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INTRODUCTION

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There are two masterpieces of Victorian children's literature. Yet they began in July 1862 as stories invented by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson for his river picnic companions, Alice Liddell and her two sisters. Full of strange and wonderful characters, such as the Mad Hatter and the imperious Queen of Hearts, the first novel follows Alice as she falls down a rabbit hole and into a world of nonsense, poetry, and mind-boggling logic. Alice's adventures continue in the back-to-front world of the Looking-Glass where Alice meets talking flowers, the Red Queen and White Queen, and Humpty Dumpty as she plays a complex game of chess and hosts an unusual banquet. These novels, the first of their kind in the history of children's literature, continue to inspire the imaginations of their readers, young and old.

Best known for his Alice books, which were published under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was not only an author, but also a noted mathematician, poet, and photographer. Born on January 27, 1832, at Daresbury in Cheshire, England, Dodgson was the eldest son and third of eleven children of Charles Dodgson, curate of the parish, and Frances Jane Lutwidge. Dodgson was taught mathematics, Latin, and religion by his father before attending Richmond School at the age of twelve, later spending three unhappy years at Rugby, the great public school immortalized in Thomas Hughes' Tom Brown's Schooldays. He graduated from Christ Church at Oxford in
1851, with first-class honors in mathematics and second-class honors in Latin. In 1852, Christ Church awarded him the title of "student" (the equivalent of a fellow at other colleges) and in 1855, he became mathematical lecturer, a position he held until 1881. He began his writing and publishing career early, starting with a series of family magazines. The first of these, *Useful and Instructive Poetry*, he wrote and produced by himself. In 1856, Dodgson published his poem "Solitude" in a magazine called *The Train*, using his famous pseudonym Lewis Carroll for the first time. Also in 1856, he purchased his first camera and lens in order to take up photography, and he met Alice Liddell, the inspiration for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The Liddells arrived at Christ Church when Alice's father, Henry George Liddell, became the new dean. Dodgson soon became acquainted with them as he pursued his photography, first attempting to photograph the dean's three young daughters, including three-year-old Alice. Although that attempt was unsuccessful, Dodgson became a regular visitor at the Liddells' home and clearly enjoyed spending time with the children, noting in his diary that the three girls had become "excellent friends" and marking another entry about a day on the river with seven-year-old Lorina with a "white stone" to indicate a special event. His intimacy with Alice—he describes her as his "ideal child friend"—grew, although the exact nature of their relationship is unclear. His diaries between 1858 and 1862 have disappeared, possibly destroyed, although they resume shortly before the famous river trip with Alice and her sisters when she begged him for a story. Dodgson composed the story as he and Robinson Duckworth, an Oxford tutor, rowed along the river. At the conclusion of the trip, Alice asked him if he would write it down, and this first version became *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, illustrated by Dodgson himself and presented to Alice in November 1864. By then relations between Dodgson and the Liddells were strained, owing to an unknown (the key pages in Dodgson's diary are missing) altercation in July 1863 between Dodgson and the Liddells. He may have proposed to Alice and been rejected on account of the great difference in their ages (she was eleven, he nearly twenty years her senior) or because the socially ambitious Mrs. Liddell felt Dodgson, a mere don with a stutter, was an inadequate suitor.
Nonetheless, the relationship between Dodgson and Alice Liddell was the inspiration for the incredibly successful Alice books. Dodgson consulted his friend George MacDonald, a well-known children's writer, about the suitability of the book for publication and received enthusiastic support from MacDonald and his children. Accordingly, Dodgson arranged for Alexander Macmillan to publish *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865. The illustrations were a cause of some concern. Although Dodgson had illustrated the edition he gave to Alice, he felt his artistic talent was insufficient for his vision. Already impressed with John Tenniel, who was popular for his political *Punch* cartoons and for the illustrations of animals in fantastic settings that appeared in his edition of *Aesop's Fables* (1848), Dodgson contacted his playwright friend Tom Taylor to determine if he knew Tenniel well enough “to say whether he could undertake such a thing as drawing a dozen wood-cuts to illustrate a child's book” and, if so, whether Taylor would be willing to put him in touch with Tenniel. Dodgson paid for the illustrations himself, working closely with Tenniel to ensure that the drawings matched his vision for the stories. Consequently, the Tenniel illustrations, more than any others, most closely represent Dodgson's ideal images of his characters.

The publication arrangements with Macmillan were unusual. Although Macmillan arranged for the printing and distribution of the books in exchange for a ten percent commission, Dodgson paid all the costs of printing, illustrating, and advertising. Dodgson retained control and made all the decisions, which meant that he was able to suppress the first edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 because Tenniel was unsatisfied with the printing of the illustrations, a decision that Dodgson calculates to have cost £600, an astronomical sum for an Oxford don. It was a copy of this first edition, however, that Dodgson arranged to have sent to Alice Liddell on July 4, 1865, the third anniversary of the river expedition on which he had created the story. Macmillan arranged to have the first edition reprinted by a different printer, and on November 9, 1865, Dodgson received the first copy of this new edition, which he noted in his diary to be “very far superior to the old, and in fact a perfect piece of artistic printing.” Dodgson’s perfectionism is evident in some of his later publications as
well; he suppressed an inferior edition of *The Game of Logic* in 1886, the entire first run of ten thousand copies of *The Nursery ‘Alice’* in 1889, and the sixtieth print run of one thousand copies of *Looking-Glass* in 1893.

