Abstract

How do the look and feel of the book impact the markets for and the meanings of the text? Text and illustrations are mutable content that is framed and commodified by the book’s materiality. The book’s materiality is the most visible yet under-researched means by which publishers target audiences and manufacture meaning. Art direction is the strategic, creative concept for how the look and feel of the book attract consumers and engage readers. That concept is articulated with the book’s design and production values (e.g. format, layout, ink, paper, binding). This dissertation documents, historicizes and interrogates how the book’s materiality impacts, first, the book–consumer relationship and, second, the text–reader relationship. This case study of British and American English-language editions of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865–2015) traces the title’s ‘material evolution’ (i.e. the successive materialities of a title that is published in multiple editions). The three-tiered framework for studying material evolution builds on: industrial printing and binding order forms and analytical bibliography to document copies; publishing history case studies and book history models to historicize multiple editions of a single title; publishing industry practice and literary theories to interrogate commercial rationales and meaning-making processes. This dissertation begins by mining book scholarship (bibliography, book history, publishing history) for the field’s engagement with materiality and literary theories (genre theory, semiotics, reader-response theory, paratext) for their constructs of authorship, text, readership and work. It then examines 46 editions of Alice individually. It recovers author Lewis Carroll as an art director who worked with London publisher Macmillan to package Alice in five editions. Subsequent remaindered, pirated and posthumous editions introduced Alice to America and variously adopted, adapted and deviated from Carroll’s fairy-tale aesthetics. Once Alice entered the public domain, publishers more aggressively and frequently used art direction to diversify the title across ages (e.g. children, adults, young adults) and categories (e.g. fantasy, film tie-in, satire, graphic novel). This dissertation unpacks how and why publishers manipulate materiality, and the impacts it has on consumers’ discovery and acquisition of the book and the meanings that readers make of the text.

Keywords: Publishing; Book Design; Book Production; Book History; Alice in Wonderland; Lewis Carroll