

“A Worker’s Paradise!”: Industrial Revolution Era Britain as Rendered in the Level ‘Hatter’s Domain’ of American McGee’s Alice: Madness Returns [2011]

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ABSTRACT

Alice: Madness Returns is a 3D action platformer which follows the story of Alice Liddell in a disturbed version of Wonderland, corrupted by residual and recurred guilt and self-destruction, brought on by Alice’s fragmented memories of her family’s fiery death. The story proceeds from the events set in the first instalment of what is now the Alice series, created by American ‘Wicked Disney’ McGee.

Of interest to this study is the exploration of Hatter’s Domain, a section of Wonderland which is inhabited and run by its namesake, the Mad Hatter. It focuses on a close reading of the territory in terms of how the narrative—being rendered through the sprites, audio, and characters—is inspired by the events of Industrial Revolution Era Britain; this is in terms of references to poor working conditions, the working conditions emphasizing harsh discipline, efficiency, and the lack of safety and sanitation in the workplace.

Keywords: *American-McGee, Madness>Returns, Alice-in-Wonderland, Industrial-Revolution, Video-Game-Appreciation*

Finding Method in the Madness: An Introduction

Being the third location in Wonderland in order of gameplay, Hatter’s Domain is a gigantic factory which produces steel, along with the steel products, for the construction of the new Looking Glass Railway, train included. Alice finds herself once more in this territory, but this time out of free will, and with the intention of finding leads and information with regards this new train which is responsible for progressively destroying Wonderland.

In the process of seeking the Hatter, players have Alice navigate about gigantic machinery (some of which are shaped like fists and feet), hot furnaces, and interacting with levers. There might be those who opine that such a depiction is a good but simultaneously excessive, game rendering of its equivalents in the Victorian age, as in the era of coal mining and coal use to power machines, both the ones which produce other materials, as well as the iron that the machines themselves were constructed from.¹ But it must be emphasized that such a point of view depends on the discipline of the person looking at the aesthetic. We need to remember that this is, after all, Wonderland (they are all mad there), and that from the perspective of videogame appreciation, environments and expressions are less about accuracy in reproduction, and places more importance on imagery which make the gameplay rich or ridiculous—the significance of this latter is the potential for it to start discussions.²

The narrative setup at the foundation of the Hatter's Domain gains its inspiration from Great Britain's history of the Industrial Revolution, specifically in terms of references to poor working conditions;³ the working conditions emphasize harsh discipline, efficiency, and the lack of safety and sanitation in the workplace.⁴ While this is something that McGee has himself shared so that players have a context in appreciating the level, the particularities as to how the depictions are to be interpreted are left to the audience to discover and appreciate on their own. These considered, this article is a dissection of the events, visuals, and audio which provide colour and historically infused richness to the level. Each in-game reference mentioned here is provided a discussion, the substance of which draws from a mix of scholarly sources and public intellectual material authored by universities and news/documentary organizations, on the topic of the socio-cultural dimension of the Industrial Revolution.

¹Peter Ackroyd, *Revolution: The History of England from the Battle of the Boyne to the Battle of Waterloo* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 275.

² This is reminiscent of a good argument by Jay Bolter and Diane Gromala on seeing software as more for the exploration of ideas than to be regarded purely in terms of them serving as tools. See Bolter, Jay David and Diane Gromala, *Windows and Mirrors: Interaction Design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency*. (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003). See also Dominique Angela Juntado and Antonio Sanna's co-authored chapter titled 'Navigating the Coded Rabbit Hole: A Sociocultural Reading of the American McGee's Alice Games,' in Antonio Sanna, ed. *Alice in Wonderland in Film and Popular Culture* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2022). Said example involves interdisciplinary perspectives working together, from Cultural Studies: Video Games (Juntado) and from Literature (Sanna).

³ McGee's interview discusses this. See Berg, R.J., *The Art of Alice Madness Returns*. (Wisconsin: Dark Horse, 2011), 80.

⁴ Wayne LaMorte, "The Industrial Revolution," *The Evolution of Epidemiologic Thinking* (Boston University School of Public Health), last modified October 18, 2017, https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/ep/ep713_history/ep713_history4.html.

_history4.html.; Sidney Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution." *The Economic History Review* 16, No. 2 (1963): 254-271.

Some Brief Notes on Close Reading Applied in Qualitative Studies of Video Games

There is no one-size fits all formula when it comes to reading videogames. Akin to film and television, Videogames are “an audiovisual, time-based medium”.⁵ Attempts at reading video games has been done mostly through close reading, borrowing broadly from the methodologies born in the field of Literary Studies, and from Film and Performance Studies.⁶ Even still, these are far from perfect fits.

