

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
INTRODUCTION	ix
FURTHER READING	lxvi
A NOTE ON THE TEXT	lxx
A NOTE ON TENNIEL	lxxv

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

CONTENTS	7
I DOWN THE RABBIT-HOLE	9
II THE POOL OF TEARS	16
III A CAUCUS-RACE AND A LONG TALE	24
IV THE RABBIT SENDS IN A LITTLE BILL	31
V ADVICE FROM A CATERPILLAR	40
VI PIG AND PEPPER	50
VII A MAD TEA-PARTY	60
VIII THE QUEEN'S CROQUET-GROUND	69
IX THE MOCK TURTLE'S STORY	78
X THE LOBSTER-QUADRILLE	87
XI WHO STOLE THE TARTS?	95
XII ALICE'S EVIDENCE	102

Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There

CONTENTS	119
I LOOKING-GLASS HOUSE	121
II THE GARDEN OF LIVE FLOWERS	135

CONTENTS

III	LOOKING-GLASS INSECTS	145
IV	TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE	156
V	WOOL AND WATER	170
VI	HUMPTY DUMPTY	181
VII	THE LION AND THE UNICORN	194
VIII	“IT’S MY OWN INVENTION”	205
IX	QUEEN ALICE	220
X	SHAKING	235
XI	WAKING	237
XII	WHICH DREAMED IT?	238
	INTRODUCTION: ALICE’S ADVENTURES UNDER GROUND	243
	ALICE’S ADVENTURES UNDER GROUND	249
	“ALICE” ON THE STAGE’	293
	NOTES TO ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND	299
	NOTES TO THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS	324
	APPENDIX I: PREFACE TO THE EIGHTY-SIXTH THOUSAND 6/- EDITION OF ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND	356
	APPENDIX II: PREFACE TO THE SIXTY-FIRST THOUSAND EDITION OF THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS	357

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Too many people have played their part in the production of this edition to be named here. The critical and editorial history of the Alice books involves a large cast of players, a fact which has inspired and inhibited me at the same time. The annotation in this edition is more indebted to my editorial predecessors than I can acknowledge in detail, in particular to editions by Martin Gardner, Douglas Gray and R. L. Green, and the trailblazing essay of the great poet critic William Empson.

My thanks to the staff of Cambridge and York University Libraries and all those who have helped me personally in producing this edition, in particular Tony Fothergill, Kenneth Fuller of Marchpane Books, David Haughton, Karen Hodder, Hermione Lee, Jacqueline Rose, the late Geoffrey Summerfield and Marina Warner. Special thanks go to my patient and inspiring editor at Penguin, Paul Keegan, who commissioned it and bore with me during its long adventures underground, to Adam Phillips whose conversations have helped make sense of it all, and to Fiona Shaw who has gone the whole distance with me.

The edition is dedicated to my daughters Eliza and Jesse with love.

INTRODUCTION

“No! No! The adventures first,” said the Gryphon in an impatient tone: “explanations take such a dreadful time.” (“The Lobster-Quadrille”)

“Even a joke should have some meaning – and a child’s more important than a joke, I hope.” (“Queen Alice”)¹

1: The Child, Nonsense and Meaning

“‘The adventures first’”, says Carroll’s Gryphon, with his dread of ‘explanations’, and all readers know this is the right order. Yet introductions inevitably come before adventures and introductions tend to mean explanations. Lots of things happen the wrong way round in these texts – “‘Sentence first – verdict afterwards’”, shouts the Queen of Hearts² – so readers who share the Gryphon’s priorities can always read the introduction after the stories, or not at all. You simply follow the instructions of the King of Hearts: “‘Begin at the beginning . . . and go on till you come to the end: then stop’”.³

Yet Carroll’s heroine, at the heart of these adventures, is very much concerned with questions of meaning. When she dreamily finds her way to the other side of the looking-glass, one of the first things she encounters is a poem called ‘Jabberwocky’. After reading it, Alice remarks “‘It seems very pretty . . . but it’s rather hard to understand!’” “‘Somehow it fills my head with ideas’”, she reflects, “‘only I don’t exactly know what they are!’”⁴

In this respect, the nonsensical mirror-poem ‘Jabberwocky’ stands as a mirror of the classic literary double-act of which it is part. All readers of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, those

undisputed classics of nonsense literature, find themselves in much the same predicament as the heroine. The stories fill our heads with ideas, but we don't know what they are.

