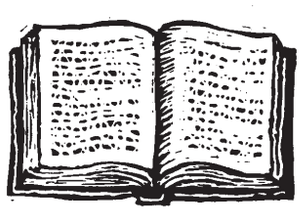
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll

1865

Lewis Carroll's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was not originally written for the general public but for a single child: Alice Pleasance Liddell, second daughter of the Dean of Christ Church College, Oxford. The story of its composition, as Carroll recorded it in the prefatory verses to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, goes something like this: On a warm summer afternoon (July 4, 1862, according to Carroll's diary) the author, his friend Reverend Robinson Duckworth, and the three young Liddell sisters (Lorina Charlotte, age thirteen, Alice Pleasance, age ten, and Edith, age eight), daughters of the Dean of Christ Church College, Oxford, made a short trip up the Thames River in a rowboat. "The trip," explains Martin Gardner in his *The Annotated Alice*, "was about three miles, beginning at Folly Bridge, near Oxford, and ending at the village of Godstow. 'We had tea on the bank there,' Carroll recorded in his diary, 'and did not reach Christ Church again till quarter past eight….'" "Seven months later," Gardner continues, "he added to this entry the following note: 'On which occasion I told them the fairy-tale of Alice's adventures underground.'"

According to an account written many years later by Alice Liddell, she pestered Carroll—the pseudonym for mathematician and dean Charles Lutwidge Dodgson—to write the story down for her. "She 'kept going on, going on' at him," explains Morton N. Cohen in his critical biography *Lewis Carroll*, "until he promised to oblige her. For one reason or another, however, it took him two



and a half years to deliver the completed manuscript, illustrated with his own drawings." Between the time that Carroll began work on the manuscript and the time that he completed it, he had lost the friendship of the Liddells. He had also shown the manuscript to his friends Mr. and Mrs. George MacDonald, who read it to their children and urged Carroll to publish the story. Working through friends, Carroll found a publisher—Macmillan of London—and an illustrator, noted cartoonist John Tenniel. The first edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published in June of 1865. However, Tenniel objected to some sloppy reproduction work of his illustrations in the printing, and Carroll agreed to cancel the entire press run of two thousand copies and to print a new press run of another two thousand copies at his own expense. This early, flawed edition of the novel is now considered one of the rarest books in the world and commands huge prices among collectors.

"*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,*" writes Cohen, "was widely reviewed and earned almost unconditional praise. Charles's diary lists nineteen notices." Sales were high and many foreign editions were quickly authorized. Inspired by the book's success, Carroll began work on a sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There,* published in 1872. The two Alice books remain in print today, over a century after their publication. They remain, next to the Bible and the works of Shakespeare, among the world's most widely translated works of literature. Translations are available in over seventy languages, including Yiddish and Swahili.

Author Biography

Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, who wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, was one of the most creative writers of children's fantasy in the history of literature. His two most famous books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872), are listed among the greatest and most influential books ever written in English. Dodgson is praised as a genius who fused his own love of word-games and logic puzzles with a genuine love of and sympathy for children. His two *Alice* books remain popular with both adults and children, and they have been interpreted by critics as guides to a Victorian childhood, as well as sophisticated treatises on philosophy, logic, and mathematics.

Lewis Carroll

Dodgson was born in Daresbury, Cheshire, England, in 1832. He was the eldest son and third child of Reverend Charles Dodgson, a clergyman in the Church of England, and his wife Francis Jane Lutwidge. He came from a large family, numbering eleven children, and was often charged with the task of amusing his younger sisters—which may help explain how he developed his love of games and his devotion to little girls. His father educated him at home and at Richmond Grammar School, thus he received a thorough background in literature and mathematics. In 1846, he entered Rugby School, which at the time was not a healthy place for a sensitive young man to be. Dodgson was hazed and bullied unmercifully—perhaps another factor in his adult preference for the company of little girls—but he maintained very high academic standards. In 1851 he entered Christ Church College of Oxford University, and in 1854 he received his undergraduate degree. The honors he received there earned him a lifetime fellowship and a residency at Christ Church, provided he became a clergyman of the Church of England and take a vow not to marry.

Up to two years before his death in 1898, Dodgson lived and worked at Oxford University. By 1857, he had begun publishing both mathematical treatises and essays on logic, but even these dry academic writings were marked by his quirky

sense of humor, whimsy, and fun. He also developed a passion for photography, which at that time was a very new and very complex process. In 1856, a combination of his interest in photographing little girls and his job at Christ Church brought him into the company of Dean Henry George Liddell, Dean of Christ Church. The Dean's second daughter, Alice Pleasance, was four years old at the time. Dodgson quickly made friends with Alice's sisters Lorina (three years older) and Edith (two years younger). On July 4, 1862, the four of them, in company with Reverend Robinson Duckworth, took a boat trip up the Thames River. As they traveled upstream, Dodgson told the story that would become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to Alice Liddell. She later recorded that she was so enchanted with the story that she demanded he write it down for her. He did so, and on November 26, 1864, he presented a handwritten and self-illustrated copy of the story to her, under the title *Alice's Adventures Under Ground.*

Dodgson published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* an expanded version of the original tale with illustrations by cartoonist John Tenniel, in 1865. It sold so well that in 1872 he published a sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There.* These two works, along with his long poem *The Hunting of the Snark: An Agony in Eight Fits* (1876), established his reputation as a writer of nonsense verse and children's fiction. So successful were the sales of the books that Dodgson was able to use the money from them to fund his later publications, including *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Symbolic Logic* (1895). By the time of his death in 1898, the two *Alice* books had sold over 180,000 copies in England alone, and by 1911 about 700,000 copies were in print worldwide.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1–3: Down the Rabbit Hole

After a short verse prologue, in which he commemorates the day on which he first told his tale, Lewis Carroll begins *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with a familiar episode: Alice is sitting by the bank of a stream, bored, when she notices the White Rabbit dressed in a waistcoat scurrying along. The rabbit stops to pull a pocket watch out of its waistcoat pocket, mutters to itself that it will be late for something, then scurries off and disappears down a hole. Alice follows the rabbit down the hole, and suddenly finds herself falling, though not so fast that she is in any danger of being injured when she lands.

She catches sight of the rabbit after she lands, but soon loses it again, and finds herself in a dark hallway. All of the doors in the hallway, she discovers, are locked; she then comes upon a small table with a tiny key on it, which enables her to open a small door she hadn't seen before, which leads into a garden. She goes back to the table, and this time finds there a bottle labeled "DRINK ME." She does just that, and shrinks to a size where she can fit through the small door. However, she has left the key on the table, and is now too short to reach it. Reduced to tears, she soon collects herself, then sees a small box under the table with a small cake in it labeled "EAT ME." Again, she follows instructions, and is soon nine feet tall. She begins crying again, filling the hallway with a pool of tears several inches deep. The White Rabbit comes and goes again, dropping a fan and pair of gloves. Clutching the fan, Alice eventually shrinks again, but is unable to go into the garden as the door has closed and locked, and the key is once again on the table.

Alice then slips and falls into the pool of tears. She sees the Mouse swimming by, begins talking to it, offends it a couple of times, but manages to coax it back, and soon they swim to the bank of the pool (the hallway having vanished). Joined there by several other creatures, they eventually engage in a "caucus-race" (that is, they simply run around for a while) in order to dry off. Some conversation follows, but it ends abruptly when Alice mentions her cat, and frightens the other creatures away.

Chapters 4–7: Learning the Ropes in Wonderland

The White Rabbit then appears again, and mistaking Alice for his servant, orders her to go fetch him another fan and pair of gloves. Alice obeys, soon finds the rabbit's house, enters it, and going upstairs finds what she is looking for. She also finds a small bottle, drinks half of its contents, and grows until she fills the room. The rabbit returns, and eventually a lizard named Bill is sent down the chimney of the house, presumably to drive Alice out. Alice manages to thrust her foot into the fireplace and kick Bill back up the chimney. The rabbit then determines that the house must be burned down. Alice finds some cakes on the floor of the room, eats enough to shrink herself to the point that she can get out of the house, and then escapes from the white rabbit and the other animals into a forest.

After an encounter with a giant puppy (Alice again being far smaller than her "normal" size), she comes upon the Caterpillar sitting on a large mushroom smoking a hookah (water pipe). The Caterpillar asks her several questions about her identity that reduce her to confusion; then, as it is leaving, it tells her that by eating opposite sides of the mushroom it was sitting on, she will either grow or shrink. She experiments with pieces from both sides, and soon has more or less mastered the process.

Determined to find the garden again, she instead comes upon a small house. After a confusing conversation with a frog-footman, she enters the house and encounters a chaotic scene: a Duchess is nursing a baby boy, who is crying, and a cook is making soup, and occasionally throwing pots and dishes across the room. Because the cook has put far too much pepper into the soup, the air in the room is full of it, causing Alice and the others to sneeze frequently. The Cheshire Cat makes its first appearance here. Eventually the Duchess gives Alice the baby to nurse, as she has to get ready to play croquet with the Queen. Alice takes the baby out of the house, only to watch it turn into a pig. She then sees the Cheshire Cat perched on the limb of a tree, and goes up to it to ask its advice.

The Cat soon disappears, and Alice comes upon the mad tea party scene from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* After offending some of the creatures she encounters there, it is now her turn to be offended: she receives no tea during her stay there, and eventually receives one insult too many, and leaves in a huff. She then comes again into the hallway she had been in when she first arrived in Wonderland, and from there manages to get into the "beautiful garden."

Chapters 8–10: Alice in the Garden

Alice first encounters a curious spectacle: some playing cards are painting some white roses red. They are doing so, she learns, because red roses were supposed to have been planted there, and if the Queen of Hearts were to discover the mistake, they would have their heads cut off. Just then the Queen and King of Hearts come by, and the Queen does indeed sentence them to be beheaded, though Alice hides them, so that the sentence is never carried out.

The Queen then invites Alice to play croquet. The match is played with flamingos for mallets and hedgehogs for balls, and is predictably chaotic. The Cheshire Cat appears and creates some further confusion. Alice has a brief conversation with the

Duchess whose baby she had watched turn into a pig earlier, then after some more croquet, the Queen recommends to Alice that she meet the Mock Turtle. Alice goes off to meet him in the company of a Gryphon. They talk first about education, then Alice hears the "Lobster Quadrille," and is asked to repeat certain poems she knows, which come out quite differently from the way she expects them to. Soon they hear the cry, "The trial's beginning!" and the Gryphon hurries Alice away.