The working definition pertinent to this article is close reading as a “detailed examination, deconstruction, and analysis of a media text”⁷ in which its purpose is to look beyond the entertainment value of the medium, to discover the ‘seams’ and how all the elements enjoin in order to form a “unified entertainment experience”.⁸ By ‘texts’, the word being used in its broadest sense, refers to “objects of critical focus”.⁹ Texts are these which “convey a set of meanings to the person who examines it”. Not being limited to written materials, a text is something that can be explored, inspected for layers of meaning, and from which information and conclusions can be drawn.¹⁰

Also, of particular application to this study is doing close reading as a “celebration of the many ways in which a text can create meaning”,¹¹ that it is through “the act of close interrogation and explication” in which “a theorist may use close reading to excavate hidden qualities of a media artifact.”¹²

We cannot assume that discussions on video games are counted as criticism in the way that we know criticism is typically structured in the social science academe. Under the social sciences, especially in the case for peer-reviewed publication, criticism involves making an evaluative

⁵Scott Brendan Cassidy, “The Videogame as Narrative,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 28, No. 4 (2011): 292.

⁶Jim Bizzocchi and Theresa Jean Tanenbaum, “Well read: applying close reading techniques to gameplay experiences,” in *Well Played 3.0: Video Games, Value, and Meaning*, ed. D. Davidson (Pennsylvania: ETC Press, 2011), 289-291.

⁷Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum, “Well Read”, 289.

⁸ Lee Sheldon, *Character Development and Storytelling for Games* (Massachusetts: Thomson Course Technology, 2004), 06.

⁹John Butterworth and Geoff Thwaites, *Thinking Skills Critical Thinking and Problem Solving 2nd ed.*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁰ Monique Babin, Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear, *The Word on College reading and Writing*. Oregon: Open Oregon Educational Resources, 2017, 3.; Allison Kilgannon, *Advanced English*. British Columbia: BCcampus Open, 2021, 3.

¹¹ Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum, “Well read”, 289.

¹² Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum, “Well read”, 289.

judgment¹³ and recommends looking at the strengths, weaknesses, and potentials of what is being inspected, then ending with an unbiased opinion based on what information is provided. Being critical doesn't merely refer to "finding fault or expressing dislike", though this is another meaning to being 'critical',¹⁴ and depending on the intention of the aspiring article, may push for a particular position. It then concludes with suggestions on how a thing can be improved. But when it comes to talking about video games, we follow suit in Ian Bogost's description, provided here in-verbatim, so as to preserve the original flavor:

Criticism is not conducted to improve the work or the medium or to win over those who otherwise would turn up their noses at it. Nor is it conducted as flash-in-the-pan buying advice, doled out on release day to reverie or disdain, only to be immediately forgotten. Rather, it is conducted to get to the bottom of something, to grasp its form, context, function, meaning, and capacities.¹⁵

And so criticism is a way of looking, and to take it as culture. The critic in this sense speaks in order to catalog and clarify the world.¹⁶ And good criticism involves answering this particular inquiry, "What is even going on here?"¹⁷

The immediate in video gaming is the visual aspect, what is first seen before a press of a button or any other form of interaction. The visual aspect influences gameplay in the sense that the contemplative player would be motivated to ask the how's and why's that a certain character, item, or place would appear as it does;¹⁸ likewise move and then next, how they sound as in an effect or atmospheric audio or music. Taking these into consideration assists in understanding the larger picture conveyed in the narrative. There are elements that become limited when written in dialogue, and there are instances in which words limit the emotions that could be better conveyed by texture, color, size, and juxtapositions.

¹³ Butterworth and Thwaites, "Thinking Skills", 12.

¹⁴ Butterworth and Thwaites, "Thinking Skills", 7.

¹⁵ Ian Bogost, *How to Talk About Video Games*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), x.

¹⁶ Bogost, "How to Talk About Video Games", x.

¹⁷ Bogost, "How to Talk About Video Games", x.

¹⁸ Dominique Angela Juntado and Abner Bondoc, "A Starting Formula for Hermeneutically-Smarter Sprites" (Presentation, First International Conference of the Philippine Historical Association, Manila, PH, August 27-29, 2015). See also Mia Consalvo and Nathan Dutton, "Game analysis: Developing a methodological toolkit for the qualitative study of games." *Game Studies* 6, No. 1 (2006). http://gamestudies.org/0601/articles/consalvo_dutton

The reading of a video game must include looking into gameplay mechanisms such as procedurality (involving rule-based representation) or procedural rhetoric (the ideas or arguments created in a game, played out through processes within the game)¹⁹; framing also applies in the case of the player, where they would appreciate a character, an in-game reference, or an event based on how they understood it and what it reminded them of, as they would in anchored ideas, and lastly how it resonated with them. Interpretation of references made in-game, of other things whether from pop culture or historical on the other hand is difficult to consistently ascertain, as getting to the context of a reference on the player’s own is different when it comes to tropes and for references; it also depends on the player’s age, general life experience, how well read they are, together with consumption of media, and encounters with the everyday. This is what makes videogame criticism different for everyone because there may be some references which will end up dismissed because of how these simply did not register in the player’s mind.

