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Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865)
Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There (1871)
Lewis Carroll

BOTH of these famous titles contain the name 'Alice', and it is tempting to think that the second 'Alice' is the same as the first. Both are trusting, intelligent, curious, rather humourless little girls with a talent for getting into fantastic scrapes. In one sense they are the same; in another they are different.

To explain why, it is necessary to know a little about the author, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, aka Lewis Carroll.[16] Dodgson was an Anglican deacon and fellow of Christ Church College, Oxford, the scion of a family of clergymen, and a lifelong bachelor who published several books on mathematics.[17] The popular image of him

16 'Lewis Carroll', a pseudonym, grew out of his real name, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, since the Anglicized version of the German name 'Ludwig/Lutwidge' is 'Lewis', and the Latin for Charles is 'Carolus'.

17 There is a famous story that Queen Victoria was so taken with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that she requested that Mr Carroll's next book be sent to her, and was disappointed when it arrived bearing the title *The Condensation of Determinants* – a story which, as Dodgson himself pointed out, was entirely untrue. In the foreword of his *Symbolic Logic* of 1896 he said it was 'utterly false in every particular'.

as a reclusive, stuttering, ivory-tower-dwelling academic is somewhat misleading. Even before the publication of the 'Alice' books his social contacts were wide-ranging: while still in his early twenties he made the personal acquaintance of John Ruskin, Alfred Tennyson, Ellen Terry and various other luminaries of the artistic, literary and theatrical worlds. He was an inveterate party-goer and entertainer, with a talent for mimicry and conjuring tricks. He was also a prolific pioneer photographer, specializing in portraits. His interest in photography overlapped to a great extent with his third main interest in life: prepubertal girls. He struck up dozens, perhaps hundreds of relationships with young girls, usually on holiday, photographed them, and kept up enormous correspondences with them. The roll-call of his conquests would fill pages: among them were Katie Brine, Agnes Grace, Madeleine Catherine Parnell, Xie Kitchin, Amy Hughes, Dymphna Ellis, Alice Constance Westmacott, Irene Macdonald, Zoe Strong and Gertrude Chataway, to name but a few. He was not a surreptitious snapper, in the manner of the prowling beach-photographer of modern nightmare, but always sought and obtained the permission and attendance of the parents. He often photographed his girls in costume – as beggar-girls, Red Riding Hoods, Chinamen – and made numerous nude studies. It was thought until fairly recently that none of these nudes had survived (he instructed his executors that they be destroyed), but a series of six Dodgson plates featuring little naked maidens was discovered in the Rosenbach collection in the 1970s.

To twenty-first century minds this all appears highly questionable. Many modern commentators have assumed that Dodgson was a paedophile. But a vogue for little girls in various states of undress was part of mainstream late-Victorian culture, much as the *putto* was a standard and unremarkable motif of the art of the baroque. Many other photographers specialized in just the same subjects, and photographs of naked girls routinely appeared on Christmas cards.

It has been assumed that among this extensive parade, Alice was special. She was certainly one of his earliest 'child-friends', though she was not the very earliest.[18] Her full name was Alice Liddell, the daughter of the Dean of Christ Church, Dr Henry Liddell. She was the middle child of a trio of charming sisters, Edith, Alice and Lorina, who at the time of meeting Dodgson on April 25, 1856 were two, three and six years old respectively. He first photographed them on June 3 of that year. The collodion wet-plate photography of the 1850s required long exposure times, and Dodgson was adept at persuading his young sitters to keep still: 'When we were thoroughly happy and amused at his stories,' Alice wrote in later life, 'he used to pose us, and expose the plates, before the right mood had passed. He seemed to have an endless fund of fantastical stories, which he made up as he told them...' The twenty-four-year-old Dodgson became a close friend of the family, attending teas and birthday parties, and soon began to take the sisters

18 He had formed friendships with little girls since early manhood. 'Boys are not in my line,' he wrote to a friend in February 1882. 'I think they are a mistake: girls are less objectionable.' Contrast the approach of JM Barrie (see chapter 20).

out on little trips, often telling them further extemporized stories. And on one summer's day – on a boat-trip on the Isis – he told them the story which became *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It was July 4, 1862, and Edith, Alice and Lorina were eight, ten and thirteen years old. Robinson Duckworth, a friend of Dodgson's who accompanied them, later wrote: 'I rowed *stroke* and he rowed *bow* in the famous Long Vacation voyage to Godstow, when the three Miss Liddells were our passengers, and the story was actually composed and spoken over my shoulder for the benefit of Alice Liddell, who was acting as "cox" of our gig. I remember turning round and saying, "Dodgson, is this an extempore romance of yours?" And he replied, "Yes, I'm inventing as we go along."' Duckworth recalled that when they returned Alice asked Dodgson if he would write the story down, and he agreed, later staying up all night to commit to paper 'the recollections of the drolleries with which he had enlivened the afternoon'.

