

Who is the Red King?

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We all know that the Alice books are a dream (though I've always preferred *nightmare*) and there is a pretty broad hint that the dream is a dream dreamt by the Red king. We all remember the passage in *Through the Looking Glass*
...

Here she checked herself in some alarm, at hearing something that sounded to her like the puffing of a large steam-engine in the wood near them, though she feared it was more likely to be a wild beast. 'Are there any lions or tigers about here?' she asked timidly.

'It's only the Red King snoring,' said Tweedledee.

'Come and look at him!' the brothers cried, and they each took one of Alice's hands, and led her up to where the King was sleeping.

'Isn't he a LOVELY sight?'" said Tweedledum.

Alice couldn't say honestly that he was. He had a tall red night-cap on, with a tassel, and he was lying crumpled up into a sort of untidy heap, and snoring loud – 'fit to snore his head off!' as Tweedledum remarked.

'I'm afraid he'll catch cold with lying on the damp grass,' said Alice, who was a very thoughtful little girl.

'He's dreaming now,' said Tweedledee: 'and what do you think he's dreaming about?'

Alice said 'Nobody can guess that.'

'Why, about YOU!' Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. 'And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?'

'Where I am now, of course,' said Alice.

'Not you!' Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. 'You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!'

'If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out – bang! – just like a candle!'

'I shouldn't!' Alice exclaimed indignantly. 'Besides, if I'M only a sort of thing in his dream, what are YOU, I should like to know?'

'Ditto' said Tweedledum.

'Ditto, ditto' cried Tweedledee.

He shouted this so loud that Alice couldn't help saying, 'Hush!

You'll be waking him, I'm afraid, if you make so much noise.'

'Well, it no use YOUR talking about waking him,' said Tweedledum, 'when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real.'

'I AM real!' said Alice and began to cry.

'You won't make yourself a bit realler by crying,' Tweedledee remarked: 'there's nothing to cry about.'

'If I wasn't real,' Alice said – half-laughing though her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous – 'I shouldn't be able to cry.'

'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?' Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt..

... and so on.

However, it now seems to me that there is more to be said about this passage. Why should it be the Red King whose figments Alice and Co^y are?

Whenever I find a second-hand copy of *The Annotated Alice*, I always buy it, in order always to have a copy to give to a deserving student—too many of my students seem not to have read it and this is not a situation to be borne. I dipped into the last copy I bought and I was brought up short by this passage in chapter 7 of *Through The Looking Glass*:

“This young lady loves you with an H,” the King said, introducing Alice in the hope of turning off the Messenger’s attention from himself...

because there seemed something odd about it. It quickly occurred to me that practically nowhere in the Alice books is any account given of the motivations or beliefs of any of the characters—other than Alice herself of course. Presumably this is simply because they are all creatures in Alice’s dreams, and have only the attributes Alice finds for them. And since they are figments of her imagination they cannot have genuine internal states. (Their internal states are figmentary, whereas hers are real). Their opacity to Alice is of course part of the nightmare quality of the whole fiction, and echoes the unintelligibility of the adult world to the child. This attribution of a hope to the King comes from the author, not from Alice. As far as I can see this is the only instance in either text where the author attributes an internal state to a character other than Alice.

I immediately instituted a string search for intentional verbs. I have highlighted in **boldface** those verbs that showed up.

The Ignorant Eaglet

‘Speak English!’ said the Eaglet. ‘I don’t **know** the meaning of half those long words, and, what’s more, I don’t believe you do either!’ And the Eaglet bent down its head to hide a smile: some of the other birds tittered audibly.

The Thoughtful Footman

The Footman seemed to **think** this a good opportunity for repeating his remark, with variations. ‘I shall sit here,’ he said, ‘on and off, for days and days.’

The Thoughtful Dormouse

‘They lived on treacle,’ said the Dormouse, after **thinking** a minute or two.

The Pigeon Believes

‘And just as I’d taken the highest tree in the wood,’ continued the Pigeon, raising its voice to a shriek, ‘and just as I was thinking I should be free of them at last, they must needs come wriggling down from the sky! Ugh, Serpent!’

‘I **HAVE** tasted eggs, certainly,’ said Alice, who was a very truthful child; ‘but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.’

‘I don’t **believe** it,’ said the Pigeon; ‘but if they do, why then they’re a kind of serpent, that’s all I can say.’

The Queen Believes

‘You needn’t say “exactly,” ’ the Queen remarked: ‘I can **believe** it without that. Now I’ll give YOU something to believe . . .’

The Gryphon Thinks

‘What **IS** the use of repeating all that stuff,’ the Mock Turtle interrupted, ‘if you don’t explain it as you go on? It’s by far the most confusing thing I ever heard!’

‘Yes, I **think** you’d better leave off,’ said the Gryphon: and Alice was only too glad to do so.

The Hatter Thinks

‘You ought to have finished,’ said the King. ‘When did you begin?’

The Hatter looked at the March Hare, who had followed him into the court, arm-in-arm with the Dormouse. ‘Fourteenth of March, I **think** it was,’ he said.

I think the reader will conclude—as I did—that these do not amount to attributions *by the author* of internal states to any of the characters involved; on the whole the attributions of internal states are made by the characters themselves, poor dears, and they would say that wouldn’t they. The exception

is the Dormouse, but then we are not told *what* the Dormouse is thinking. As far as the narrative is concerned the only function of its thinking is to waste some time.

It's true that it is the author rather than the footman who suggests that the footman is thinking, but he goes no further than to say that footman *seemed* to think.

Against the suggestion that the Red King is a specially intentional entity, is the fact that the eaglet "bends down to conceal a smile" ... which *could* be taken to imply that the eaglet had intentions. It would suit my case much better if the Eaglet bent down *as if* to conceal Is the current text perhaps the result of an elision ... ?

The suggestion here is that the King has a special status as the only character other than Alice to whom the author attributes intentional states. If so, what is different about the Red King? Why should the Red King be special in this way? Who—other than Alice herself of course—can have internal states? Well, the author for one. I offer the suggestion that the Red King is Carroll doing a Hitchcock. The reason why the characters are figments of the Red King's imagination is that the Red King is the author, and his identity is betrayed by the fact that he is the only character to have intentional states attributed to him by the author.

I look forward to this identification revealing itself in other ways.