Exploring the London Setting

As Alice makes her way out of her residence at Houndsditch Home for Wayward Youth, the player is given information in audio and visual clues via interactive clutter and event script,²⁰ about urban social living for the poor, as well as tragedies which have become part and parcel of working in factories. A definitive example is in the newspaper the player may have Alice pick up from the stack sitting on the console in the hall at the orphanage, to which she would react by uttering her thoughts and reading an excerpt:

The “Illustrated News” feeds an insatiable appetite for domestic mayhem and industrial disaster. “Fire at match factory. Six girls missing” Is there anything more predictable? The world’s gone quite mad.

Upon stepping out of the shelter, the player is able to reference that the Houndsditch Home sits in the London east end, in a location which provides a view distant from the more well-off. The place is characterized by winding streets, pollution from burning coal from each household and business, filling the air with plumes of smoke, ash and soot. The quality of the air is further diminished with pungent fumes from metal smelting, and industrial plants

¹⁹This is a simplified, jargon-free definition for those outside Ludology. For the full definition and application of Procedural Rhetoric, see Ian Bogost’s 2007 work titled *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* and his 2006 book titled *Unit Operations*.

²⁰ Where an action in-game would trigger the playing of another event

belching clouds of smoke.²¹ On Pinchin Lane, the player overhears, and has the option to eavesdrop, into a conversation between some workers on the nature of work in a factory and dissatisfaction in the justified lack of sufficient compensation:

Man 01: Aw, this digging is killing me back. They call work
'noble' those bastards.

Man 02: (Keeps his eyes on his companion)

This is an idea which the player will see expanded later on at Hatter Industries under the administration of Dormouse and March Hare.

The same theme of work is repeated at Deadman's Cross, where a Pimp attempts to recruit a woman, but the subject of their conversation has to do with defining what can constitute work together with its ethical dimensions:

Pimp: "Like a real job? No changing nappies, better than being
a dog's body for orphans. You can make someone happy. Save
the world... 10 minutes at a time."

There were those who, instead of outright begging, felt they could earn their living in street performance. An example of this would be the man playing the violin just down the street from Houndsditch Home, asking Alice if she liked Boccherini or Paganini.



Figure 1. Hatter Industries. *Alice Wiki*, https://alice.fandom.com/wiki/Hatter%27s_Domain

²¹ Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500* (Massachusetts: Cengage Learning, 2022), 612.

Navigating Hatter’s Domain

The Hatter’s Domain is situated on the other side of The Vale of Tears. Hatter Industries is depicted as a massive, sprawling complex. It floats in the sky without a visibly apparent mechanism, giving the impression of defying the laws of Physics. In-character with dark Wonderland fashion, the collective impression to the scene is best described as having a steampunk aesthetic mixed with grunge, and some sense of foreboding.

Of Constant Motifs

Aesthetics-wise, Tea has always been associated with the Hatter. The idea of taking tea as a demonstration of culture and civility is encountered in two instances. First, it is the immediate observation when appreciating the structures that comprise the industrial complex. In terms of plot development, the buildings which are shaped like teapots, and the cable cars and mine carts fashioned as teacups on tall wheels, can be seen as an artistic carry-over of the gigantic tea table in *Crazed Clockwork*, from *American McGee’s Alice*. The teapot machinery are a Wonderland counterpart of the steam mechanisms under the factory setup. The second instance, where the Tea Set is encountered in-game as extrapolated clutter, is best reserved for the succeeding discussion which delves into the contrasts between the administrations of the old order and that of the new order of the Industrial Revolution.

Grandfather Clocks, the clock faces, and gears are a second reference which have likewise been carried over from the previous game. While serving as another aesthetic reference to keep the Hatter in character, as he is still very much obsessed with time and precision, from the context of the Industrial Revolution, the observance of clocks translates to efficiency. For the new technologies to be operated efficiently, part of the strategy was to coordinate workers according to a particular schedule, as by doing so, this would ensure that the power sources for the machinery wouldn’t need to run for longer hours. In addition to this, as a measure for consistent productivity at all times, greater stocks of inventory per worker had to be maintained for each stage of the production process so as to ensure that production would not stop due to the absence of a worker.²²

²² Gregory Clark, “Factory Discipline,” *The Journal of Economic History* 54, No. 1 (1994): 128-163.

