

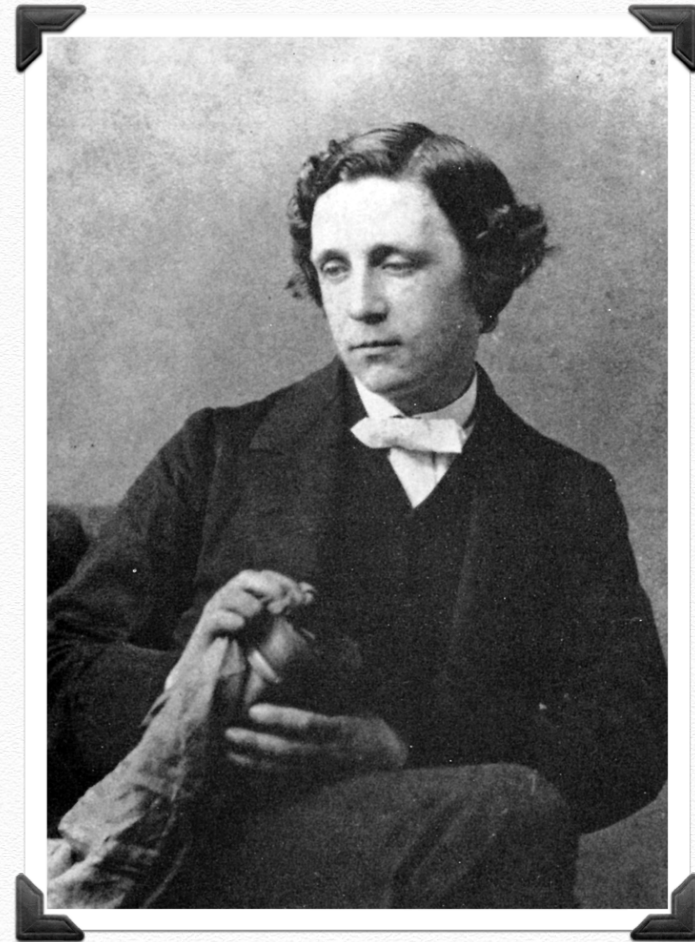


Alice in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll

Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

- ❖ Pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, an inversion of his name in Latin, *Carolus Ludovicus*
- ❖ Mathematician at Christ Church College, Oxford
- ❖ Had an idyllic childhood in Cheshire, making up games, writing poems, and publishing 'magazines' for his family
- ❖ Struggled in boarding school and idealized his childhood as a time of innocence and happiness
- ❖ Interested in burgeoning science of photography



The Liddells

- ❖ While Dodgson was a fellow at Christ Church, Henry Liddell was the dean. He had four children, including three daughters: Lorina, Alice, and Edith
- ❖ Dodgson befriended the Liddells, took posed and costumed photographs of the children (a Victorian fad), and took them on outings in Oxford
- ❖ Wrote stories, puzzles, and word games for them, and seemed particularly interested in getting to know Alice the most out of the Liddell siblings

Writing *Alice*

- ❖ On a series of picnics and trips up the river to Godstow with the girls and Robinson Duckworth, a fellow at Trinity College, Dodgson told them a story about a girl called Alice who fell down a rabbit hole
- ❖ Alice asked to have the story written up, so Dodgson gave it to her as a gift with illustrations
- ❖ Two years later (1865), it was published professionally, with illustrations by John Tenniel

Contemporary Culture in *Wonderland*

- ❖ Dodgson felt strongly about Victorian children's education, with its focus on obedience; he used parody poems to make fun of soppy children's literature
- ❖ *Wonderland* includes a lot of parodies of legal and political procedures (the caucus race, the trial of the Knave)
- ❖ Dodgson also makes fun of Victorian class hierarchies: the Gryphon bragging about its school, the Duchess' cook using too much pepper (used by financially struggling families to cover up the taste of spoiled food)
- ❖ Plays with common phrases like 'mad as a march hare' or 'A cat may look at a king'
- ❖ Many references to Oxford in the 1860s, including the 'treacle well', a holy well in Binsey



Mathematics and Science in *Wonderland*

- ❖ Lots of popular scientific interest in dreams at the time: how our minds create them, and connections between reality and dreams
- ❖ Carroll was a mathematician, and so the maths in the book is often right even when it looks wrong: Alice's poor calculations in 'The Pool of Tears' are correct if you start at base 18 and keep increasing the base by 3
- ❖ Carroll was also interested in time, time zones, and the International Date Line, which was another topic of interest at the time. It's not a coincidence that *Wonderland* is full of stopped clocks!
- ❖ There was a lot of popular speculation in the 1860s about what would happen if you fell through a hole that went straight through the center of the earth. In theory you would oscillate forever due to gravity, but wind resistance would eventually bring you to rest at the earth's centre
- ❖ The Dodo and many of the other animals in *Wonderland* can be found in Oxford's Museum of Natural History. Dodgson photographed their collections and heard the great debate on Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in the museum in 1859

Themes in *Wonderland*

- ❖ **Authority and tyranny:** this book makes fun of politics, law, and monarchy, always showing how dangerous unchecked power is
- ❖ **The plight of children:** the adult world often seems nonsensical or even scary. *Wonderland* is a great metaphor for this feeling. Alice often gets mistreated in Wonderland, as a child interacting with strange and fantastic adults. But even the violence is played for laughs, and Alice has fun. The story is about how she makes it out of every strange interaction and difficult spot, always coming out just fine.
- ❖ **Manners and class:** everyone in *Wonderland*, Alice included, seems to have very bad manners, and to constantly be offending each other. The nobility, in particular, aren't very noble at all
- ❖ **Making fun of morals:** Dodgson found Victorian children's literature, with its moralizing and sentimentality, to be boring and uncreative. His parodies are about turning morals on their heads for the sake of fun and cleverness
- ❖ The pleasures and anxieties of **playing around with language**, which is both fun and dangerous: meaning can be changed very easily!
- ❖ **Identity crisis:** Alice seems to have trouble answering the question 'Who are you?' in Wonderland. What makes us who we are, and how do we remember?