



# Artist of Wonderland: The Life, Political Cartoons, and Illustrations of Tenniel

*Frankie Morris*

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Best known today as the illustrator for Lewis Carroll's Alice books, John Tenniel was the Victorian era's chief political cartoonist. This extensively illustrated book is the first to draw almost exclusively on primary sources in family collections, public archives, and other depositories. Frankie Morris examines Tenniel's life and work, producing a book that is not only a definitive resource for scholars and collectors but one that can be easily enjoyed by everyone interested in Victorian life and art, social history, journalism and political cartoons, and illustrated books.

In the first part of the book, Morris looks at Tenniel the man. From his sunny childhood and early enthusiasm for sports, theater, and medievalism to his flirtation with high art and fifty years in the close brotherhood of the London journal *Punch*, Tenniel is shown to have been the sociable and urbane humorist revealed in his drawings. According to his countrymen Tenniel's work—and his *Punch* cartoons in particular—would embody for future historians the "trend and character" of Victorian thought and life. Morris assesses to what extent that prediction has been fulfilled.

The biography is followed by three parts on Tenniel's work, consisting of thirteen independent essays in which the author examines Tenniel's methods and his earlier book illustrations, the Alice pictures, and the *Punch* cartoons. She addresses such little-understood subjects as Tenniel's drawings on wood, his relationship with Lewis Carroll, and his controversial Irish cartoons, and inquires into the salient characteristics of his approximately 4,500 drawings for books and journals.

For lovers of Alice, Morris offers six chapters on Tenniel's work for Carroll. These reveal demonstrable links with Christmas pantomimes, *Punch* and Judy shows, nursery toys, magic lanterns, nineteenth-century grotesques, Gothic revivalism, and social caricatures.

In five probing studies, Morris demonstrates how Tenniel's cartoons depicted the key political questions of his day--the Eastern Question, which brought into opposition the great rivals Gladstone and Disraeli; trade-union issues and franchise reform; Irish resistance to British rule; and Lincoln and the American Civil War—examining their assumptions, devices, and evolving strategies. An appendix identifies some 1,500 unmonogrammed drawings done by Tenniel in his first twelve years on *Punch*.

The definitive study of both the man and the work, *Artist of Wonderland* gives an unprecedented view of the cartoonist whose adroit adaptations of elements from literature, art, and above all the stage succeeded in mythologizing the world for generations of Britons.

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