The Mad Hatter vs. the Hare & Dormouse: Comparing Industry Leadership

Hatter, Hare, and Dormouse are known to be friends in both the Carolinian canon and in the last part of McGee's *Alice*. But this is otherwise the case in the re-corrupted version of Wonderland in *Madness Returns*, as Hare and Dormouse are written to have overthrown the Hatter. Discussed in the pages that follow, is how the Administrations running certain eras in Hatter Industries are reflective of leadership modes encountered in the old order and in the new order of the Industrial Revolution.

Previously, the Hatter's leadership can be interpreted as a render of the old "employers groping their way towards a new impersonal discipline"²³ when it comes to running industry. The modifications when it came to working conditions was seemingly minor. Workers in manufactories and workshops had control over their own hours, work pace, and conduct; breaks were taken whenever desired, and they socialized at work as they wished.²⁴ Porcelain Tea Sets scattered about Hatter's Domain nods to this detail, also serving as an artistic appreciation referencing the superiors' practice of "looking backwards sporadically to make use of feasts and holidays, typical of the old order in cementing personal relationships and breaking the monotony of the working year".²⁵ This balanced the rigidity of the workday, the punctuality and attendance taking. It may be argued that the Hatter has always considered the tea-taking ceremonies as among the trappings of high culture and humanity.²⁶ It's a chance at exchanging civilities,²⁷ and it was a time and venue to practice reflective thinking as a hobby through riddle-telling, conversation, and debate.

The Hare and the Dormouse embody the new order as they focus on discipline and efficiency. Looping reminders on work conduct are heard over the audio system; while for visuals, posters display rules and motivational content which are "formalized" and "impersonal".²⁸

²³ Sidney Pollard. "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution." *The Economic History Review* 16 (1963): 257.

²⁴ Clark, "Factory Discipline," 128.

²⁵ Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution," 257.

²⁶ Recall the Lab scene in the prequel American McGee's *Alice*, that Dormouse claims that Hatter denied him and Hare the privilege of tea in their situation.

²⁷ Though exchanging civilities was more among the Hatter and his Wonderland contemporaries. In a personal correspondence with Antonio Sanna, he mentioned the Hatter has been mean towards Alice.

²⁸ Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution," 258.

There are other imagery in terms of how factory discipline was visually exemplified in the game. The Dodo Miserarium²⁹ is a notable example of a scene composition in which the arrangement of its elements can be appreciated as an artistic interpretation of one of the rules of worker conduct—where no one is allowed to talk with fellow workers during the working hours³⁰ as doing so would result in the workers getting reprimanded,³¹ or worse, fired. Keep in mind how Wonderland canon has animals behaving and speaking in the same manner as humans. Players might ponder of the possibility that the fate of ‘getting fired’ involves the literal use of fire—as some locations in the factory show Dodos getting spit-roasted, some others upside-down, plucked, and suspended in their cage or from the ceiling.

It is also under this new order that the festive events and sumptuous dinners formerly celebrated by workers were now exclusive to stockholders of industry; the social divide between the worker and employer was hard and distant, only to speak on matters of efficiency, light incentives, or dismissal.³² This characteristic of the Industrial Revolution is reflected in-game, in one of the rooms of Hatter Industries in which the floor is entirely covered with multiple feet of broken tea wares, an expression of the end to the Hatter’s reign of decadence, excess, and waste.

²⁹The room with the caged Dodos

³⁰Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 258.

³¹Harriet Isecke, *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution (Building Fluency through Reader’s Theater)*. (California: Teacher Created Materials, 2009)

³²Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 258.



Figure 2. Examples of rules and motivational content in posters plastered about locations in the Factory. Images taken by screenshot from American McGee. *Alice: Madness Returns*. Spicy Horse. PC. 2011



Figure 3. Motivational posting which features Hare’s portrait. The bottom of the image reads, “All Aboard for Progress.” Image taken by screenshot from American McGee. *Alice: Madness Returns*. Spicy Horse. PC. 2011

Workforce Types on the Factory Floor

This section focuses on two types of Wonderland creatures pertinent to depicting the references to Industrial Revolution era Britain in Hatter’s Domain. The first is the Menacing Ruin, which is argued as the sequel’s generation of the Automaton from the first instalment of *Alice*; it is discussed before its relative, the Insidious Ruin. Second are the Dodomechs, though a repeat mention in this study, but for another purpose; they are exclusive to *Madness Returns*.

Automatons as Metaphors for Laborers

Menacing Ruin and Insidious Ruin can be interpreted as the succeeding version of the Automatons, given its cues of having been human once, as seen on the child-like faces it has. When it is introduced, the creature is seen swiftly emerging from a pool of black oil and gunk.