The title of the original hand-lettered book was *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. Dodgson illustrated the book himself, and presented it to Alice in November 1864. But by this time he was barely on speaking terms with Alice and her family: relations with the Liddells had suffered a mysterious rupture. One guess is that Dodgson offered Lorina – or Alice – his hand in marriage, and the offer was not well received by the Liddells. The girls were still very young, of course, but possibly of greater importance was that they were the daughters of the Dean of Christ Church. Alice's mother was a social climber, and Dodgson was not a very good prospect.

Still, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* was the fruit of those golden days on the Isis: and it was so well liked by the friends Dodgson showed it to that he determined to have it properly published, with proper illustrations. He decided on John Tenniel as the illustrator, thus bringing into being the one of most famous marriages of author and illustrator in the history of literature. However, Dodgson worried that the title *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* might be a little too prosaic for the published version (he even joked that readers might guess it had something to do with mining), and accordingly wrote on June 10, 1864 to a friend, Tom Taylor[19], for advice. He enclosed several titular possibilities in his letter, including *Alice Among the Elves, Alice Among the Goblins, Alice's Hour in Elfland, Alice's Hour in Wonderland*, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Taylor seems to have picked the latter, and Dodgson concurred. Of the possibilities, it stands out as the superior choice, but in rather a poor field. The original title – *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* – is easily better, with its mythic connotations and its modern sense of a parallel social reality. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published in June 1865, became a best-seller, and has never been out of print.

So this was one Alice. It is less well known that the heroine of *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* drew on a different Alice. This was the five-year-old Alice Theodora Raikes, Dodgson's distant cousin, who he first met in 1867. Writing much later in *The Times* in 1922, Alice told the story:

19 Taylor was the editor of *Punch* and a minor member of the Victorian literati. He had one other claim to fame: he was the author of a play called *Our American Cousin*. This was the play being performed when Lincoln was assassinated in 1865.

> As children, we lived in Onslow Square and used to play in the garden behind the houses. Charles Dodgson used to stay with an old uncle there, and walk up and down, his hands behind him, on the strip of lawn. One day, hearing my name, he called me to him saying, 'So you are another Alice. I'm very fond of Alices. Would you like to come and see something which is rather puzzling?' We followed him into his house which opened, as ours did, upon the garden, into a room full of furniture with a tall mirror standing across one corner.
>
> 'Now,' he said, giving me an orange, 'first tell me which hand the little girl you see there has got it in.' After some perplexed contemplation, I said, 'The left hand.' 'Exactly,' he said, 'and how do you explain that?' I couldn't explain it, but seeing that some solution was expected, I ventured, 'If I was on the *other* side of the glass, wouldn't the orange still be in my right hand?' I can remember his laugh. 'Well done, little Alice,' he said. 'The best answer I've had yet.'
>
> I heard no more then, but in after years was told that he said that had given him his first idea for *Through The Looking Glass,* a copy of which, together with each of his other books, he regularly sent me.

Derek Hudson, Dodgson's biographer, calls this 'the most important single inspiration for *Through the Looking-Glass*'.[20] It suggests that the first Alice is different from the second; or rather that neither the first Alice nor the second are crucially related to any living little girl. The Alices

20 The working title was *Behind the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Saw There*: it was later changed to *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There.*

were instead inspired by an amalgam of 'child-friends' Dodgson had built up during the course of his life, and we are incorrect if we think of either the Alice of the first book or the Alice of the second book as 'being' Alice Liddell, or, indeed, Alice Raikes. And when pressed on the matter later in life, Dodgson repeatedly denied that Alice was based on any real child. In a letter to Mary E Manners of December 5, 1885, for example, he said: 'thanks for the very sweet verses you have written about my dream-child (named after a real Alice, but none the less a dream-child) and her Wonderland.' This seems a little heartless, but given his extensive contact with little girls, it is intuitively convincing. Alice was essentially a fictional character, as Peter Pan was, or Winnie-the-Pooh – or Oliver Twist or the Woman in White.