

Studying Alice

[Ben Brantley's *New York Times* review](#) of "Then She Fell" — an interesting immersive re-mix of Lewis Carroll's Alice books, currently "on stage" at Brooklyn's Greenpoint Hospital — comes just in time to be useful to you Engl 170-01 students brainstorming and drafting the fall 2012 final exam.

Brantley writes that he has "returned often to Carroll's masterpieces; I even studied them in college."

His review of "The She Fell" shows that he understands some of the most important ideas to which the Alice books give, as he puts it, "fantastical shape": ideas, for example, about "the thoughts, fears, confusions and uncanny knowingness of children."

But there is a big difference between studying child psychology and studying how children's thoughts, fears, confusion, and knowingness are given "shape" in a work of literature.

Studying the first doesn't require a special vocabulary for discussing how human nature and experience get expressed in some kind of representational form: oral tale, book, play, film, video game, etc. Studying the second does.

Here's another way to think about the difference. Ask yourself why a work like Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms* would not be particularly useful to someone studying psychology but might be indispensable to someone studying English.