Figure 4. A comparison of the two Ruins. Left to right: Menacing Ruin and Insidious Ruin.
Alice Wiki, <https://alice.fandom.com/wiki/Ruin>

The Cultural-Historical Anatomy of a Menacing Ruin and an Insidious Ruin

Menacing Ruin may be symbolic of child labor in the mines and in light metal trades during the Industrial Revolution, particularly in the instances of these workers eventually aging into the industry under this setup. Maturing child factory workers eventually made for the development of a labor market for productive adult factory workers.³³ In Alice's world, this explains the Menacing Ruin's baby-like faces on grown up bodies.

By impression, its sexual dimorphism is male, the torso being significantly larger and disproportionate to its legs. Its upper back and shoulders are wide, rounded, and slightly stooped; a thick right arm, much like the rest of its body made from sludge, which appears nearly muscular is its only usable, present, upper limb. Such artistic depiction follows from how children were said to have hauled coal carts on rails to the lifts. Among the dangers to be encountered working in the coal mines were cave-ins, explosions, and gas fumes (called "bad air"). The tunnels were cramped, as they often did not exceed three or four feet in height, and constant dampness in the mines were also said to have resulted in "deformed bodies" and "ruined lungs".³⁴ For children workers, over-exertion was characteristic of the 06 days-a-week work schedule.³⁵ Factory and mine work resulted in stunted growth, an anticipated shortened life expectancy, and severely compromised health.³⁶

³³Douglas A. Galbi, "Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills," *Journal of Population Economics* 10, No. 4 (1997), 358.

³⁴ Caroline Tuttle, *Hard At Work in Factories and Mines: The Economics of Child Labor During the British Industrial Revolution*. New York: Routledge, 2021, 134, epub; Spielvogel, "Western Civilization", 601.

³⁵Tuttle, "Hard At Work In Factories and Mines", 51, epub.

³⁶ Tuttle, "Hard At Work In Factories and Mines", 131, epub.

The long term physical damage to their health is more significant for their age range compared to that of adults, given how their bodies are still developing.³⁷ The absence of a whole left arm on the Menacing Ruin is also possible to interpret as a result of accident or injury. There are reports of children getting into accidents due to the insufficiency of sleep if not the inevitable lack of it due to covering another worker's shift in an emergency.³⁸ Other instances of accidents and injuries occurred from children getting sucked into machinery.³⁹ Unlike adults, children are more accident prone due to their tiring easily and need for rest for revitalization. Workplace rules forced children to labor continuously for 06 hours before taking a brief break for a meal; but their breaks included working and cleaning machinery as they ate.⁴⁰

Protruding from the top of its back is a set of multiple pipes that let out exhaust and flames; these also allow the creature to charge towards Alice. There are two possible ways to read this feature. One, is how it can illustrate accident, with parts of machinery ending up stabbing into an individual. The second is that this can loosely be taken as mute testament of the figurative idea of the worker having eventually become one with the machine; as work in mechanized factories "required regular attendance and consistent effort, respect for tools and machinery used but not owned, tolerance for close supervision, a willingness to work under non-personal contract, and the ability to work in close quarters with a large number of persons."⁴¹

Among the Menacing Ruin's attacks involves throwing flaming rocks, which are presumably coal, that explode upon hit or drop.

The three infant-like faces at the center of the Menacing Ruin's body serve as its head, with a single pair of baby arms sticking out just below. At first glance, these faces are easy to associate with the Dresden doll or bisque doll. Upon closer inspection, it is observed how the heads drop from the body and roll away without any shattering or damage from the blows dealt by the player, which leads one to deduce that the material is that of a Victorian Wax Doll.⁴² The Wax Doll involved a technique which has been perfected in

³⁷ Tuttle, "Hard At Work In Factories and Mines," 266, epub.

³⁸ Tuttle, "Hard At Work In Factories and Mines", 100 & 132-133, epub.

³⁹ Tuttle, "Hard At Work In Factories and Mines", 274, epub.

⁴⁰ Tuttle, "Hard At Work In Factories and Mines", 274, epub.

⁴¹ Galbi, "Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills," 358.

⁴² "Wax dolls and wax over composition dolls (Carter's Price Guide to Antiques)," Carter's, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.carters.com.au/index.cfm/index/13593-wax-dolls-dolls/>; Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, "The History of Creepy Dolls," *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-creepy-dolls-180955916/>.

