

Preface

This work began at a time long past when, banished to the “land of counterpane” by a childhood illness, I received from class and teacher the combined *Alice* books. How elegant the little volume seemed to me with its gold-embossed ivory cover, coated pages, and pale blue ribbon to mark my place. It would be years before I realized that its ninety-two illustrations by John Tenniel might have been better reproduced.

But at that time there was so much to wonder at: the impossibly slender legs of Father William’s son and the way his mouth formed a tiny *o*, the grim profile of the Duchess’s cook, the way the mask-faced King of the frontispiece came alive in the forty-first picture, and the contrast of the stiff wooden skirts of the chess people with their lively little feet. The strangeness of those books was like a private place to which I returned again and again to imbibe its odd flavor.

Passing over the years, how exciting to learn that the maker of these pictures was not only a political artist but also the chief cartoonist of his age. At first the twenty-three hundred cartoons were enigmas to me, except that here and there I caught glimpses of Queens—both Red and White, swains, and country louts reminiscent of the *Alices*. But soon certain drawings seemed to form distinct sets. Two of these—my incipient studies of Tenniel’s handling of Irish and of working-class issues—eventually appeared in a single chapter of my 1985 dissertation. Other embryonic studies, now incorporated into the last part of this book, were written for the 1991 *Punch* conference in London and the 1994 international Lewis Carroll conference in Winston-Salem. Then an added chapter—the nineteenth—seemed needed to clarify the politics of Tenniel and *Punch*. In these propaganda studies I have tried to present both sides on issues, but it will be no secret that Tenniel’s social philosophy is not my own.

The *Alice* chapters evolved separately. Having long avoided the topic (expecting that everything about these books would have been said many times over), I came upon an 1865 engraving in which actors disguised as chess pieces played upon a giant board. Once aware of the everyday Victorian world behind the creatures and scenes of Wonderland, I was assailed by a string of new insights. Ian Anstruther’s book on the Eglinton tournament, a Carroll

Society talk on movable books, a chance remark on magic lanterns and dissolving views, a giant advertisement in a London tube station picturing Tenniel's blue Caterpillar—these all played their part.

Like my other investigations, the biographical search yielded discoveries. For example, Tenniel was of a higher social class, was more active in society, and had British roots going further back than many had supposed. Still, this being perfectly compatible with the personality that spoke so clearly from some forty-seven hundred drawings, there were no real surprises.

Finally, there was a last chapter to be written—not the one that appears last in this book, but the fifteenth, "The Grotesque Alice." It is the one most personal to me, for it explores the fascination that began with a happy childhood gift.

I am grateful to the Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon for the financial means to conduct research in London in 1986–87 and to the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation for making possible my biographical search in England in 1993. Among the many to whom I am indebted are the descendants of Tenniel's relatives and friends, who were generous in sharing with me their collections, letters, and reminiscences. These are Derek Stanley Green and Sally Green, Robert Riviere Calkin, Ian Calkin, Maurice Calkin, David B. Calkin, Ann Richardson, Hineira Amy, Paula Ashton King, W. Tenniel Evans, John Hemming, Jeremy Hemming, and Jeanne Wilkins. Others who have furthered my work by making their collections available to me are the Earl of Eglinton and Winton, Robin de Beaumont, Selwyn H. Goodacre, Simon Houfe, and Catherine and Mark Richards.

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