shout sets off a chain of shouting by the soldiers, Alice and the Queen herself, culminating in a regal roar.

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[35] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 7.
[36] Quoted in Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 8.
[37] Elliott, *The Sound of Nonsense*, p. 24.

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If Carroll can effectively turn up the volume, he can also turn it down, and use varying sound levels to comic effect. *Wonderland*'s much-remarked shifts in physical scale and dimension are thus accompanied by variations in volume which also extend into the second book. Carroll sometimes simultaneously plays with size and volume together, as with the (smaller) talking flowers who so take the (larger) Alice's breath away that they speak louder than she does (LG, 166). Incongruent levels of sound can produce absurdity and comedy. In the *Looking-Glass* frame narrative we learn that Alice herself is by no means immune to noisy and somewhat sinister flights of fancy: 'once she had really frightened her old nurse by shouting suddenly in her ear, "Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyaena, and you're a bone!"' (LG, 147) This clearly echoes the aforementioned scene in the narrative proper where the Messenger adopts the posture of someone about to whisper, before simply yelling in the King's ear. When the latter compares it to an earthquake, Alice observes that it 'would have to be a very tiny earthquake' (LG, 237). These are books in which the paradoxical nature of a cry for silence – issued twice in the trial scene – become very much apparent (W, 115, 125).

Indeed, alongside recognition of the rich, varied, noisiness of the texts, it is also vitally important to register their silences. Almost entirely overlooked by critics distracted by noisiness when they do occasionally consider sound, and generally crowded out in adaptations, silences are both frequent and significant. As a broad-brush indication, the words 'silent' and 'silence' are over four times more frequent than 'noise' or 'noisy'. Moments of silence occur throughout: when Alice is alone, but also during conversations and in social settings. They are interspersed in many of the loudest and most vocal scenes of the books, such as when Alice is trapped in the White Rabbit's house, the animals outside talk over each other on a range of topics, forming a cacophony nevertheless frequently punctuated by silence. At the tea party, all the characters are shown pausing to reflect (W, 74) and Alice later falls silent upon running out of ripostes. As here, silence in the books tends to be an absence of speech specifically and occurs in relation to the openings of, and protocol surrounding, conversation. This is particularly the case in Alice's encounter with the Caterpillar which begins with the pair eyeing each other up 'for some time in silence' (W, 49). When they do finally embark upon a conversation, the Caterpillar frequently clams up, whilst Alice waits patiently for him to continue. Similarly, the Mock Turtle takes so long to embark on his story that Alice is on the point of walking away. What results from all this is an acute awkwardness and sense of desolation which Carroll, with his lifelong speech hesitation, must have known only too well. Moreover, if, as Beer argues, 'talk is the life of the books', these conversational aporia clearly contribute to their morbid undertones.[38] Overall, silence is as noisome as extreme sound, a source of torment and irritation rather than relief or comfort: Alice is disconcerted and alarmed by the 'dead silence' she faces (LG, 245, 274).

In these works, silence and sound are not positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum but instead shown to be closely bound to each other. Taking place within dreams so that everything that so vividly occurs beyond the frame

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[38] Beer, *Alice in Space*, p. 109.

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narrative does so within Alice's vivid, hyaena-producing imagination, the books are of course a sustained reflection on the relationship between internal and external processes of perception, mind and world, and especially on the complex intertwining of sounded speech and silent thought. In the closing paragraphs of *Wonderland*, sound is shown to move between the realms of mind and world and back, albeit undergoing creative transformation in the process, just as the passage from the spoken and sung river trip version to the written manuscript and printed book preserves rather than dispenses with sound. In line with 'one of the major theories of dreaming' in the period, 'that sleep does not prevent perception, and that dreams are caused by sense-impressions reaching the mind from the external world during sleep', Alice converts external sensory stimulae into the sounds and episodes of her dream.[39] Her sister then performs a back translation, holding in her mind the sounds of Wonderland and her own world, revealing the correspondences between the two. Alice's sister first 'really' listens to the heroine's story of her adventures and then listens, so to speak, within her 'mind's ear' ('listened or seemed to listen' (LG, 131)), remembering and reactivating Alice's narrative. In this closing scene, Carroll draws attention to the mind's roving ability to penetrate not only time but also other people's dreams, minds and experiences. Similarly, at several points within the narratives of both texts, the distinction between internal thought and external speech seems to break down. Minds are frequently read – and not, as is standard, by the omniscient narrator but by characters as, for instance, in the exchange between Alice and the Caterpillar. Alice speaks her thoughts aloud, but she also thinks about speech (e.g. that of the White Rabbit, after the event), and 'I declare' can be thought rather than said (W, 24). In conversation with the Cheshire Cat, Alice declares that 'they all quarrel so dreadfully one ca'n't hear oneself speak' (W, 90), which makes more sense than the common phrase, and which, by bringing the other word to mind through its replacement, playfully connects speech and thought. The tight binding of thinking, speaking and dreaming is most readily apparent in the railway carriage scene of *Looking Glass* where Alice has access to the thoughts of the various disembodied voices of insects and vice versa. If, then, thought is made audible and becomes part of the soundscape, so too is music and song heard silently. Alice, and to a lesser extent her sister, is the model for this since she repeatedly hears songs and nursery rhymes in her head, which are then externalised in the events and characters of the plot. Those reading the *Alice* books to themselves were placed in a similar position with respect to the poems and songs running through the books.

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Conclusion

The *Alice* books are not just lavishly illustrated books but emphatically audio-visual, multimedia works. The hitherto neglected music and song threaded with infinite care through them mean that they are 'portable units of complete

[39] Nicola Bown, 'What is the stuff that dreams are made of?' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 151-72 (p. 160).

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domestic entertainment', to adopt Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's expression.[40] Recognition of the sonic aspects of the texts not only extends our understanding of them but allows us to see the familiar images in a new light. The rich and varied soundscape of these works is moreover by no means limited to the traditional realm of music. Instead, it runs the full gamut from old, timeless, reassuring songs to the dissonant and often unsettling sounds of modernity. In Carroll's taught, lean narrative, sound is never a merely ornamental detail. It works hard, contributing to characterisation, pace, and plot. Voices of a multitude of tones, timbres and inflections predominate. Howsoever deployed, whether in song, recitation, or conversation, self-reflexivity frequently characterises the vocal performances of these texts, so that Carroll emerges as an expert and intensely self-aware ventriloquist. But as we have seen, these books encompass invariably awkward silences as well as sound. They repeatedly probe the sonic relationship between mind and world, blurring absolute distinctions. At a time when the boundaries of sound were being pushed back and the possibilities of preserving and recording sound were developing apace, Carroll reveals the sonic qualities of the seemingly silent processes of thinking, dreaming and reading. Giving access to the thoughts and feelings of characters is the generally accepted role of the writer, especially in the realist tradition of the nineteenth century. Through his fictional explorations, Carroll takes this mission seriously, and indeed literally. Attendance to sound thereby serves to forge connections between Carroll and his contemporaries (such as Eliot) and situates the books firmly within a culture habituated to and desirous of music, words and images working together. At the same time, given subsequent endeavours to unsettle distinctions between the audible and inaudible, and between sound and music,[41] it serves to substantially reinforce Carroll's status as a proto-modernist.

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[40] Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'A Modern Poetry of Sensation: Three Christmas Gift Books and the Legacy of Victorian Material Culture' in *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Collette Colligan and Margaret Linley, pp. 107-136 (p. 125).
[41] Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 11.