England by Augusta Montanari and her son Richard, who made infant dolls popular.⁴³ The Doll is another consistent aesthetic transposed from American McGee's Alice, bearing the same connotations of innocence in childhood. Also, it is believed that a fondness for dolls or a prominent reference to dolls in a scene has been used by creatives to "identify adult characters who are in various ways still dangerously caught up in childhood fears and anxieties";⁴⁴ this is pertinent in Alice's case, with the Carrollian canonical anxieties of 'growing up'⁴⁵ and periodically escaping to Wonderland as coping mechanism. In the development of this theme in *Madness Returns*, the doll as metaphor in the Hatter Industries scenes may be appreciated as a conversation point on the meaning of life, work, and being, intertwined. Gaining its anchoring in the topic of child labor, it reflects on a question of the significance of the routes of socialization. Can a child learn everything they need in order to grow into model citizens through their dedication to their labor? As conventional socialization goes, a person's formative years are in their youth, which is the best time to learn and gain wisdom so that they can have the tools to transition into adulthood and contribute to society:

Hence we see developing during adolescence, reason, conscience, idealism, love, and, in fact, all the most "civilized" attributes of human nature.⁴⁶

All of these are believed to be learnt in school. It has been suggested that children should remain at school until they are at least 14,⁴⁷ based on the belief that the physical and emotional effects of work would hamper children's well-being. Given the monotony of the tasks and workload they are assigned in long stretches of each workday, this leaves little to no room nor motivation to think at the slightest of the 'civilized' attributes of human nature. It indirectly asks, without these reflections, without contemplation, would a person still be human? This motif of the grungy doll also coincides with the themes of the death and requiem for innocence and aspirations. These ideas, juxtaposed with substances associated with decay, but being not-quite-dead, and inquiries into what life means, takes the ideas of pediophobia, along with pupaphobia potentially to a different emotional state all together.

⁴³ 'Doll,' *Britannica Online*, last modified February 27, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/doll>.

⁴⁴ Hutchings, Peter. *Historical Dictionary of Horror Cinema*. Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008.

⁴⁵ See Dominique Angela Juntado, "Deliberately Falling Through a Coded Rabbit Hole: A Sociocultural Written "Let's Play" of American McGee's Alice," *The International Journal of Social Science* 27, No. 1 (2014), 44-73.

⁴⁶ Arnold Freeman, *Boy Life and Labour: The Manufacture of Inefficiency* (London: P.S. King and Son, 1980.), 95

⁴⁷ Tuttle, "Hard At Work in Factories and Mines", 131, epub.

The distinction the Insidious Ruin has from its relative is that it only has a single face, is much smaller, and its appendages are complete. Its physique is also by trope, young-looking, because of the overall body size and the size of the arms.

For both the Menacing and the Insidious Ruin, the common anatomical trait would be the bowed appearance of the legs. One interpretation of this detail is in connection with the low ceiling clearance of the coal mines forcing them to walk a certain manner. A second would be in another industry; serious bowed legs were often a result of factory life in the woollen mills⁴⁸ where children worked at spinning machines for long hours and assuming an unnatural posture.

It must be clarified that child labor was not a creation of the Industrial Revolution, but has always been a significant part of family economy beginning in pre-industrial times by working in the fields or spinning wool at home, to serving as Apprentice in noble households.⁴⁹

The favor that children had was that they were recognized by factory managers for their strength and youth; predominantly being as young as 05 and just under 18.⁵⁰ Labor usually meant having them work for 12 to 14 hours a day;⁵¹ some accounts specify 12 to 16;⁵² with others also mentioning that there are beds at the factory where children are to sleep after their shift until the next.⁵³

While life had been brutal for the child laborer in early English factories, there were still some children who ‘not only endured but went on to become adult factory workers’.⁵⁴ Managers had the belief that those who have been

⁴⁸ Read particularly William Dodd’s account of his life as factory boy. See Emma Griffin’s *Liberty Dawn: A People’s History of the Industrial Revolution* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ Tuttle, “Hard At Work in Factories and Mines”, 37, epub; Norman John G. Pounds, *The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 336; Spielvogel, “Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500,” 601.

⁵⁰ Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 259; Galbi, “Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills,” 363; Griffin, “Liberty’s Dawn,” 24.

⁵¹ Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 263.

⁵² “Child Labor during the British Industrial Revolution,” *Economic History Association*, accessed December 02, 2021, <https://eh.net/?s=child+labor+in+the+industrial+revolution>.

⁵³ Quality of children’s sleep is another question, as it is documented that they did not get enough sleep to recover from the physically taxing work. See Caroline Tuttle, *Hard at Work in Factories and Mines: The Economics of Child Labor During the British Industrial Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 131-275.

⁵⁴ Galbi, “Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills,” 359.

employed in their childhood (best if in their “infancy”), are “decidedly the best”⁵⁵ as they have been raised by the grit and efforts that they are required at work, and this usually gives applicants favor when they continued in the industry as adults. And so it is in this context that it may be said Menacing Ruin are those who went on and became adult factory workers, while Insidious Ruin are those who began work at the factories and mills in their childhood.