Chapters 11–12: The Trial and the Return

When they arrive at the courtroom, the trial of the Knave (i.e., Jack) of Hearts, accused of having stolen some tarts made by the Queen, is just beginning. (The episode is based on a familiar nursery rhyme.) The participants in the trial include many of the creatures Alice has already encountered. As with the croquet match, it progresses in a chaotic, absurd fashion. Over the course of the trial, Alice begins to grow again, and with her increased size she grows increasingly bold, and points out more and more frequently the absurdity of the proceedings. Eventually the Queen of Hearts orders that her head be cut off, to which Alice replies that as they are nothing but playing cards, she is not afraid of them. At that point, all the cards fly at her, and she wakes up—her adventures in Wonderland have been a dream.

Alice tells her older sister about her dream, and her sister reflects on how Alice herself will soon grow up. She expresses to herself the wish that Alice might "keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood."

Characters

Alice

Alice is in some ways the most complex and the simplest of Carroll's characters. Her character was modeled on that of his young friend Alice Pleasance Liddell, middle daughter of the classics professor and dean of Christ Church College, Oxford. Although John Tenniel's illustrations of Alice look nothing like Alice Liddell—she had short, dark hair cut into bangs, while Tenniel's little girl has long blonde hair—some of the characteristics of Miss Liddell remain in the character of Carroll's Alice. Carroll described his dream-Alice in an article entitled "Alice on the Stage" as loving, courteous, "trustful, ready to accept the wildest impossibilities with all that utter trust that only dreamers know; and lastly, curious—wildly curious, and with the eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when Sin and Sorrow are but names—empty words signifying nothing!"

Carroll's Alice is all of these things and more. She is an ordinary person trying to make sense of a senseless situation and to understand the curious realm into which she has wandered. In Wonderland, Alice is caught in a predicament where none of the rules or logic she has learned does her any good. The creatures of Wonderland behave to her like the Victorian adults of her outside world: they ignore conventional rules in favor of rules of their own that make no sense to anyone but themselves. Alice tries to deal with them logically and fails; the dream only ends for her when she rejects their world in favor of the outside world.

Alice is also a reflection of her own society: in the early chapters of the book she is sometimes arrogant and careless of the feelings of others. Morton N. Cohen writes in his critical biography *Lewis Carroll* that Alice is the means through which Carroll criticizes and compliments Victorian society. "He wove fear, condescension, rejection, and violence into the tales, and the children who read them feel their hearts beat faster and their skin tingle, not so much with excitement as with an uncanny recognition of themselves, of the hurdles they have confronted and had to overcome. Repelled by Alice's encounters, they are also drawn to them because they recognize them as their own. These painful and damaging experiences are the price children pay in all societies in all times when passing through the dark corridors of their young lives." However, in the end, Cohen concludes, Alice overcomes the problems that face her and emerges a stronger person.

Alice's Sister

Alice's sister is unnamed throughout the course of the story. She appears briefly at the beginning—the book she is reading launches Alice on her dream voyage—and in a more lengthy passage at the end of the book, in which she herself dreams about the adventures Alice has just had. Alice's sister offers an adult perspective to the entire Wonderland adventure, interpreting Alice's dream in her own way and then going on to dream about Alice's own future.

Alice Pleasance Liddell, Carroll's model for the character Alice, had in fact two sisters: Lorina Charlotte, three years older than herself, and Edith,

Media Adaptations

- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* came to the stage quite early in its history. Carroll himself wrote about an early stage version of his story, written by Henry Savile Clarke and produced in London in November, 1886, in a late article entitled "Alice on the Stage." Later dramatizations produced under the title *Alice in Wonderland,* but usually based on both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There,* include adaptations by Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus, Samuel French, 1932; by Madge Miller, Children's Theatre Press, 1953; and by Anne Coulter Martens, Dramatic Publishing, 1965.
- *But Never Jam Today,* an African American adaptation for the stage, was written in 1969. Other dramatic adaptations include *Alice and Through the Looking Glass* by Stephen Moore, 1980; *Alice,* by Michael Lancy, 1983; *Alice, a Wonderland Book,* by R. Surrette, 1983; and *Alice* (a ballet) by Glen Tetley, 1986.
- The first movie featuring Alice was *Alice in Wonderland,* produced by Maienthau, 1914, featuring Alice Savoy. Another was produced the following year by Nonpareil. Other versions were released by Pathe Studios in 1927 and by Macmillan Audio Brandon Films. The most famous film versions of *Alice* include: the 1933 Paramount version, featuring Charlotte Henry as Alice and a variety of contemporary Paramount stars (including Gary Cooper as the White Knight, Cary Grant as the Mock Turtle, W. C. Fields as Humpty Dumpty, and Edna May Oliver as the Red Queen); a 1950 satirical version by the French company Souvaine; Walt Disney Production's 1951 animated feature film featuring the voice of Kathryn Beaumont as Alice (available from Walt Disney Home Video); another animated feature by Hanna Barbera in 1965, featuring many of their cartoon stars (including Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble) in leading roles; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* released by American National in 1972 and featuring Michael Crawford as the White Rabbit, Dudley Moore as the Dormouse, and Peter Sellers as the March Hare (available from Vestron Video); and *Alice,* a disturbingly surrealistic view of Carroll's universe directed by Jan Svankmajer and released by Film Four in 1988 (available from First Run/Icarus Films).
- Among the numerous recordings featuring Alice and produced under the title *Alice in Wonderland* include one from the 1950s narrated by Cyril Ritchard, Wonderland; one narrated by Christopher Casson, Spoken Arts, 1969; one from the 1970s, narrated by Stanley Holloway with Joan Greenwood as the voice of Alice, Caedmon, 1992; one narrated by Flo Gibson, Recorded Books, 1980; one read by William Rushton, Listen for Pleasure, 1981; one read by Christopher Plummer, Caedmon, 1985; an audio CD read by Sir John Gielgud, Nimbus, 1989; a four-cassette unabridged performance by Cybill Shepherd and Lynn Redgrave, Dove Audio, 1995; and a BBC Radio version with Alan Bennett as narrator, Bantam Books Audio, 1997. A recording of Eva Le Galienne's stage adaptation *Alice in Wonderland,* featuring Bambi Linn as Alice, was released by RCA Victor in the 1940s. Several other records were also released in connection with the Disney film.
- A number of television adaptations of the "Alice" books have also been made. In 1955, NBC television broadcast the Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus stage play on "The Hallmark Hall of Fame." The television version featured Gillian Barber as Alice, Martyn Green as the White Rabbit, puppeteer Burr Tillstrum as the Cheshire Cat, Elsa Lancaster as the Red Queen, and coauthor Le Gallienne as the White Queen. A television special entitled "Alice through the Looking Glass" was broadcast on NBC in 1966; it was a musical and featured Jimmy Durante as Humpty Dumpty, and Tom and Dick Smothers as Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Another all-star television adaptation featured Red Buttons, Ringo Starr, Sammy Davis Jr., Steve Allen, Anthony Newley, Steve Lawrence, and Eydie Gorme. It aired in 1985 and is available on video from Facets Multimedia.

Cary Grant as the Mock Turtle in the 1933 film Alice in Wonderland.

two years younger. Alice's sister apparently is based on neither of the two other Liddells. If there is a historical character that Alice's sister is supposed to represent, it is probably Carroll himself.

Baby

See Pig Baby

Bill the Lizard

Bill is a lizard, one of the White Rabbit's helpers. He is sent down the chimney of the White Rabbit's house to get Alice out of the place.

Canary

Canary is one of the birds that flee Alice's company after she begins to talk about her cat Dinah. The Canary "called out in a trembling voice, to its children, 'Come away, my dears! It's high time you were all in bed!'"

Caterpillar

Alice meets the Caterpillar and spends most of Chapter 5 trying to understand his twisted logic. When she first encounters him, the Caterpillar is sitting on a mushroom and smoking a hookah, a type of water pipe from the Middle East. It is at the Caterpillar's insistence that Alice recites Carroll's "You Are Old, Father William"—a parody of Robert Southey's poem "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them." Although he is initially very rude to Alice, the Caterpillar finally tells her that the mushroom will help her control her height.

Cheshire Cat

The Cheshire Cat first appears in the kitchen with the Duchess, the Cook, and the Baby. It has an unusual grin, as well as the strange ability to fade into invisibility—sometimes one part at a time. The Cheshire Cat is one of the few animals in Wonderland that apparently has some sympathy with Alice. He guides her on the next step of her journey (the Mad Tea Party) and is the subject of what may be *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*'s most quoted line: "'Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin,' thought Alice; 'but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!'" The Cat reappears and provokes an argument between the executioner and The King of Hearts about whether one can decapitate a bodiless character.

The Cheshire Cat's grin is one of the most debated questions about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Why does the Cheshire Cat grin? There was a common phrase in Carroll's time, "to grin like a Cheshire Cat," but no one really knows how the phrase originated. One theory holds that the grin

is based on pictures of grinning lions that a local painter used to paint on the signboards of inns. Another states that Cheshire cheeses were sometimes molded into the shape of grinning cats. Carroll, who was born in the county of Cheshire, could have known both theories. Although he is one of the most popular characters in the Alice stories, the Cheshire Cat does not appear in the original manuscript version, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground.*

Cook

The Cook serves in the Duchess's kitchen. She is primarily noted for two qualities: she throws things (mostly kitchen utensils) at the Duchess and the Baby, and she cooks with an excessive amount of pepper, which causes the Baby and the Duchess to sneeze. She appears again as a witness against the Knave of Hearts.

Crab

See Old Crab

Dinah

Dinah is Alice's cat. She does not appear in person. It is Alice's thoughtless talking about her cat that finally alienates the animals and birds. "Dinah" was also the name of a cat owned by the Liddell girls.

Dodo

The Dodo appears in the drying-off sequence. He suggests the Caucus-Race as a means of drying off and later calls on Alice to provide the prizes for the winners. In the original manuscript, the Dodo makes the suggestion to move the party to a nearby house to dry off.

Like the Mouse and the Duck, the Dodo represents another of the characters who traveled on the "golden afternoon" on which the Alice story was first composed. According to a note in Martin Gardner's *The Annotated Alice,* the Dodo was Carroll himself. "When Carroll stammered he pronounced his name 'Do-Do-Dodgson,' and it is amusing to note that when his biography entered the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* it was inserted just before the entry on the Dodo."

