Book - Alice in Wonderland

For this assignment I've chosen to re-interpret and re-tell "Alice in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll using typography and variations in type design.

"Alice in Wonderland" is a well-known children's book from the mid 19th century. The book tells the story of a young girl named Alice and how se came to fall down a rabbit hole into a fantasy world filled with anthropomorphic creatures. The story plays with logic, physics and literacy, making it suitable for both adults and children alike.
The book is one of the best examples of of the *literary nonsense* genre, and famous for its narrative course, structure, depiction of characters and imagery.

The book has 12 chapters, but for this assignment I've chosen to depict only the first one; "Down the Rabbit Hole". In this chapter, we find Alice in her own world with her sister, when se suddenly a White Rabbit with a pocket watch run past her and down a rabbit hole. Alice follows her, and she falls a long way down into a curious hall with all the exit doors locked. She finds a potion labelled "DRINK ME", making her small as a button and unable to reach any of the doors or keys. She then finds a cake with "EAT ME" written in currants. The chapter ends with her eating the cake.

Using type

The original print of the book featured hand-drawn illustrations of the characters and environment depicted in the written text. As my task was to retell the tale using type, I am eliminating the possibility to rely on the illustrations ations and the way they fit into the text to compliment the story. This has to be replaced by the chosen type design and compositions. The White Rabbit is depicted as a hard working and a well educated fellow, and the way down the rabbit hole is a mysterious and slow place. These attributes are to be "replaced", if not re-told, by me using typography and placements. Typography has to ascend from the role as the sole messenger of information and paint the entire picture.
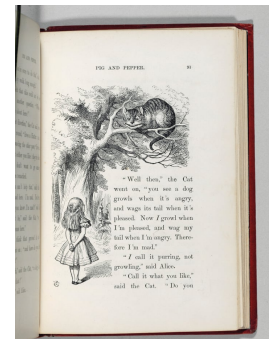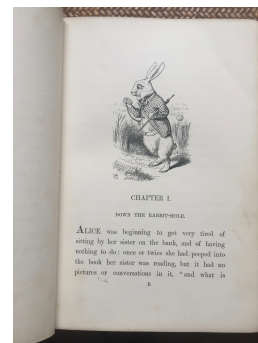
Children's books and typography

As a part of my studies, I have drawn a inspiration and guidance from a thesis by doctor Louise Gallagher of the Trinity Collage. This thesis is named "Typography and Narrative Voice in Children's Literature: Relationships, Interactions and Symbiosis"[1], and examines the relationship between narrative voice and the typography used to present it to readers in children's literature. The thesis discusses the historical development of usage of type to aid the storytelling, and also properly design better experiences for minds in development.
The thesis is divided into chapters, and the final chapter highlights and discusses an essential point for this assignment; looking at the symbiotic relationships between first-person child or young adult narrative voices and expressive typography, highlighting the important role this interaction takes in multimodal children's and young adult literature. Where the original tale featured illustrations to speak directly to the reader, this assignment challenges me to achieve this effect otherwise. One of this effects is achieved by giving the narrator and characters their own voice and personalities, i.e. their own typefaces and variations open these typefaces. However,

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[1] https://bit.ly/35dyRPH

this only solves half of the issue. The environmental descriptions and point of views are somewhat lost when removing the illustrations, and this may be reintroduced via creative use of geometry and typography.

Typographical Voices and Dialects

In the first chapter, we get to know three major characters; the narrator, Alice and the White Rabbit.
The narrator is the all-knowing being, describing both the environment, actions and thoughts. It forms the bridge between the world depicted in the tale, and the readers mind. The words chosen and the sentences shaped by the narrator directly shapes the readers understanding of the story. The *end-user effects* are to be be a result of the narrators execution of telling the story.
For the narrator I've chosen two "voices" as baselines. The first one you encounter is the Courier typeface designed by Howard "Bud" Kettler, originally created for IBM's typewriters, but are more commonly known for its recent use in computers and programming.
Courier is a monospaced font, and is the default font for use in screenplays and was until 2004 the U.S. State Department's standard font. The typeface is well known for its stability and dignity, but also for being machine-like and cold. It is a serious font for serious business, leaving the reader with only the content to be effected by on an emotional level. Alice's life in the normal world is cold and without much to do.

Courier (IBM)

Aa Ee Qq
Aa Ee Qq

a

Think.

abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz
00Ø123456789
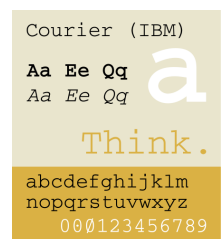
The second typeface for the narrator is Victorian Orchid by Ryoichi Tsunekawa and published through Dharma Type. The typeface is described as a "gorgeous vintage flower" with beautiful, organic serifs inspired by the Victorian era decorations. Most notable are the eye-catching small g's and through-cutting and well balanced serifs found on the capital A's and V's. The font has a somewhat organic, humanistic and soft-impression also found in Times New Roman, but also the horizontal serifs and stressed letterform found in the Modern Serif. This combination makes the font both sharp and neat. The low contrast and well balanced serifs create a strong but casual impression commonly found in Slab Serif fonts.
This typeface enters the story as the White Rabbit jumps into Alice's view. The Victorian Orchid typeface is a contrast to the ordered and strict Courier, and symbolizes and represent the fantasy land that is the Wonderland. As Alice sees the rabbit, the narrator switches voice to the cheery and exciting Victorian Orchid, making the world of Courier look bleak and boring.
When entering Wonderland, the narrator's voice changes entirely to the Victorian Orchid typeface, and the strict and little varied paragraph structure changes to a more fluid and descriptive form, further explained in the next section.

