

## WONDERS IN ALICE'S WORLD

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In 1862, while Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll, was writing his first odd book for the Liddell sisters, it's very likely that even Alice, his favourite, had no idea of the deep and unforgettable sign she was going to leave not only in the history of fantastic novels, but above all in the fantastic collective unconscious, worldwide in the 18th, the 19th and in 20<sup>th</sup> century...

Plummeting down into the well of Carroll's wild inventiveness, following an absurd white rabbit always late for something, became the favourite game of several generations of readers and illustrators, starting with the severe and original John Tenniel and Arthur Rackham up to Walt Disney sumptuous characters in its classic cartoons, from the genial reviewer Ralph Steadman that worked at the century editions to the Italian Emanuele Luzzati at the end of the century. All of them were first anxious and then happy to be able to plunge into that parallel world where everything is possible, where a surprising reality is in constant transformation and where each character is absolutely unpredictable.

To all professionals working with images, Alice's wonderland is definitely the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, a paradise full of wealth, the Bible of visual inventiveness, the richest and lushest psychedelic jungle, Atlantis full of surprises. Illustrating the young Victorian girl running here and there across the chapters is a true present, or even better, it is an award, the final achievement of a dream nurtured since one's childhood.

That's why young Giovanni Robustelli is really lucky to have already accomplished his dream of being there, through the looking glass!

Not at all discouraged by the possible difficulties of such a challenge, Robustelli plunges into the rabbit hole and explores all its corners without hesitation. He immediately identifies all peculiarities of his companion of adventures, Alice, a young girl a bit impudent but very curious about others. With her, he meets, one after the other, the various ministers of marvel: the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter, the Caterpillar, the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts and all the others.

Robustelli's unusual horizontal table scenes succeed in carrying the observer right in the middle of those pleasingly absurd situations. And it is precisely in that moment, gazing from left to right and viceversa, that we are astonished not only by what we see, but by the way we see it.

Surprisingly, Robustelli's teen art is already perfectly mature. His rapid graphic technique knows immediately – instinctively? – what to focus on and what to gloss over. Thus, locations and characters have their own space, with each one standing out based on its true essence, made of ink and dream, without interfering with one another.

And yet each one is meaningful: Alice and the humans, the animals and the plants, and even the inanimate objects.

It is evident at first glance that this is a classy interpretation, a superb one. The naughty bare feet of the young protagonist, the curly mustache of the White Rabbit, the questioning look of the Eaglet are there to prove this. In the same way, this appears clearly looking at the anarchic intertwining of the trees in the wood, the ascending delight of the descending Caterpillar, the furry elegance of the March Hare, the ancient contempt of the Duchess Cook, or Alice's shadow in the playing cards twirl.

If he had grown in the 60s, by now Robustelli would be a famous and well known Italian illustrator. Living and producing today, he is a great Italian illustrator still not well renowned. What are we waiting for to recognize his value? "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late" – says the White Rabbit, reminding us that the clock keeps ticking ... Come on, let's not be late too!

*Ferruccio Giromini*