Dormouse

Dormouse is the third character at the Mad Tea Party. The name is actually derived from the Latin verb dormire, which means "to sleep." It looks more like a small squirrel than a mouse. It hibernates during the winter and sleeps during the day, so the name is quite appropriate. Since Alice is touring Wonderland during the day, the Dormouse is very sleepy. Nevertheless, it is able to participate in the tea party and even begins a nonsense tale before falling to sleep again. Martin Gardner reports in *The Annotated Alice* that the Dormouse may have been inspired by the pet wombat of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a noted literary figure of Carroll's time. Rossetti's wombat "had a habit of sleeping on the table," Gardner writes. "Carroll knew all the Rossettis and occasionally visited them." The Dormouse does not appear at all in Carroll's original manuscript story, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground.*

Duchess

When Alice first encounters the Duchess, she is sitting in the kitchen with the Cook and the Cheshire Cat, and she holds the Baby who will later turn into a Pig. She also sings the Carrollian poem "Speak Roughly to Your Little Boy," a parody of a Victorian verse about manners. She also abuses the Baby by shaking it and tossing it up into the air, and at the end of the poem she throws it at Alice.

John Tenniel's famous big-mouthed illustration of the Duchess from the original edition of the novel is probably based on a portrait of Margaretha Maultasch, a duchess of Carinthia and Tyrol during the fourteenth century. Martin Gardner, in his *The Annotated Alice,* reports that "'Maultasch,' meaning 'pocket-mouth,' was a name given to her because of the shape of her mouth." He also explains that Margaretha "had the reputation of being the ugliest woman in history." Carroll's Duchess appears again, and is now very friendly to Alice. Then it is revealed that the Queen had sentenced her to death, and she leaves quickly.

Duck

The Duck is one of the birds that gets caught in the pool of Alice's tears. The Duck gets into an argument with the Mouse over the interpretation of a pronoun in the "dry" passage of English history that the Mouse reads. The Duck originally represented Reverend Robinson Duckworth, a companion of Carroll and the Liddell sisters on the "golden afternoon" on which Carroll told Alice Liddell the story that became *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

Eaglet

The Eaglet is one of the animals caught in the pool of tears. She demands that the Dodo "speak English" and adds, "I don't know the meaning of

half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!" The Eaglet represents Alice Liddell's younger sister Edith Liddell.

Father William

Father William is the title character of Carroll's parody poem "You Are Old, Father William," a takeoff of Robert Southey's didactic poem "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them." Carroll's poem inverts the didactic purpose of Southey's original. While the Old Man in Southey's poem won his comforts through thriftiness, conservative behavior, and religious devotion, Carroll's Father William moves through his old age by refusing to conform to Victorian norms. While Southey's young man seeks to understand his father's good health and good humor, Carroll's young man seeks information only to satisfy his curiosity. Carroll's poem ends with Father William's threat to kick his son downstairs.

Father William's Son

Father William's Son is the other character in Carroll's parody poem "You Are Old, Father William," a take-off of Robert Southey's didactic poem "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them." While Southey's young man seeks to understand his father's good health and good humor, Carroll's young man seeks information only to satisfy his curiosity. Carroll's poem ends with Father William's threat to kick his son downstairs.

Fish-Footman

The Fish-Footman brings an invitation to the Duchess from the Queen to play croquet.

Five of Spades

Five of Spades is one of the gardeners Alice discovers in the Queen's garden who are painting the white roses red.

Frog-Footman

The doorman at the house of the Duchess, the Frog-Footman goes outside to accept the invitation from the Queen for the Duchess to play croquet that afternoon. He then poses a logical conundrum for Alice: since he can only answer the door from inside the house, how is she to get in? Alice discusses the problem with him for some time before she finally gives up, opens the door to the Duchess's house herself, and goes in.

Griffin

The Gryphon is assigned by the Queen of Hearts to be Alice's guide and takes her to see the Mock Turtle. He is one of the more sympathetic characters in the novel, and he treats Alice better than most of his fellow Wonderland creatures.

Gryphon

See Griffin

Guinea Pigs

Guinea Pigs appear in several different roles in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* A couple of them serve as the White Rabbit's servants and help revive Bill the Lizard after Alice kicks him up the chimney in Chapter IV. Another couple—or perhaps the same ones—serve as jurors in the trial of the Knave of Hearts in Chapters XI and XII.

King of Hearts

The King of Hearts first makes his appearance at the Queen's croquet party, but his most important role is as the conductor of the Knave of Heart's trial. He objects to the Cheshire Cat's rudeness and sentences the animal to lose its head. He is not as forceful as his wife, the Queen of Hearts, but he shares with her and the other Wonderland characters a form of logic that first confuses Alice, then irritates her.

Knave of Hearts

Made of cardboard, the Knave (or Jack) of Hearts makes a brief appearance in Chapter 8. He is later arrested and held for trial on the charge of stealing the Queen's tarts.

Lory

Lory is a type of Australian parrot who gets into an argument with Alice, and "at last turned sulky, and would only say, 'I'm older than you, and must know better.' " Critics agree that the Lory represents Lorinda Liddell, Alice's older sister, who was also a participant on the "golden afternoon" on which the concept of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was composed.

Mad Hatter

The Mad Hatter, like his friend the March Hare, is stuck in an endless tea time. In Carroll's time, hat makers regularly used mercury to treat their hats, and mercury vapor is poisonous. It can cause hallucinations as well. The depiction of the Hatter in the original illustrations by John Tenniel may be based in part on an Oxford furniture dealer

named Theophilus Carter. "Carter," says Martin Gardner in his *The Annotated Alice*, "was known in the area as the Mad Hatter, partly because he always wore a top hat and partly because of his eccentric ideas." Carter invented a bed that tossed the sleeper out on the floor when the alarm went off, which "may explain why Carroll's Hatter is so concerned with time as well as with arousing a sleepy dormouse." His poem "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat" parodies Jane Taylor's song "The Star," and he proposes the famous riddle "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" He appears again as a witness in the trial of the Knave of Hearts. He does not appear at all in Carroll's original manuscript story, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground.*

Magpie

See Old Magpie

March Hare

The March Hare hosts the Mad Tea Party. He is called the March Hare because he is mad. In England March is the breeding season for hares, and they often act strangely during the month. With his friends the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse, he is stuck in a perpetual tea party, in which time never progresses and tea never ends. He is very argumentative and challenges almost all of Alice's remarks by challenging the meanings of specific words. When Alice leaves the tea party, she looks back to see the Hatter and the Hare trying to drown the Dormouse in a teapot. He later appears as a witness in the trial of the Knave of Hearts. He does not appear at all in Carroll's original manuscript story, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground.*

Mary Ann

Mary Ann is the White Rabbit's servant. He mistakes Alice for her in Chapter IV, but she never actually appears in the book.

Mock Turtle

The Mock Turtle is a character who has the front limbs and shell of a turtle and the head and hind limbs of a calf, because "mock turtle soup" is made from veal. In Chapters 9 and 10 he entertains Alice with the story of his education (liberally sprinkled with puns) and the song known as "The Lobster Quadrille"—a parody of a poem by Mary Howitt called "The Spider and the Fly." He also performs "Beautiful Soup," a Carrollian parody of a popular song, "Star of the Evening," that Carroll had heard the Liddell sisters sing on occasion.

Mouse

Mouse is the first creature Alice meets after she falls into the pool of her own tears she had cried while she was nine feet tall. Alice inadvertently offends the Mouse by talking about her cat Dinah, but the Mouse forgives her and tries to help her dry off by reciting a passage from a very dry—in the sense of boring—book of English history. Later the Mouse tells her and the other assembled animals "The Mouse's Tale," perhaps the most famous example in English of "figured" verse, poetry in which the shape of the poem reflects something of the poem's subject matter.

In the original manuscript, the Mouse was held to represent Alice Liddell's governess Miss Prickett. The book with the very dry passage that the Mouse quotes was an actual book of English history that Miss Prickett used to teach the Liddell children.

Old Crab

The Old Crab gives a moral lesson to her daughter: "Let this be a lesson to you never to lose your temper!"

Old Magpie

The Old Magpie is one of the "curious creatures" from the pool of tears. When Alice begins to talk about her cat Dinah, the Old Magpie declares, "I really must be getting home: the night-air doesn't suit my throat!" and leaves.

Pat

Pat is the White Rabbit's manservant. He speaks with an Irish brogue and tries to get Alice out of the White Rabbit's house.

Pig Baby

The Baby first appears in Chapter 6, where he is alternately wailing at the Duchess and sneezing from the Cook's pepper. After Alice rescues him from the Duchess's abuse and the Cook's thrown dishes, he changes into a Pig. Martin Gardner, in his *The Annotated Alice*, suggests that Carroll made the Baby change into a Pig because of his low opinion of little boys.

Pigeon

Alice encounters the Pigeon after the Caterpillar's mushroom has made her grow up over the surrounding trees. The Pigeon mistakes her for a serpent because Alice's neck has grown very long. The Pigeon cannot conceive of anything that long

and serpent-like being anything but a serpent and refuses to accept the idea that Alice does not want to eat her eggs.

Puppy

Alice encounters the Puppy toward the end of Chapter 4, after she shrinks to a height of three inches. Because of her smallness the playful puppy poses a serious threat to Alice, and she is forced to run away from it. She compares playing with the Puppy to "having a game of play with a cart-horse, and expecting every moment to be trampled under its feet."

Queen of Hearts

The Queen of Hearts is the driving force behind Wonderland. She constantly orders the execution of her subjects, but her command "off with his head!" is never carried out. It is fear of her anger that motivates the White Rabbit at the beginning of the book, and it is fear of the queen that suppresses the Duchess's behavior. Alice's own anger at the Queen's illogical, reckless behavior makes her overturn the conventions of Wonderland and break out of her dream at the end of the book. In "Alice on the Stage," Carroll wrote, "I pictured to myself the Queen of Hearts as a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion—a blind and aimless Fury." "Her constant orders for beheadings," explains Martin Gardner in his *The Annotated Alice*, "are shocking to those modern critics of children's literature who feel that juvenile fiction should be free of all violence and especially violence with Freudian overtones."