Victorian Orchid
Designed by Dharma Type

A	M	N
V	W	n
g	v	w
2	7	&

Pattern Poetry and Shaped Prose

When interpreting Alice in Wonderland, I got the sense that the tale needed something that could better explain the environments depicted through the illustrations and contents of the text. This is where "pattern poetry" or shaped verse come in. This is a technique where the typography and lines are arranged in an unusual configuration in order to convey or extend the aesthetic or emotional contents of the words making up the shape. The images from left is one of the original printings of the tale about Alice, and the original sketch by the author. Here Carroll is playing with the reader and the story by both using the word "tale" literally and figuratively, by having the tale being shaped like a tail. Sadly, this is the only example of shaped verses in the book.
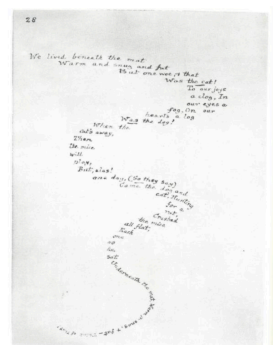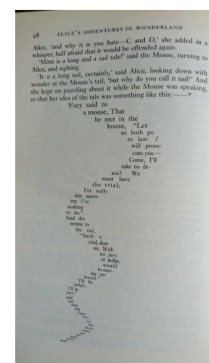
Using this technique on "Alice in Wonderland", I was looking to bring forth certain aspects; environmental structures, movements of the characters and point of views. One of earliest examples of this when Alice is crawling down the rabbit hole, and it all of the sudden becomes a vertical well. This is achieved by having the sentence go from horizontal to vertical through an arch. The relationship between the horizontal and vertical parts is chosen to reflect the suddenness of the drop; a more gradual drop would not have served the tale right.
Another example is when Alice falls down the well, and the paragraphs on both of the spreads in view are shaped like thin, vertical strips to answer to the darkness and range of vision. Later we find Alice in a confined hall searching for a door and a key. Here the first paragraph is taking shape of the room Alice is confined in, and the second is shaped like a key-hole. The latter example is less an environmental description than a description of Alice"s motive. Nevertheless, the key-hole is a physical attribute, and one Alice has to navigate around and use in order to advance to Wonderland.
The last example I am to discuss is the sequence of events that is the result of Alice drinking the potion that shrinks her down to a button. When she has finished the potion, she gradually shrinks down in size, as emphasized by the distorted line from Alice. This ends with Alice eating a mysterious cake, and chapter two starts with her increasing in size. In the original tale, there is no indication of the effects of the cake before the reader turns to the next page. In this assignment I have added an element of foreshadowing by using the same graphical technique indicating that she is growing, maybe without her knowing herself yet?

Layout, size and readability

One of the main methods used in the text is contrast - i.e. contrast between the real world and Wonderland. The real world follows a strict and methodical layout with defined paragraphs and sentence structures. This goes hand in hand with the typeface of choice, and creates a clean look only aborted by brief introductions form the Wonderland.
When entering Wonderland, the layout becomes more experimental and playful. As mentioned in the previous sections; some of the paragraphs becomes an illustration themselves by mimicking the environments or other attributes of the story.
Positioning is heavily influenced by Alice's point of view. If she is low to the ground, the paragraphs may be placed accordingly (when looking straight forward). When chasing the White Rabbit around a corner, the connection where to pages becomes a spread acts as the corner, creating a more dynamic reading experience.
When Alice becomes small, so does the text. The narrator keeps its point of view, and we see Alice as the little button she has become. This aids the story in a few ways, but mainly in terms of humor. Reading the small text helps us emphasize with Alice, and gives us insight into the struggles she might experience.

Colors

The amount of chosen colors are sparse. Inspired by the original tale, we are experiencing a simple white background populated by dark text in most the text, inverted in the darker environments of the story. Some of the narrators text has variation in opacity to aid the story in suitable areas.
Color is introduced in elements of the story where labels are present. The objects labeled are of the Wonderland kind, and represent the contrast with the bleak real world. Alice has yet to enter Wonderland, and these labels are there to give the reader an indication to what is coming in terms style and aesthetics in the coming chapters.

Final thoughts

This project has proven to be a good exercise in a few key areas. First; writing a children's book is challenging and ever changing. The thesis I've drawn a lot of knowledge form is a testament to this. By analyzing how we have told stories throughout the years, we can clearly see changes in terms of character depiction, narrator voice, page layouts and visual aids. One has to look at the targeted audience and try to figure out what means can effectively enhance the readers perception of the story.

Secondly; being creative with type is hard. In previous assignments I've struggled with being too conservative and not taking enough risks. This assignment is still coursed by this, but to a lesser degree than I thought when I started working on it. Still, there are more risks to be taken and skills to be learned.

Thirdly (and more final thoughts of the course itself); typography is not something you want take for granted. Text is one of the worlds best messenger for information and understanding, and having a combination of appeal and clear design are often make or break aspects for products and services. It doesn't have to be pretty or clean, but thoughtful and deliberate.