Dodomechs

The main role of the Dodos in Hatter’s factory was to supply power. Known as Dodomechs, they were literally bound to run on hamster wheels to provide power; these are the Wonderland counterparts to the employment of horses in powering mechanical pumps.⁵⁶

Audial Data: The Dormouse’s Words on Morals and Ethics of a Worker

Some sections of Hatter Industries have atmospheric sound. Of relevance are the twin recordings of the Dormouse reminding workers of the values they should strive to have, attitudes towards work, as well as what constitutes a ‘Good Worker’. These loop for the entire duration that Alice is within earshot of the scripted locations. The common theme shared by two recordings is how these contain lines which reference the influence of religion on the Industrial Revolution; scholars particularly identify this religion to be Methodism.⁵⁷

The first recording is initially encountered at the Clockface⁵⁸ just before Alice retrieves the Umbrella:

⁵⁵Galbi, “Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills,” 360.

⁵⁶Spielvogel, “Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500,” 585.

⁵⁷ Jean-Pierre Van Noppen, “Methodism: The Voice of Oppression or Liberation?” Poetics and Linguistic Association Website, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.pala.ac.uk/uploads/2/5/1/0/25105678/noppen.pdf>; Rupert Davies, ‘Methodism,’ *Britannica*, last modified November 23, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Methodism>.

⁵⁸ The player will recognize this as the spot of ‘About Face’ from American McGee’s Alice, the face-off with the Mad Hatter.

A Worker’s paradise!
Fight the good fight!
Work until you expire!
Substantial rewards in heaven; it is better to give labour, than
to receive pay for it!
A Worker’s paradise, AND — You don’t have to *die*.
Not a cheap slogan, we really *care*.
Fight the good fight, work until you expire
Substantial rewards in heaven; it is better to give labour, than
to receive pay for it —
Words to live by; you can eat them too~

The context to this recording requires looking into the frameworks of Methodism, which influenced the work ethic during this era.

Methodism placed an emphasis on living a life on a disciplined path.⁵⁹ The original intention of Methodism was to bring the 18th century Church of England a spiritual vitality. In this attempt, it involved the cultivation of an intimate experience of God, practical charity and care for the underprivileged, innovative and effective forms of evangelism, a spirit of generosity towards other Christians, and a strategic combination of small, intimate groups for facilitating discussions about well-being of the soul, and big, public gatherings.⁶⁰ Its services involve an “informal and vibrant piety”, characterized also by the practice of taking religious services to the people, this “was better positioned to meet the spiritual needs of these uprooted masses than the structured Anglican establishment.”⁶¹ The growth of the Methodist Church was also the largest in the industrial areas.⁶² The extent that Methodism was able to influence people along socio-political dimensions is discussed in this segment of the study.

Returning to the references being made in the recording, “Fight the good fight” is a common Christian phrase which can be read in 1 Timothy 6:12 from the King James Bible. It means to do one’s best; to do what is morally right, and to attempt to encourage others to do the same. The line has also become the title and content for a Christian hymn written in 1863 by Irish Anglican clergyman and poet, John Samuel Bewley Monsell. “Fight the good

⁵⁹Spielvogel, “Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500,” 588.

⁶⁰William J. Abraham, *Methodism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

⁶¹ ‘The Emergence of Methodism,’ Cengage, *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/emergence-methodism>.

⁶²Davies, ‘Methodist Church’.

fight” has likely been carried over into the Methodist teaching as John Wesley was an Anglican clergyman⁶³ prior to his founding of Methodism.

Such a line was maximized by factory superiors. It was Marxist historian Edward P. Thompson who presented the postulate that “Methodism was a distraction that led the working class to focus on heaven and on illusory spiritual goods rather than on tackling the genuine problems of poverty and class that arose with the Industrial Revolution.”⁶⁴ And it is this precise detail which gives context to the line “Substantial rewards in heaven; it is better to give labour than to receive pay for it!” It is believed that the hardship in the present life was guaranteed to pave the way for the joys of the next.⁶⁵ In reality, the meagre wages, together with the occasional deductions in the event that there are damages to equipment or penalties incurred by the worker, are still somehow a wake-up call to workers that such dedication isn’t feasible --- hence the line in the recording: “Words to live by; you can eat them too~”

Then there are the Dormouse’s sayings of what characterizes a good worker as compared to a bad worker, which begins playing when Alice reaches the interior of the factory where material is smelted:

A good worker is a *live* worker. Paid to live --- and work!
A bad worker is a dead worker; and vice versa.
Don’t be a bad worker; bad workers are slaves, and dead.
Payday for good workers has been postponed indefinitely.
Payday for bad workers is cancelled!