Seven of Spades

The Seven of Spades is one of the gardeners Alice discovers in the Queen's garden who are painting the white roses red.

Sister

See Alice's Sister

Two of Spades

The Two of Spades is one of the gardeners Alice discovers in the Queen's garden who are painting the white roses red.

William

See Father William

White Rabbit

White Rabbit is the first character that Alice meets in her dream wonderland. He looks much like any other white rabbit, with a white coat and pink eyes, but he wears a waistcoat (vest) and carries a large gold watch. John Tenniel's illustration from the first edition of the novel shows him wearing a jacket and carrying an umbrella. He also speaks English, but to Alice his clothes and watch are his most amazing characteristics. In the second chapter he drops his white kid gloves and a fan, which Alice picks up; it is the fan that causes her to shrink to below her normal size. (In the original manuscript, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, the fan was replaced by a nosegay, a small bouquet of flowers.) Later he mistakes Alice for his maidservant Mary Ann.

The White Rabbit, with his preoccupation with time and clothing, is in many ways a representative Victorian adult. Carroll wrote about him in the article "Alice on the Stage": "For her 'youth,' 'audacity,' 'vigour,' and 'swift directness of purpose,' read 'elderly,' 'timid,' 'feeble,' and 'nervously shilly-shallying,' and you will get *something* of what I meant him to be." "I *think* the White Rabbit should wear spectacles," the author continued. "I am sure his voice should quaver, and his knees quiver, and his whole air suggest a total inability to say 'Boo' to a goose!"

Themes

Identity

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been one of the most analyzed books of all time. Critics have viewed it as a work of philosophy, as a criticism of the Church of England, as full of psychological symbolism, and as an expression of the drug culture of the 1960s. Readers all differ in their interpretations of the book, but there are a few themes that have won general acceptance. One of the clearly identifiable subjects of the story is the identity question. One of the first things that the narrator says about Alice after her arrival in the antechamber to Wonderland is that "this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people." The physical sign of her loss of identity is the changes in size that take place when she eats or drinks. After she drinks the cordial and eats the cake in Chapter 1, for instance, she loses even more of her sense of self, until at the beginning of Chapter 2 she is reduced to saying, "I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little differ-

Topics for Further Study

- Make a chart of the sequence of events in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Many critics find a definite pattern to Alice's adventures. Do you agree with them? Explain why or why not, and give examples from the text to support your argument.
- One of the chief characteristics of Wonderland is its twisted logic. Read Carroll's books on *Symbolic Logic* and *The Game of Logic* and compare Carroll's concept of logic in these books to that in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*
- Compare *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to other Victorian works of fantasy, including John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* and Jean Ingelow's *Mopsa the Fairy.* How does Alice compare to these books?
- Research the roles of women and children in Victorian England during the period when *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was written. Write a diary of what daily life might have been like for the real Alice, and include what her expectations for the future might have been.

ent. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I?" She begins to cry and to fan herself with the White Rabbit's fan, which causes her to shrink down to almost nothing. After she shrinks, she falls into a pool of her own tears, in which she almost drowns. For Alice, the question of identity is a vital one.

Alice continues to question her identity until the final chapters of the book. When the White Rabbit mistakes her for his servant Mary Ann, she goes along willingly to his house to find his gloves. At the beginning of her encounter with the Caterpillar in Chapter 5, she answers his question "Who are *you?*" with the response "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." At the end of Chapter 5, she tells the hostile Pigeon who calls her a serpent that she is a little girl; but she says it "rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day." As late as Chapter 10, she says to the Gryphon, "I could tell you my adventures—beginning from this morning … but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then." As she progresses through Wonderland, however, Alice slowly gains a greater sense of herself and eventually overthrows the Queen of Hearts' cruel court.

Coming of Age

The question of *why* Alice is so confused about her identity has to do with her developing sense of the difference between childhood and adulthood. She is surrounded by adult figures and figures of authority: the Duchess, the Queen, the King. Even the animals she encounters treat her as a Victorian adult might treat a small child. The White Rabbit and the Caterpillar order her about. They also break the rules of politeness that adults have drilled into Alice. The Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and (to a lesser extent) the Dormouse are all rude to her in various degrees. They also break the rules of logic that Alice has been taught to follow. It is not until Alice stops trying to understand the Wonderland residents logically and rejects their world that she "comes of age"—she takes responsibility for her own actions and breaks powerfully out of her dream world.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is, on this level, a very affirming book for children. It offers them a path by which they can find their own way into the power of adulthood. "By a magical combination of memory and intuition," writes Morton N. Cohen in his critical biography *Lewis Carroll,* "Charles keenly appreciated what it was like to be a child in a grown-up society, what it meant to be scolded, rejected, ordered about. The *Alice* books are antidotes to the child's degradation…. Charles champions the child in the child's confrontation with the adult world, and in that, too, his book differs from most others. He treats children … as equals. He has a way of seeing into their minds and hears, and he knows how to train their minds painlessly and move their hearts constructively."

Absurdity

Carroll communicates Alice's confusion about her own identity and her position between childhood and adulthood by contrasting her logical, reasoned behavior with that of the inhabitants of Wonderland. Everything about Wonderland is absurd by Alice's standards. From the moment that she spots

the White Rabbit taking his watch from his waistcoat pocket, Alice tries to understand the twisted Wonderland logic. None of the rules she has been taught seem to work here. The inhabitants meet her politeness with rudeness and respond to her questions with answers that make no sense. The Mad Hatter's question "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" is an example. Alice believes that he is posing a riddle and tries to answer it, believing (logically) that the Hatter would not ask a riddle without knowing the answer. When she is unable to answer the question, the Hatter explains that there is no answer. He does not explain his reasons for asking the riddle; he simply says that he hasn't "the slightest idea" of the answer. When Alice protests that asking riddles with no answers wastes time, the Hatter responds with a lecture on the nature of Time, which he depicts as a person. The connections between the two subjects make no logical sense to Alice.

Alice's encounter with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle are as equally absurd, although less grating, as the Mad Tea Party. When the two of them call on her to recite, Alice begins another of Carroll's nonsense verses, "'Tis the Voice of the Lobster." At the end, she "sat down with her face in her hands, wondering if anything would *ever* happen in a natural way again." Alice finally rebels during the trial scene when the King requires *All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.* She objects to the absurd nature of the trial, saying finally "Stuff and nonsense!" and "Who cares for *you?*" "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" Her final break precipitates the end of her dream, and she wakes up with her head in her sister's lap.

Style

Parody

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was originally told to entertain a little girl. One of the devices Lewis Carroll uses to communicate with Alice Liddell is parody, which adopts the style of the serious literary work and applies it to an inappropriate subject for humorous effect. Most of the songs and poems that appear in the book are parodies of well-known Victorian poems, such as Robert Southey's "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them" ("You Are Old, Father William"), Isaac Watts's "How Doth the Little Busy Bee" ("How Doth the Little Crocodile"), and Mary Howett's "The Spider and the Fly" ("Will You Walk a Little Faster"). Several of the songs were ones that Carroll had heard the Liddell sisters sing, so he knew that Alice, for whom the story was written, would appreciate them. There are also a number of "inside jokes" that might make sense only to the Liddells or Carroll's closest associates. The Mad Hatter's song, for instance, ("Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat") is a parody of Jane Taylor's poem "The Star," but it also contains a reference to the Oxford community. "Bartholomew Price," writes Martin Gardner in his *The Annotated Alice*, "a distinguished professor of mathematics at Oxford and a good friend of Carroll's, was known among his student by the nickname 'The Bat.' His lectures no doubt had a way of soaring high above the heads of his listeners."

What makes Carroll's parodies so special that they have outlived the originals they mock is the fact that they are excellent humorous verses in their own right. They also serve a purpose within the book: they emphasize the underlying senselessness of Wonderland and highlight Alice's own sense of displacement. Many of them Alice recites herself under pressure from another character. "'Tis the Voice of the Lobster" is a parody of the didactic poem "The Sluggard" by Isaac Watts. It is notable that most often Alice is cut off by the same characters that require her to recite in the first place.

Narrator

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland opens with Alice's complaint, "For what is the use of a book … without pictures or conversations?" So most of the story is told through pictures and dialogue. However, there is another voice besides those of Alice and the characters she encounters. The third-person ("he/she/it") narrator of the story maintains a point of view that is very different from that of the heroine. The narrator steps in to explain Alice's thoughts to the reader. The narrator explains who Dinah is, for instance, and also highlights Alice's own state of mind. He frequently refers to Alice as "poor Alice" or "the poor little thing" whenever she is in a difficult situation.

Point of View

Although the narrator has an impartial voice, the point of view is very strongly connected with Alice. Events are related as they happen to her and are explained as they affect her. As a result, some critics believe that the narrator is not in fact a separate voice, but is a part of Alice's own thought process. They base this interpretation on the statement in Chapter 1 that Alice "was very fond of pretending to be two people." Alice, they suggest, con-

sists of the thoughtless child who carelessly jumps down the rabbit-hole after the White Rabbit, and the well-brought-up, responsible young girl who remembers her manners even when confronted by rude people and animals.

Language

Part of the way Carroll shows Wonderland to be a strange place is the way the inhabitants twist the meaning of words. Carroll plays with language by including many puns and other forms of word play. In Chapter 3, for instance, the Mouse says he can dry everyone who was caught in the pool of tears. He proceeds to recite a bit of history—"the driest thing I know." Here, of course, the Mouse means "dry" as in dull; the Mouse's words have no ability to ease the dampness of the creatures. When Alice meets the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, they play with syntax—the order of words—to confuse Alice. When she says "I say what I mean" is the same thing as "I mean what I say," the others immediately contradict her by bringing up totally unrelated examples: "'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'You might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see"!'" The power of language is also evident in the way Alice continually offends the inhabitants of Wonderland, often quite unintentionally. For instance, she drives away the creatures at the pool of tears just by mentioning the word "cat." Eventually Alice learns to be careful of what she says, as in Chapter 8 when she changes how she is about to describe the Queen after noticing the woman behind her shoulder.

Historical Context

The Victorian Age in England

According to his own account, Lewis Carroll composed the story that became *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on a sunny July day in 1862. He created it for the Liddell sisters while on a boating trip up the Thames River. Although the book and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* have since become timeless classics, they nonetheless clearly reflect their Victorian origins in their language, their class-consciousness, and their attitude toward children. The Victorian age, named for the long rule of Britain's Queen Victoria, spanned the years 1837 to 1901.