The reviews of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* were mixed, although generally favorable. A December 16, 1865, review in the *Athenaeum* described it as a “stiff, overwrought story” but an *Illustrated London News* review on the same date declared it a “very elegant piece of fancy-work wrought by a clever brain for the amusement and even instruction of children.” The review went on to say that Tenniel’s forty-two illustrations were a further reason for its “strong recommendation.” The January 20, 1866, review in *John Bull* called it a “work of genius” that “effectually dispels the notion that first-rate mathematical talent and ability are inconsistent with genuine humour and imagination.” Reviews in children’s periodicals were also positive. In *Aunt Judy’s Magazine*, for example, editor Margaret Gatty described the illustrations as “exquisite” and explained how they “do justice to the exquisitely wild, fantastic, impossible, yet most natural history of ‘Alice in Wonderland.’”

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was sufficiently successful that Dodgson made arrangements for French and German translations in 1866. In August of that year, he began considering a sequel, based on the remaining stories told to the Liddell children that he could remember. The result, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, was written more slowly than the first novel, in part because of Dodgson’s difficulties in finding an illustrator. Dodgson initially contacted Tenniel, who originally declined owing to a busy schedule. Dodgson’s diary confirms that he then unsuccessfully approached other illustrators, including Richard Doyle, Sir Joseph Noel Paton, and W. S. Gilbert. Tenniel ultimately agreed to provide the illustrations when he had time, which turned out to be three and a half years later. Dodgson received his first copy on December 6, 1871, and sent copies to the deanery on December 8.

By the end of January 1872, *Looking-Glass* had sold fifteen thousand copies and was well on its way to success. In 1881, thanks to his income from the Alice books, Dodgson was able to resign his Christ Church lectureship. Dodgson was heavily involved in all aspects of the further commercialization of the Alice books during his lifetime.
The manuscript facsimile of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* was published in 1886, and *Songs from “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”* was published in 1871, accompanied by music from William Boyd. Cheaper “People’s Editions” of both books were published in 1887 to reach a wider audience. Dodgson also revised *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* for a younger market; Tenniel redrew some of his pictures for this larger format book, which was published as *The Nursery ‘Alice’* in 1890. In 1893, Dodgson wrote to Alice Liddell (then Hargreaves) herself, saying “your adventures have had a marvelous success. I have now sold well over 100,000 copies.” He continued revising the layout and punctuation of the Alice books, producing a final corrected text in 1897.

Part of the success of the Alice books emerges from their imaginative genius and the ways in which they revolutionized writing for children. Children’s literature of the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries is typically characterized by religious and moral didacticism. Books after Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* grew less serious and became more entertaining, making way for vivid flights of fancy and foregrounding delight over instruction. Ronald Reichertz has argued, however, that Carroll’s writing actually follows a developing trend in children’s literature, incorporating “an extensive literary tradition that ranges from conventional kinds of children’s literature (for example, moral and informational didacticism, nursery rhyme, and fairy tale) to general literary topoi and forms (such as the ‘world turned upside down,’ the looking-glass book, and dream vision) that had been assimilated into children’s literature before the Alice books were written.” While some reviewers disliked the shift toward mere amusement in children’s literature, reviewers as fiercely conservative as Charlotte Yonge nonetheless praised Carroll’s imagination, describing *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as “one long dream of sheer nonsense; but [children] will not like it the worse for that.” In her review in *Aunt Judy’s Magazine*, Margaret Gatty expressed a similar notion, alerting parents to the fact “that they must not look to ‘Alice’s Adventures’ for knowledge in disguise.” The idea that a book for children might simply be entertaining, without a moral or a lesson, marked a significant change in the development of children’s literature.
In *Alice's Adventures*, Carroll satirizes earlier children's literature. An example of this occurs when Alice finds a bottle labelled "DRINK ME":

It was all very well to say "Drink Me," but wise little Alice was not going to do *that* in a hurry. "No, I'll look first," she said, "and see whether it's marked 'poison' or not"; for she had read several nice little stories 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: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that, if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked "poison", it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later.

In poking gentle fun at the messages found in these "nice little stories," the Alice books are placed within, and yet distinct from, the evolving tradition of children's literature. They are also part of a growing Victorian preoccupation with children and childhood. In adult fiction of the period, such as that by Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, and Charles Dickens, childhood began to occupy an increasingly central role. At the same time, a new literature for children rapidly developed, including Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* (1846) and William Makepeace Thackeray's fairy tale *The Rose and the Ring* (1855). Based on these traditions, the Alice books combine comedy and reality, nonsense and logic, in ways that were both highly original and liberating for the time. They are, moreover, centrally concerned with the child's experience in an adult environment and with the process of growing up and finding a sense of self.

Alice's no-nonsense attempts to impose logic in Wonderland and on the other side of the Looking-Glass are met with frustration, and supply much of the hilarity in both books. For example, her meeting with the Cheshire Cat provides no useful assistance about which way she ought to go:
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where—” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“—so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.

“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”

Random, seemingly unconnected, events characterize both books, yet there is an underlying order. For instance, Alice learns the rules for growing taller and shorter by eating different sides of the mushroom from the caterpillar. Although the rules are unexpected, once Alice learns them, she is able to change her size as necessary. Of course, not everything is as easily explained, nor is it meant to be. Some of Carroll’s creatures, such as the Walrus and the Carpenter, are mere whimsy, designed to amuse and entertain.

The immense body of criticism, the numerous biographies of Dodgson, and the many adaptations and re-tellings of the stories reflect the challenges of decoding the meaning of the Alice books and the extent to which those meanings have changed over time. Will Brooker explains that the notions of “Alice” and “Lewis Carroll” “currently circulate as cultural myths, cultural icons—often far removed from the historical figures of Alice Liddell and Charles Dodgson.” The stories of Alice falling down the rabbit hole and crossing through the looking-glass into the other drawing room have inspired children and adults since the character’s first appearance in the nineteenth century, and they continue to inspire children’s literature and culture of today.

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