Put in the context of the events of the Industrial Revolution, the part of the audio which delves into the good worker “...being paid to live” is not about earning wages in order to survive; instead it expresses the extended work obligations that take place outside the regular hours of doing physical work. In the attempts of making discipline and efficiency habitual anywhere, the worker is at any time, and so as to prevent “Idleness, Extravagance, Waste, and Immorality”,⁶⁶ obligated to keep in mind and practice the virtues and moral education emphasized in religion. For example, discipline was materialized in punctuality when it comes to arriving for work and leaving as scheduled in the end of the workday, with late penalties and early leave fines through wage deductions; repeated instances resulting in dismissal; observance of silence among fellow-workers; non-smoking during work hours must be observed (with fines as penalty); and there are designated areas in the factory where workers may relieve and groom themselves, and anyone

⁶³ “John Wesley,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Wesley>.

⁶⁴ Abraham, “Methodism: A Very Short Introduction”, 81

⁶⁵ Spielvogel, “Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500,” 589.

⁶⁶ Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 267.

caught doing such in other undesignated locations would pay a fine.⁶⁷ When it comes to the duties in indoctrination, these were allocated to churches, chapels, and Sunday schools, as supported by the employers.⁶⁸

The Methodist commitment to holiness occurs on two levels — the personal, and the social; and former is said to be influenced by the latter. To begin, personal holiness is defined as the “individual’s reorientation from sinners to saints through the manifold grace of God.”⁶⁹ Social holiness, on the other hand, is framed as an expression of love for neighbor expressed in “personal and corporate action in society and history.”⁷⁰

The ultimate goal was to increase obedience of the workers at all ages, partly to ensure that no one would be swayed into misconduct. The drink and drunkenness of the leisurely weekends were also reformed so as to increase the usefulness of workers who were usually incapacitated to show.⁷¹ During work hours, propriety was expected; some employers did not tolerate swearing, singing, being drunk, and stealing.⁷² Those who did appear for work drunk were dismissed, as this was especially a bad example for younger workers.⁷³ Laziness and wastefulness were considered as sins.⁷⁴

Returning to the recording, the line “bad workers are slaves, and dead” can simply be interpreted as nodding to Wesley’s support of the abolition of slavery.⁷⁵ “...payday for good workers is postponed, indefinitely” on the other hand may be read as a strategic exaggeration of the paltry wages, used with the intention of complimenting the macabre mood of Hatter’s factory.

Some Final Notes

American McGee’s *Alice: Madness Returns* is neither an educational game, nor does it teach players about Industrial Revolution era Britain. In the spirit of game studies carried over into the academic, we borrow and apply a few lines from Gonzalo Frasca’s review of his proposal for videogames titled *Videogames of the Oppressed*. There are games which are in the business of “triggering discussions”; that “it would not matter if the games could not

⁶⁷Spielvogel, “Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500,” 589.

⁶⁸ Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 268.

⁶⁹Abraham, “Methodism: A Very Short Introduction”, 80.

⁷⁰Abraham, “Methodism: A Very Short Introduction”, 81.

⁷¹ Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 268.

⁷² Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” 262.

⁷³ Spielvogel, “Western Civilization: Volume II: Since 1500,” 588.

⁷⁴ Spielvogel. “Western Civilization”, 588.

⁷⁵ Cengage, “The Emergence of Methodism’

simulate the situation with realistic accuracy”; and that we are advised to look at how games “would work as metonyms of dealing with real life issues.”⁷⁶

As suggested in the previous pages, the game could serve as an entertaining sidebar material (an application of critical thinking and history practiced in the everyday setup), and gameplay to facilitate discussion, using the ideas suggested in this paper as a springpoint for scene, event, and character contexts, and possibly developing other ideas for questions or subtopics for discussion on the larger theme of Industrial Revolution era Britain.

These contexts aside, the lasting appeal of the events of the game into the present era, lies in how it echoes the enduring questions people reflect on how their daily existence is scheduled. Take for instance the opportunities to discuss the philosophy of work as hinted in the London setting. Is it possible, and how can we define the distinctions between ‘Work’ vs. ‘Labor’ or ‘Toil’, and ‘Noble Vocation’ vs. ‘Exploitation’? Is there such thing as finding and spreading happiness in some profession? From exploring Hatter Industries, we ask how do people get ‘paid to live and work’ nowadays? Once at work, the character of the individual has to be observed by themselves and others. For one instance, there is the need to understand the distinctions between ‘professionalism’ from the lack of emotion and humanity. On occasions, the individual might also find themselves divided, particularly in terms of how they can reconcile with embodying the expected traits of a member of an institution they work for versus keeping individuality and maintaining authenticity while in the workplace.

⁷⁶Gonzalo Frasca, “Videogames of the Oppressed,” *Electronic Book Review*, last modified June 24, 2004, <https://electronicbookreview.com/essay/videogames-of-the-oppressed/>

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