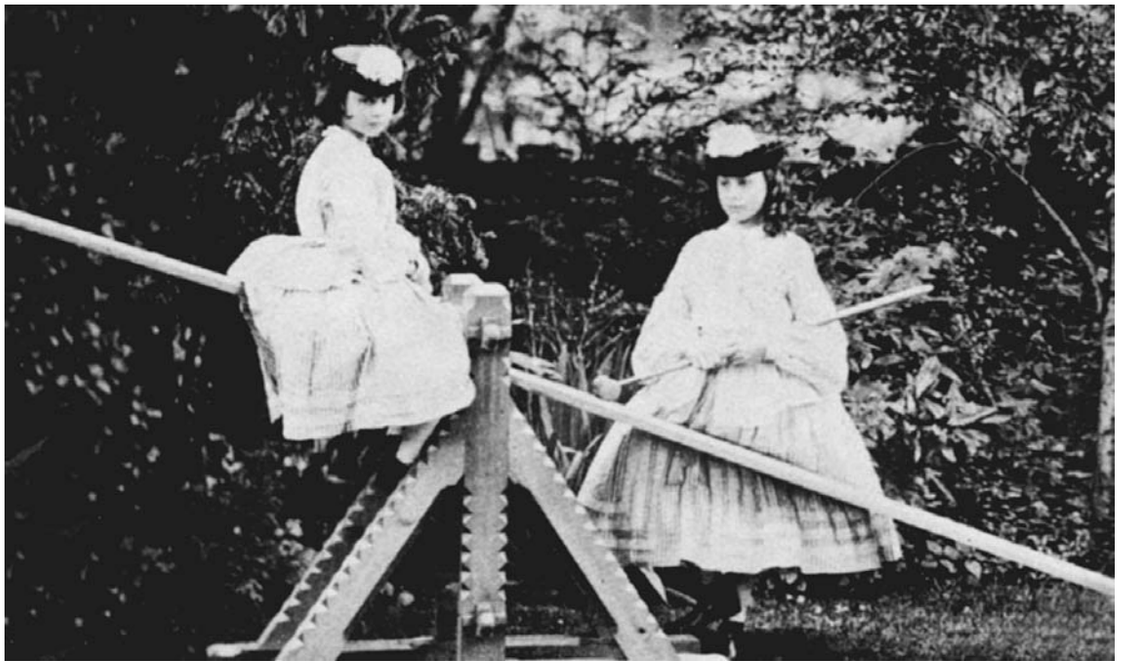
The early Victorian era marked the emergence of a large middle-class society for the first time in the history of the Western world. With this middle-class population came a spread of so-called "family values": polite society avoided mentioning sex, sexual passions, bodily functions, and in extreme cases, body parts. They also followed an elaborate code of manners meant to distinguish one class from another. By the 1860s, the result, for most people, was a kind of stiff and gloomy prudery marked by a feeling that freedom and enjoyment of life were sinful and only to be indulged in at the risk of immorality. Modern critics have mostly condemned the Victorians for these repressive attitudes.

The tone for the late Victorian age was set by Queen Victoria herself. She had always been a very serious and self-important person from the time she took the throne at the age of eighteen; it is reported that when she became queen, her first resolution was, "I will be good." After the death of her husband Albert in 1861, however, Victoria became more and more withdrawn, retreating from public life and entering what became a lifelong period of mourning. Many middle-class Englishmen and women followed her example, seeking to find morally uplifting and mentally stimulating thoughts in their reading and other entertainments.

Victorian Views of Childhood

Many upper-middle-class Victorians had a double view of childhood. Childhood was regarded as the happiest period of a person's life, a simple and uncomplicated time. At the same time, children were also thought to be "best seen and not heard." Some Victorians also neglected their children, giving them wholly over into the care of nurses, nannies and other child-care professionals. Boys often went away to boarding school, while girls were usually taught at home by a governess. The emphasis for all children, but particularly girls, was on learning manners and how to fit into society. "Children learned their catechism, learned to pray, learned to fear sin—and their books were meant to aid and abet the process," states Morton N. Cohen in his critical biography *Lewis Carroll.* "They were often frightened by warnings and threats, their waking hours burdened with homilies. Much of the children's literature … were purposeful and dour. They instilled discipline and compliance." Although the end of the century saw a trend toward educating women in subjects taught to men, such as Latin and mathematics, this change affected only a small portion of the population, specifically the upper classes.

This emphasis on manners and good breeding is reflected in Alice's adventures. She is always



Alice Pleasance Liddell, inspiration for the title character of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, *pictured with her sister, Lorina Charlotte Liddell.*

apologetic when she discovers she has offended someone, and she scolds the March Hare for his rude behavior. Nevertheless, Carroll seems to share the view that childhood was a golden period in a person's life. He refers in his verse preface to the novel to the "golden afternoon" that he shared with the three Miss Liddells. He also concludes the book with the prediction that Alice will someday repeat her dream of Wonderland to her own children and "feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days." On the other hand, Alice's own experiences suggest that Carroll felt that children's feelings and emotions were fully as complex as any adult emotions. By the end of the novel, she is directly contradicting adults; when she tells the Queen "Stuff and nonsense!" she is acting contrary to Victorian dictates of proper children's behavior.

The Early Development of Children's Literature

"Children's literature" first emerged as a genre of its own in the mid-1700s, when English bookseller John Newbery created some of the first books designed specifically to entertain children. (He is honored today in the United States by the American Library Association, who awards the annual John Newbery Medal to the best children's work of the year.) Prior to that time, works published for children were strictly educational, using stories merely to impart a moral message. If children wished to read for entertainment, they had to turn to "adult" works, such as Daniel Defoe's 1719 classic *Robinson Crusoe.* Despite Newbery's groundbreaking work, few works of entertainment for children appeared over the hundred years.

Most early Victorian fairy-stories and other works for children were intended to promote what contemporaries believed was "good" and "moral" behavior on the part of children. Carroll's "Alice" books take a swipe at this Victorian morality, in part through their uninhibited use of nonsense and wordplay (a favorite Victorian pastime) and in part through direct parody. Alice recalls in Chapter 1 of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that "she had read several nice little histories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them." Most of the verses and poems Carroll included in the story are parodies of popular Victo-

rian (i.e., morally uplifting) songs and ballads, twisted so that their didactic points are lost in the pleasure of wordplay.

Carroll's "Alice" books were part of a flourishing movement throughout the world to write entertaining books for children. English translations of the fairy tale collections of the German brothers Grimm first appeared in the mid-1820s. The tales of Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen appeared in English in 1846. The United States saw Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* in 1868–69, part of a movement to publish realistic stories for children. In England, many noted authors for adults published works for children, including Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson, whose 1883 work *Treasure Island* is considered a classic children's adventure story. The ground broken by Carroll and other children's authors of the nineteenth century led the way for today's huge market for children's books, which have their own publishers, critical scholars and journals, and librarians.

Critical Overview

In part because of its popularity with children and in part because of the fascination it has for adults, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has become one of the most widely interpreted pieces of literature ever produced. Victorians praised Lewis Carroll's wordplay and brilliant use of language. Critics after his death found psychological clues to Carroll's own subconscious in the book's curious dream-structure and the strange and often hostile creatures of Wonderland. During the 1960s, many young people read the book as a commentary on the contemporary drug culture. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* still fascinate critics, who continue to find new readings and new meanings in Carroll's stories for children.

Early reviews of the novel on its original release in 1865 concentrated on Carroll's skills at invention and his ability as a molder of words. They mentioned his parodies, his use of language, and his literary style. According to Morton N. Cohen in his critical biography *Lewis Carroll*, the noted poets Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti both praised the book in private letters to the author. Novelist Henry Kingsley thanked Carroll for his copy, saying "I received it in bed in the morning, and in spite of threats and persuasions, in bed I stayed until I had read every word of it. I could pay you no higher compliment … than confessing that I could not stop reading … till I had finished it. The fancy of the whole thing is delicious…. Your versification is a gift I envy you very much."

"*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was widely reviewed," notes Cohen, "and earned almost unconditional praise." Important newspapers and magazines, including the *Reader* and the *Press* commended the story's humor and its style. "The *Publisher's Circular*," asserts Cohen, " … selected it as 'the most original and the most charming' of the two hundred books for children sent them that year; the *Bookseller* … was 'delighted…. A more original fairy tale … it has not lately been our good fortune to read'; and the *Guardian* … judged the 'nonsense so graceful and so full of humour that one can hardly help reading it through.' " An anonymous review in the " Children's Books" section of *The Athenaeum* magazine (reprinted in Robert Phillips's *Aspects of Alice*) was an exception to the general praise the work received. The reviewer declared that "Mr. Carroll has labored hard to heap together strange adventures and heterogeneous combinations, and we acknowledge the hard labor….. We fancy that any real child might be more puzzled than enchanted by this stiff, overwrought story."

After Carroll's death in 1898, critics expanded the number and type of their readings of the *Alice* books. They analyzed the stories from many points of view—political, philosophical, metaphysical, and psychoanalytic—often evaluating the tales as products of Dodgson's neuroses and as reactions to Victorian culture. Because of the nightmarish qualities of Alice's adventures and their violent, even sadistic, elements, a few critics have suggested that the books are not really suitable for children. "We have also been bombarded by a horde of wild surmises," declares Cohen, "mostly from the psychological detectives determined to unlock deep motives in the man and to discover hidden meanings in the books. These analysts sometimes seem to be engaged in a contest to win a prize for the most outlandish reading of the texts. One such writer has proved to his satisfaction that *Alice* was written not by Lewis Carroll at all, but by Queen Victoria."

Some of the most well-known interpretations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are those that try to understand the story in light of Carroll's well-documented preference for the company of young, preteen, girls. Critics who take this approach connect Carroll's apparent inability to form an adult relationship with a woman and his artistic photographs of little girls, and conclude that Carroll was a closet pedophile—although major critics

agree that there is absolutely no biographical information to support this theory. Analysts who use the theories of noted psychologist Sigmund Freud, says Cohen, "suggest that the book is about a woman in labor, that falling down the rabbit hole is an expression of Carroll's wish for coitus, that the heroine is variously a father, a mother, a fetus, or that Alice is a phallus (a theory that, at least, provides us with a rhyme)." Other readings interpret the story as about toilet training or about fallen women. "Unfortunately," Cohen concludes, "these eccentric readings, while they may amuse, do not really bring us any closer to understanding Carroll or his work."

