



# The Making of Lewis Carroll's Alice and the Invention of Wonderland

Books Reviewed:

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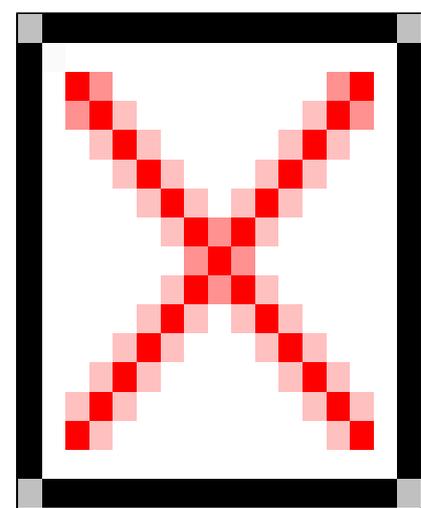
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As has long been known, the adventures of Alice Liddell, daughter of the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, began when she was the heroine of a story, or stories, told by the Rev. Charles Dodgson, a Christ Church lecturer. The narrative was stabilised when Dodgson took Alice **Under Ground** in a manuscript that he wrote out and illustrated for her as a Christmas present in 1864. A year later this found a much expanded form as a printed book for all to read: **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** with Dodgson adopting his authorial name of Lewis Carroll. Invention and making did not occur only there however and in 1871 Alice was taken to the chess-board landscape **Through the Looking-Glass** while eighteen years later she returned to Wonderland in a highly abridged journey intended for reading to, or even by, small children.

Merely to describe these authorial metamorphoses as a critical exercise is a demanding task, but from the very start the text is more than just an absurdist story for children. It is overlaid with multiple tropes stemming from the author's life and relationships around Oxford and by a multiplicity of jokes, puns, parodies and puzzles. Including a tithe of these in a simple explanation of the adventures, intended, as here, for general readers is a demanding job.

Peter Hunt admits as much in his highly perceptive introduction although it should be noted that he is by no means the first to venture into the dream landscapes down the rabbit-hole or across the chess-board squares beyond the mirror. Hundreds have been there before him in annotated editions of the stories, in biographical studies, in the massive output of the English and American Lewis Carroll Societies (don't mention Japan) and even in his own annotated edition of the books in Oxford's World's Classics series.

In the event though I'm not sure but what his new take on the books will not confuse most innocent readers as well as deprive them of important elements in the business of making and inventing. He is always a most approachable writer, enjoying the amusing aspects of his task and always ready to question Received Ideas, but he too often allows himself to be diverted into irrelevant by-ways. (How do the listing of the names and ages of actresses who have played Alice help the job in hand, or [a makeweight?] brief biographies of some of the dramatis personae in the book? What's the use of a misleading synopsis of some didactic children's books published before **Alice** mostly cribbed from Harvey Darton's historical work?)

These and other unnecessary passages are the more frustrating in that they obscure a second aspect of the making of the books: their life as physical products. (Hunt omits mention in his 'Further Reading' of two crucial books in this respect: **Lewis Carroll and the House of Macmillan** [1987] and Michael Hancher's **The Tenniel Illustrations to the 'Alice' Books** [1985].) Tenniel is indeed the main sufferer here for although predictable aspects are discussed such as the 'Wasp in a Wig' incident or the character of the White Knight, there is nothing on either his techniques or his vision throughout the project. Indeed, spurred on initially by Carroll's own thirty-seven drawings for **Under Ground**, he is surely himself the Inventor of Wonderland. (Ask yourself: what would have been the fate of **Alice's Adventures** if it had been published as a plain text edition?)

As it is, the illustrations that adorn the present volume do great credit to its intentions as a popular summary. They appear, often in full colour, on almost every page of the book, sometimes on facing pages as well, and they are not only relevant and entertaining but, thanks mostly to Christ Church and the Bodleian itself, seldom paraded in Carrolliana (the many coloured adaptations of Tenniel are from some facsimile playing cards devised by E Gertrude Thomson in Bodley's John Johnson Collection). Pernicketty to the last though, I must point out that the *Struwelpeter* plate should be dated after 1906 rather than 1985 and that the mysterious Humpty Dumpty on page 95 needs a date.

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