To the extent that critics are able to agree about the meaning of the *Alice* books, they conclude that the stories are primarily games, stories invented by a man who loved young children and who loved to invent his own word-games and mind-puzzles. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* they agree, is the work of a lonely and brilliant man who found consolation in the company of children and tried to repay some of the debt he felt.

Criticism

Stan Walker

In the following essay Walker, a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas, explains the background of Charles Dodgson, who wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland *under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. He explores the sources the author used in creating the novel, and examines how its major themes of growing up and finding one's identity are a reflection and product of the Victorian age.*

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), Lewis Carroll's masterpiece of children's nonsense fiction, has enjoyed a life rivaled by few books from the nineteenth century, or indeed any earlier period. Alice has inspired several screen adaptations, from Disney's well-known 1951 animated feature to more "adult" versions by contemporary Czech surrealist Jan Svankmajer and Playboy. It has been adapted for the stage several times, has served as the basis for countless spin-offs in the realm of fiction, and has inspired at least one well-known pop song (Jefferson Airplane's 1967 hit "White Rabbit"). Episodes from *Alice* and its companion piece, *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), have also frequently been used to illustrate problems in contemporary physics and ethics. On one level, perhaps, the reason for *Alice*'s popularity needs no explanation: its sheer imaginative force, coupled with its blend of humor, unsentimental sweetness, and a sense of wonder, make the book unique, and likely to endure for some time. As Sir Richard Burton puts it in the "Terminal Essay" to his famous translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* (1886), "Every man at some turn or term of his life has longed for … a glimpse of Wonderland."

What Do I Read Next?

- The roughly contemporary fairy tales of the Danish novelist Hans Christian Andersen (available in many editions), which established a Victorian passion for fairy stories.
- John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1851), a classic Victorian fairy tale that, like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* was originally written for a little girl. Ruskin was at one time an instructor for Alice Liddell.
- The Victorian wordplay of Edward Lear, contained in *A Book of Nonsense* (1846), *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets* (1871), *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (1872), *Laughable Lyrics: A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems, Songs, Botany, Music, Etc.* (1877), and *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (1895).
- George Macdonald's allegorical fairy tale about growing up and coming to sexual maturity, *The Golden Key* (1867).
- Victorian poet Christina Rossetti's famous narrative poem "Goblin Market" (1862), which, like the "Alice" books, is outwardly for children, but nonetheless deals with many adult themes—particularly repressed sexuality.
- The American fairy tales of L. Frank Baum, including *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and its many sequels.
- Gilbert Adair's *Alice through the Needle's Eye* (1984), a modern attempt to add to the "Alice" stories.

Lewis Carroll was the pen name of the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a professor of mathematics at Christ Church, one of the colleges of Oxford University. Politically, he was conservative, "awed by lords and ladies and inclined to be snobbish toward inferiors," according to Martin Gardner in *The Annotated Alice.* He was also a skillful photographer (when photography was a new technology), a patron of the theater (a pastime generally discouraged by church officials at the time), and a fan of games and magic. And if "he was so shy that he could sit for hours at a social gathering and contribute nothing to the conversation, … his shyness and stammering 'softly and suddenly vanished away' when he was alone with a child," notes Gardner.

This fondness for children, specifically young girls (he intensely disliked boys), has led to much speculation about Carroll's psychological makeup. There is little to no evidence, however, that his numerous relationships with girls were anything other than purely platonic. These relationships tended to break off after the girls passed through adolescence. A principal exception was his relationship with Alice Liddell, daughter of Henry George Liddell, dean of Christ Church. *Alice in Wonderland* was written at her request, and represents a record (expanded and polished) of a tale he told her one afternoon in July 1862. On this "golden afternoon" of the verse prologue, the two went rowing on the Thames River with Dodgson's friend the Reverend Robinson Duckworth and Alice's two sisters.

Much of the nonsense in *Alice,* as well as many incidental details, are based on things from mid-nineteenth century English life. The majority of the songs in the book are burlesques of poems and songs popular at the time, and familiar to Carroll's child audience. The last of Alice's adventures, the trial, is based on a then-familiar nursery rhyme. Another device Carroll used was creating incident out of common sayings. The character of the Cheshire Cat, for example, is based on the then-common phrase, "Grin like a Cheshire cat," while the episode of "The Mad Tea-Party" is based on two common expressions, "mad as a hatter" and "mad as a March hare." (the "madness" by which hatters were frequently afflicted was caused by prolonged exposure to mercury, used in the curing of felt, while March in England was the mating season of the hare.)

Certain more "exotic" details attest to the successful ventures of the British Empire: the flamingos, for example, pointed to missionary and colonial expansion in Africa. The hookah-smoking Caterpillar was evidence of a very profitable and still encouraged trade in opium with China; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, for example, was addicted to opium.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland can be characterized as a funhouse mirror version of a child's "journey" through the "adult" world, specifically the world of upper-class Victorian England. One of the main things that the child must grapple with on such a journey, and one of the principal themes that *Alice* takes up, is the question of his/her identity in that world. "Who are you?" Alice is frequently asked early in her adventures, and it is a question that she at first has a difficult time answering. Her initial erratic changes in size could be said to represent her inability to "fit" herself into this world. Her mastery of this process enables her to begin to be the master of her own destiny—to "fit," by enabling her to walk through the door that leads to the "beautiful garden," which she has wanted to enter since the beginning of her adventures.

This garden is hardly a Garden of Eden, though. Indeed, what Alice is immediately confronted with, the painting of the roses and condemnation to death of the painters by the Queen of Hearts, is an instance of the other principal of *Alice:* the absurdity, even insanity, of the "adult" world from the point of view of the innocent. "We're all mad here," the Cheshire Cat informs her in their famous exchange. This absurdity is frequently little more than a source of amusement to Alice; many times, though, it is a source of grief. Her treatment at the hands of the inhabitants of Wonderland, though brought upon her at times by her childish candor, is often rough, occasionally even cruel, and many times she is reduced to tears. Moreover, her adventures end with an apparent vision of the ultimate injustice of this adult world—the trial—though with her innocent frankness she is able to overcome this injustice, as her body symbolically grows to fill the courtroom.

Yet *Alice* is not political or social satire per se. Carroll may turn the adult world on its head, but there is no sense in the book that he is advocating any substantial changes to things as they are. Moreover, if an absurd, and even at times menacing world, Carroll's England as reflected in Wonderland is a world that can be mastered, suggesting (though some critics have contested this) that it is ultimately a benign world. Despite all the transformations she undergoes, Alice is never harmed, at least in any overt way. Indeed, her self-assured responses to the rough treatment she receives comes from the confidence—fortified by her class posi-

tion—that "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world."

Source: Stan Walker, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1999.

Roger B. Henkle

In the following excerpt, Henkle examines Carroll's emphasis on play, including its limitations.

It was just over a hundred years ago that *Through the Looking-Glass,* the second of Lewis Carroll's two Alice books, was published, yet Carroll's fantasy adventures into a little girl's dream worlds have a wider, more responsive audience than they may ever have had. Looking-Glass inversions and Wonderland absurdities give us striking shorthand renditions of the language and behavior of a modern world in which it sometimes seems—to quote the Cheshire Cat—that "I'm mad. You're mad. We're all mad here." André Gregory's recent New York stage version exalted the manic potential of the Alice worlds to black humor proportions. The dry, ingenuous tone and the mix of rebellion and self-indulgence in the Alice books have been made to order for the canny, loose "youth culture" of the last few years; and the psychedelic landscapes that the Jefferson Airplane and others have discovered are stunning enough to cause some people to wonder whether shy, inhibited Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, creator of a hookah-puffing caterpillar and mushrooms that change your size, might not have been surreptitiously in the opiate tradition of Coleridge and DeQuincey.

There is no real evidence that Carroll tripped to hallucinatory worlds, but there are enough indications that Carroll was deliberately probing in the Alice books for a new adult life-style, built around a concept that is close to play, to explain their strong appeal to contemporary readers. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* have always led double lives as adult fantasy literature as well as children's classics—Katherine Anne Porter once observed that she found them, in fact, enjoyable *only* when she read them as an adult—but we have been inclined to look upon them largely as grownup escapes into childhood and not as attempts to define and come to new terms with adult life. William Empson has argued, for instance, that the Alice books reflect the post-Romantic feeling that "there is more in the child than any man has been able to keep." Though Empson adds that Carroll uses Alice to bring out some hard-headed and unsentimental judgments about the foolishness and even puerility of adult behavior, he apparently does not see any sustained and, one might say, "serious" attempt in the Alice books to explore the possibilities of a freer, richer adult life-style. Such a dimension seems, indeed, almost too much to expect of books that we turn to for the whimsy of talking animals, logic games, and parodies.

Yet within the Alice books are explorations of an adult life that venture as far as Carroll could risk going toward freedom from the duties, responsibilities, and arid self-limitations of modern society—and in this aspect we may discover the immediacy of their appeal to contemporary readers. Furthermore, in Carroll's ambiguous feelings toward the relatively stable middle-class society that oppressed him, and in his anxieties about the self-exposure that his nonsense barely cloaked, we discover something of the reasons why writers probing from within a culture turn predominantly to comedy—as they have done in England for a century and a half and in America for the last decade.

One of the pleasures, surely, of reading *Alice in Wonderland* is to witness the absurd and sometimes devastating ways in which a rather too well-bred little girl learns of the caprices of language and logic and of the alarmingly erratic tracks of her own mind. I am going to concentrate here, however, on what may be an even stronger source of its appeal to adult readers, the covert delight that we take in madcap behavior. Much of our enjoyment of all comedy lies in our realization that we, too, would like to play and carry on, just as the adult creatures of *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* do. The creatures Alice meets are clearly grown-ups (with the exception of the Tweedles) and they are engaging in pastimes whose allure would seem to be peculiarly to adults.

What a pleasant change the caucus-race would be from the competition of most "games" and adult occupations: "they began running when they liked and left off when they liked," and at the end of the race "*everybody* has won and *all* must have prizes." How nice it would be to sit, as the Mock Turtle does, on a shingle by the sea, and sentimentally ruminate on one's experiences—to surrender to all the self-indulgence that seems too rarely possible in modern life. It is always tea-time for the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse, and people they don't like just aren't invited; "No room! No room!" says the Hare. When Humpty Dumpty uses a word it means what *he* chooses it to mean, neither more nor less.…

The exuberance of play, however, is often deliberately restrained by an arbitrary order of rules in-

vented by the player, and this was especially important to Carroll . In this quality of personally devised order—the brief moments in the Alice books of creatures rehearsing their individual delights—one captures the pleasure of personal control of one's life, and perhaps achieves the stasis that so many Victorians sought in a rapidly changing world.

Even more important is the relief play brings from the officious moralizing of other people. The "moral" of *Wonderland* is drawn by the Duchess (although she doesn't practice it): "If everybody minded their own business, the world would go round a deal faster than it does." Victorian comic writers from Thackeray to Butler tried to fend off those ponderous forces that were bent on dictating ethical, social, and even psychological conformity. In moments of play, at least, one can operate, as Johan Huizinga has noted, "outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly … of good and evil." In later years, Carroll could rhapsodize about his dream-Alice because she was living in the happy hours "when Sin and Sorrow are but names—empty words signifying nothing!" The homiletic hymns and rhymes that Alice tries to recall in *Wonderland* but cannot—"The Old Man's Comforts," "Against Idleness and Mischief," "The Sluggard," and "Speak Gently"—all share three elements: an injunction to be industrious and responsible, the reminder that we shall all grow old, and an invocation of our religious duties. Significantly, these banished thoughts are those we try to forget in play.

Carroll could not forget them for long, however, and Wonderland's imaginative projection as a possible variant life style was at the same time an opportunity to register and somehow "work out" the very anxieties that gave rise to the search for a new life style. In dreams we are often able to do all these things, and *Wonderland* is such a dream.

True to the dream, most things in Wonderland do not happen in a logical and chronological manner. There is no "plot" to the book; instead, dream thoughts pull seemingly disorganized elements together. Almost immediately the anxieties Carroll recorded so often in his diaries come to the surface in the behavior of the White Rabbit, who's late, who's lost his glove, who'll lose his head if he doesn't get to the Duchess' house on time. The Rabbit will later act for the Crown in the surrealistic trial of the knave at the book's end, thereby explicitly linking such social anxieties with the arbitrary punishment and the dread of fury that persistently flashes along hidden circuits of Wonderland's dreaming brain and periodically seizes Alice and the creatures. At the end of the innocuous caucus race, the Mouse tells Alice his "tale"; it is about Fury and it prefigures the terrifying dissolution of the Wonderland dream itself. According to the tale, personified Fury, who this morning has "nothing to do," imperiously decides he'll prosecute the Mouse: "'I'll be judge, I'll be jury,' said cunning old Fury; 'I'll try the whole cause and condemn you to death.'"

Time and again the delights of play are cut off suddenly by such arbitrary violence, for we perceive that play by its nature cannot last. No wonder the Mad Hatter curtly changes the subject when Alice reminds him that he will soon run out of places at the tea-table. Too soon he is dragged into court by the Queen to be badgered and intimidated, despite his pathetic protest "I hadn't quite finished my tea when I was sent for." Play can only temporarily remove us from outside reality, as Carroll himself repeatedly discovered, because authority, society (characterized in those adult women—Queens and Duchesses) will interfere and impose its angry will. This is why I believe it is inaccurate to assert, as Hugh Kenner and Elizabeth Sewell have, that Carroll's books are "closed" works of art, literary game structures that are deliberately isolated and fundamentally unrelated to the Victorian social world outside them. They show, on the contrary, Carroll's reluctant conclusion that totally independent life patterns are impossible and even dangerous, and they are Carroll's paradigms of the way social power is achieved and how it operates in Victorian England.

Inherent in the very freedom of play is its weakness. Functioning by personal whim, it is potentially anarchic, thus vulnerable to the strongest, most brutal will. Halfway through the book, Alice unaccountably must enter Wonderland a second time and she finds its tenor radically different. Instead of the pleasantly free caucus race, she is in a croquet game where "the players all played at once, quarrelling all the while." All order has collapsed; hedgehog balls scuttle through the grass, bodiless cats grin in the dusk. And the domineering Queen of Hearts imposes her angry will more and more as she exploits the anarchy of the hapless world of play.

The antics that the mad tea party group, the Caterpillar, and other free souls had been indulging in were, in a word, nonsense. Just as nonsense writing is a form of play activity, play itself—at least as Carroll conceived it—is nonsensical in the context of the "real world"; it has been deliberately deprived of meaning, of any overt social and moral

significance. Alice noted at the tea party that "the Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English." At the trial of the knave, however, suddenly there *is* meaning attached to nonsensical actions and statements: it is the meaning that the autocratic Queen wants attached to them, so they can be made to serve her lust for persecution. The most damning piece of evidence, according to the Crown, is a nonsensical letter purportedly written by the defendant. Alice argues, "*I* don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it," but the King of Hearts insists, "I seem to see some meaning in [the words] after all." The individuals who assert power in society, Carroll is suggesting, decide what things shall mean. *Their* whims, prompted and carried out by an irrational fury against people who would be free, dictate our responsibilities, our duties, our guilts, our sins, our punishment.

Here the adult victim's view nicely corresponds to the child's view of grown-up authority. If a child is called to task, told to remember some rule or duty he has forgotten about or never fully realized he was responsible for, he feels like the Mad Hatter, who is told "Don't be nervous, or I'll have you executed on the spot." Justice from a child's perspective often does seem to function like the Queen's: verdict first, guilt later.…

The madness in the Alice books is often no more than the "looniness" of children's literature , or a harmless addlepatedness, which Alice usually absorbs with considerable aplomb. But there is a more worrisome dimension to the motif. The hallucinatory qualities of the books, the sudden metamorphoses, the wayward thoughts of cannibalism and dismemberment, the hot flashes of fury, all remind us that in dreams, especially, our minds seem to wander dangerously close to insanity. Throughout his life Carroll displayed a fascination with mental derangement. His long poem, "The Hunting of the Snark," subtitled "An Agony in Eight Fits," takes us imaginatively to the borderline of dissolution: a Baker goes out like a candle at the sight of a boojum snark. An insomniac, Carroll worked off and on at the small book of mathematical "pillow problems" to take the mind, he said, off the "undesired thoughts" that fly into the head in those late-night hours before sleep. And Carroll recorded in his diary the confusion between dream and wakefulness that makes us question our very sanity:

> Query: when we are dreaming and, as often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life?

The psychologist Ernst Kris suggests that the venture into comedy itself is "double-edged," often carrying us near to the most unpleasant and terrifying aspects of existence and non-existence. So often do comic writers from Cervantes to the present play with insanity that we can well wonder about the standard of "common sense" prevalent in comedy; it seems at times to be an attempt to hold onto some generally agreed-upon reality.

All this is not to show that Carroll feared he would go mad, but that he was acutely conscious of the distortions of the human mind. He was preoccupied enough with the train of his own uncanny thoughts to have strong doubts about those potentially anarchic individual life styles that he concocted. He was evidently uneasy about deviation from societal norms. For this reason Alice herself acts in *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* as a check on the possibly manic behavior of even the "free" adult creatures like the Hatter and the Hare. She retains throughout a nice balance of self-control and imagination, which may be, in part, what made preadolescent little girls so attractive to Carroll. Even at her most disoriented, Alice can declare firmly that "I'm I." Though Carroll gently spoofs Alice's literal-minded common sense, she serves to remind us that no matter how appealing some of the creatures' life styles are, any sensible child her age must see it all as silly behavior by grown-ups. When the chaos and foolishness of Wonderland get out of hand at the end of the book, it is Alice who becomes the adult by growing in size and authority, and the imaginary creatures appear to be only errant children. Built into the work which vividly and alluringly explores the free behavior patterns that Carroll was attracted to is a perspective that makes it all seem puerile and pathetic, as if Carroll had doubts in his own mind about the sense (as well as the social wisdom) of that life style.

Source: Roger B. Henkle, "The Mad Hatter's World" in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Winter, 1973, pp. 99–117.

Nina Auerbach

In the following excerpt, Auerbach suggests that each character Alice meets in her adventures represents a part of Alice's own personality.

Dinah is a strange figure. She is the only above-ground character whom Alice mentions repeatedly, almost always in terms of her eating some smaller animal. She seems finally to function as a personification of Alice's own subtly cannibalistic

hunger, as Fury in the Mouse's tale is personified as a dog. At one point, Alice fantasizes her own identity actually blending into Dinah's:

> "How queer it seems," Alice said to herself, "to be going messages for a rabbit! I suppose Dinah'll be sending me on messages next!" And she began fancying the sort of thing that would happen: "Miss Alice! Come here directly, and get ready for your walk!" "Coming in a minute, nurse! But I've got to watch this mousehole till Dinah comes back, and see that the mouse doesn't get out."

While Dinah is always in a predatory attitude, most of the Wonderland animals are lugubrious victims; together, they encompass the two sides of animal nature that are in Alice as well. But as she falls down the rabbit hole, Alice senses the complicity between eater and eaten, looking-glass versions of each other:

> "Dinah, my dear! I wish you were down here with me! There are no mice in the air, I'm afraid, but you might catch a bat, and that's very like a mouse, you know. But do cats eat bats, I wonder?" And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself, in a dreamy sort of way, "Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?" and sometimes, "Do bats eat cats?" for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't matter which way she put it.

We are already half-way to the final banquet of *Looking-Glass,* in which the food comes alive and begins to eat the guests.

Even when Dinah is not mentioned, Alice's attitude toward the animals she encounters is often one of casual cruelty. It is a measure of Dodgson's ability to flatten out Carroll's material that the prefatory poem could describe Alice "in friendly chat with bird or beast," or that he would later see Alice as "loving as a dog … gentle as a fawn." She pities Bill the Lizard and kicks him up the chimney, a state of mind that again looks forward to that of the Pecksniffian Walrus in *Looking-Glass.* When she meets the Mock Turtle, the weeping embodiment of a good Victorian dinner, she restrains herself twice when he mentions lobsters, but then distorts Isaac Watt's *Sluggard* into a song about a *baked* lobster surrounded by hungry sharks. In its second stanza, a Panther shares a pie with an Owl who then becomes dessert, as Dodgson's good table manners pass into typical Carrollian cannibalism. The more sinister and Darwinian aspects of animal nature are introduced into Wonderland by the gentle Alice, in part through projections of her hunger onto Dinah and the "nice little dog" (she meets a "dear little puppy" after she has grown small and is afraid he will eat her up) and in part through the semi-cannibalistic appetite her songs express. With the exception of the powerful Cheshire Cat, whom I shall discuss below; most of the Wonderland animals stand in some danger of being exploited or eaten. The Dormouse is their prototype: he is fussy and cantankerous, with the nastiness of a self-aware victim, and he is stuffed into a teapot as the Mock Turtle, sobbing out his own elegy, will be stuffed into a tureen.

Alice's courteously menacing relationship to these animals is more clearly brought out in *Alice's Adventures under Ground,* in which she encounters only animals until she meets the playing cards, who are lightly sketched-in versions of their later counterparts. When expanding the manuscript for publication, Carroll added the Frog Footman, Cook, Duchess, Pig-Baby, Cheshire Cat, Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse, as well as making the Queen of Hearts a more fully developed character than she was in the manuscript. In other words, all the human or quasi-human characters were added in revision, and all develop aspects of Alice that exist only under the surface of her dialogue. The Duchess' household also turns inside out the domesticated Wordsworthian ideal: with baby and pepper flung about indiscriminately, pastoral tranquillity is inverted into a whirlwind of savage sexuality. The furious Cook embodies the equation between eating and killing that underlies Alice's apparently innocent remarks about Dinah. The violent Duchess' unctuous search for "the moral" of things echoes Alice's own violence and search for "the rules." At the Mad Tea Party, the Hatter extends Alice's "great interest in questions of eating and drinking" into an insane *modus vivendi;* like Alice, the Hatter and the Duchess sing savage songs about eating that embody the underside of Victorian literary treacle. The Queen's croquet game magnifies Alice's own desire to cheat at croquet and to punish herself violently for doing so. Its use of live animals may be a subtler extension of Alice's own desire to twist the animal kingdom to the absurd rules of civilization, which seem to revolve largely around eating and being eaten. Alice is able to appreciate the Queen's savagery so quickly because her size changes have made her increasingly aware of who she, herself, is from the point of view of a Caterpillar, a Mouse, a Pigeon, and, especially, a Cheshire Cat.

The Cheshire Cat, also a late addition to the book, is the only figure other than Alice who encompasses all the others. William Empson [in *Some Versions of Pastoral,* 1950] discusses at length the spiritual kinship between Alice and the Cat, the only creature in Wonderland whom she calls her

"friend." Florence Becker Lennon [in *The Life of Lewis Carroll*, 1962], refers to the Cheshire Cat as " Dinah's dream-self" and we have noticed the subtle shift of identities between Alice and Dinah throughout the story. The Cat shares Alice's equivocal placidity: "The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought: still it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect." The Cat is the only creature to make explicit the identification between Alice and the madness of Wonderland: "'… we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.' 'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice. 'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.' Alice didn't think that proved it at all…." Although Alice cannot accept it and closes into silence, the Cat's remark may be the answer she has been groping toward in her incessant question, "who am I?" As an alter ego, the Cat is wiser than Alice—and safer—because he is the only character in the book who is aware of his own madness. In his serene acceptance of the fury within and without, his total control over his appearance and disappearance, he almost suggests a post-analytic version of the puzzled Alice.

As Alice dissolves increasingly into Wonderland, so the Cat dissolves into his own head, and finally into his own grinning mouth. The core of Alice's nature, too, seems to lie in her mouth: the eating and drinking that direct her size changes and motivate much of her behavior, the songs and verses that pop out of her inadvertently, are all involved with things entering and leaving her mouth. Alice's first song introduces a sinister image of a grinning mouth. Our memory of the Crocodile's grin hovers over the later description of the Cat's "grin without a Cat," and colors our sense of Alice's infallible good manners:

> How cheerfully he seems to grin,
> How neatly spreads his claws,
> And welcomes little fishes in,
> With gently smiling jaws!…

When the Duchess' Cook abruptly barks out "Pig!" Alice thinks the word is meant for her, though it is the baby, another fragment of Alice's own nature, who dissolves into a pig. The Mock Turtle's lament for his future soupy self later blends tellingly into the summons for the trial: the lament of the eaten and the call to judgment melt together. When she arrives at the trial, the unregenerate Alice instantly eyes the tarts: "In the very middle of the court was a table, with a large dish of tarts upon it: they looked so good, that it made Alice quite hungry to look at them—'I wish they'd get the trial done,' she thought, 'and hand round the refreshments!' " Her hunger links her to the hungry Knave who is being sentenced: in typically ambiguous portmanteau fashion, Carroll makes the trial both a pre-Orwellian travesty of justice and an objective correlative of a real sense of sin. Like the dog Fury in the Mouse's tale, Alice takes all the parts. But unlike Fury, she is accused as well as accuser, melting into judge, jury, witness, and defendant; the person who boxes on the ears as well as the person who "cheats." Perhaps the final verdict would tell Alice who she is at last, but if it did, Wonderland would threaten to overwhelm her. Before it comes, she "grows"; the parts of her nature rush back together; combining the voices of victim and accuser, she gives "a little scream, half of fright and half of anger," and wakes up.

Presented from the point of view of her older sister's sentimental pietism, the world to which Alice awakens seems far more dream-like and hazy than the sharp contours of Wonderland. Alice's lesson about her own identity has never been stated explicitly for the stammerer Dodgson was able to talk freely only in his private language of puns and nonsense, but a Wonderland pigeon points us toward it:

> "You're a serpent; and there's no use denying it. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!"
>
> "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." This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two …

Like so many of her silences throughout the book, Alice's silence here is charged with significance, reminding us again that an important technique in learning to read Carroll is our ability to interpret his private system of symbols and signals and to appreciate the many meanings of silence. In this scene, the golden child herself becomes the serpent in childhood's Eden. The eggs she eats suggest the woman she will become, the unconscious cannibalism involved in the very fact of eating and desire to eat, and finally, the charmed circle of childhood itself. Only in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was Carroll able to fall all the way through the rabbit hole to the point where top and bottom become one, bats and cats melt into each other, and the vessel of innocence and purity is also the source of inescapable corruption.

Source: Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," in *Victorian Studies*, September, 1973, pp. 31–47.

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Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Martin Gardner, editor and author of notes, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass by Lewis Carroll*, Bramhall House, 1960.

For Further Study

Daniel Binova, "Alice the Child-imperialist and the Games of Wonderland," in *Nineteenth Century Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 2, September 1986, pp. 143-171.

Reading *Alice* in the context of Victorian imperialism, Binova argues that Alice behaves as an "imperialist" by attempting to force the behavior of the creatures she encounters to fit the "rules" for such behavior as she understands them. He concludes that Carroll is critiquing the ethnocentric attitude that underlies such an attempt.

Kathleen Blake, *Play, Games, and Sport: The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll*, Cornell University Press, 1974.

Blake's work examines the many ways in which Carroll's works play with the reader.

Kathleen Blake, "Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)," in *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography, Volume 4: Victorian Writers, 1832-1890*, Gale, 1991, pp. 111-28.

A brief biographical and critical survey of Carroll's life and works.

Harold Bloom, editor, *Lewis Carroll*, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House, 1987.

A useful compilation of essays that contains several pieces on the Alice books, including a feminist psychoanalytic reading of the character of Alice by Nina Auerbach and a discussion of Carroll's "philosophy" by Peter Heath.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, Facsimile edition, Dover Publications, 1965.

A reprint of the author's manuscript, produced by hand (including drawings and other illustrations by Carroll himself) for Alice Liddell. The Dover edition also includes some information from the 1886 facsimile edition of the manuscript.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland: Authoritative Texts of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking-Glass, The Hunting of the Snark*, edited by Donald J. Gray, Norton, 1971.

The Norton Critical Edition of Carroll's most famous works presents a text with footnotes, excerpts from Carroll's diaries, appreciations by some of his friends (including Alice Liddell, the model for Alice), and a selection of the most important criticism of the author's work.

Lewis Carroll, "Alice on the Stage," in *The Theatre*, April, 1887.

In this article, Carroll himself describes the chief characteristics of his "Alice" character.

Charles Frey and John Griffith, "Lewis Carroll: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," in their *The Literary Heritage of Childhood: An Appraisal of Children's Classics in the Western Tradition*, Greenwood Press, 1987, pp. 15-22.

In their article Frey and Griffith survey some of the ways critics have chosen to read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

Jean Gattegno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, translated by Rosemary Sheed, Crowell, 1976.

This work takes a thematic approach to various aspects of Carroll's life and work.

Edward Guiliano, editor, *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*, Clarkson N. Potter, 1982.

A collection of essays compiled for the 150th anniversary of Carroll's birth, several of which focus on Alice. Among them are Terry Otten's discussion of Alice's "innocence," Nina Demurova's consideration of Alice's genre, and Roger Henkle's argument that the Alice books are "forerunners of the modernist novel."

Richard Kelly, *Lewis Carroll*, revised edition, Twayne, 1990.

Kelly touches the main bases of Carroll's life and works in this survey. His chapter on the Alice books goes through both works episode by episode, offering critical perspectives as he does so.

James R. Kincaid, "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland," in *PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America)*, Vol. 88, No. 1, January 1973, pp. 92-99.

Kincaid argues that Carroll's own attitudes toward both Alice and the worlds she visits in *Alice* and *Looking Glass* are highly ambivalent.

Florence Becker Lennon, *Victoria through the Looking-Glass: The Life of Lewis Carroll*, Simon & Schuster, 1945.

Although this biography is more than fifty years old and its biographical details have been superseded by more recent scholarship, it does help place Carroll in the context of his time and provide a survey of earlier criticism.

Robert Phillips, editor, *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen through the Critics' Looking-Glasses, 1865-1971*, Vanguard Press, 1971.

A survey of critical evaluations of Carroll's work, including personal and biographical criticism, comparisons of Carroll with other Victorians and other writers, and philosophical, Freudian, Jungian and other interpretations of *Alice.*

Phyllis Gila Reinstein, *Alice in Context*, Garland Publishing, 1988.

Reinstein places *Alice* and *Looking-Glass* in the context of Victorian children's literature. She argues that Carroll's books, unlike their predecessors, do not "capitulate at one point or another to the pressures of their society," but instead "consistently offer amusement without intending instruction".