All the same, readers tend to divide between those who are content to find the stories 'pretty' – as Alice somewhat incongruously finds that monstrous travesty of a heroic monster-slaying saga 'Jabberwocky' 'pretty' – and those who want to know what those obscure 'ideas' Alice intimates really are. Of the verses read out in the court-room scene at the close of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice declares "I don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it", which prompts the King to reflect:

"If there's no meaning in it," said the King, "that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any. And yet I don't know," he went on, spreading out the verses on his knee, and looking at them with one eye; "I seem to see some meaning in them after all. '—said I could not swim—' you can't swim, can you?" he added, turning to the knave.⁵

To read the Alice books is to plunge into a world of narrative distortions and nonsensical explanations, and the reader is perpetually caught between the two contradictory positions adopted by Alice and the King, of finding no meaning in it, as she does, or attempting to decode 'some meaning' from it all, like the King. Finding meaning, like losing meaning, involves pleasure as well as pain. But then losing meaning, like finding it, does too, as the best nonsense reminds us.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice brings her comparable puzzlement about the 'Jabberwocky' poem to Humpty Dumpty. "You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir", she says, "Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called 'Jabberwocky'?"⁶ Humpty Dumpty, an egghead absolutely obsessed with meaning, duly obliges, with an intellectual confidence rare even among critics of poetry: "I can explain all the poems that ever were invented – and a good many that haven't been invented yet". He goes on to interpret 'Jabberwocky' according to whimsical fiat on the one hand ("'"Brillig' means four o'clock in the afternoon"') and a theory of 'portmanteau words' on the other hand: this enables him to unpack the different meanings he sees packed into one nonsense word (so that 'slithy', for example,

can be decoded as an amalgam of ‘lithe’ and ‘slimy’). Though authoritative, and even seductive, as a piece of off-the-cuff philological commentary upon ‘Jabberwocky’, Humpty Dumpty’s ‘explanation’ of the nonsense idiom of the poem is as nonsensical as his definition earlier of ‘glory’ as a ‘knock-me-down argument’. It is as much a parody of philosophical and linguistic authority as an instance of it, and, as the familiar nursery rhyme warns Alice he will do, this hubristic nonsense commentator comes to a sticky end.

If the problem of meaning – of what Alice’s adventures and what she finds in them means – haunts the text and its heroine, it has also, since the date of its first publication, haunted its readers. Though many readers share the ‘adventures first’ view of the Gryphon that ‘explanations’ are a waste of time, others adopt the viewpoint of the Red Queen that “‘Even a joke should have a meaning—and a child’s more important than a joke’”. In fact, we could classify readers of the books as either Gryphons or Queens. Those in the first camp simply wish to enjoy the story as a story, as they think appropriate for a book originally written for children, and rebuff all efforts to interpret it. Those in the second, contrariwise, insist that it is meaning and not meaninglessness which makes Carroll’s nonsense expressive, and that all readings of the Alice books are necessarily interpretative. Why should meaningless jokes or meaningless stories be more interesting than meaningful ones?

Historically, the Carrollian editor and biographer R. L. Green falls into the first camp and stands as the prime spokesperson for Gryphonism.⁷ The poet and critic William Empson stands at the forefront of the latter or Red Queen’s camp, with his ground-breaking essay on ‘The Child as Swain’ setting the agenda for all subsequent Freudian and historical interpretations of Lewis Carroll’s work.⁸ The editor Martin Gardner, a mathematician and logician like Carroll, is the ultimate exponent of the Red Queen school of thought and in his masterfully Dumptyan *The Annotated Alice* explains the Alice books with reference to the whole intellectual universe before and since – and the whole intellectual universe by reference to the Alice books.⁹

These divergent approaches to reading the Alice books reflect something of the enigmatic or hybrid nature of the text itself. These are sophisticated ‘fairy tales’ on the one hand, as Carroll announces in the

prefatory poem to *Wonderland*, and they abound in the spontaneous enigmatic coinings of dreams, slips of the tongue, jokes and improvisatory free-association. On the other hand they are also riddling, aesthetically highly wrought products of a child-haunted adult, obsessed by questions of meaning, and have something of the eerie perfection of the literary sphinx about them, of Wildean contrivance as well as the vertiginous spontaneity of improvisation. On the one hand, these are two of the few widely acknowledged classics of children's literature which helped in themselves to redefine the possibilities of writing for children. On the other hand, they are two of the most original, experimental works of literary fiction in the nineteenth century and have had a huge impact on subsequent fiction and culture. Translated by Nabokov into Russian, adopted by the Surrealists as proto-surrealist dream books in France, taken up by T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, W. H. Auden and more recently Peter Ackroyd as models, the Alice books have been taken to prefigure modernism at its most experimental as well as children's writing at its most elemental.¹⁰ This double fate may embarrass some readers but is surely inherent in the stories Carroll wove around his heroine Alice, and surely part of their challenge and appeal to all readers, young and old.

In a sense this dispute represents a reaction to something beyond the Alice books themselves. It represents a dispute about the meaning of children's literature (whatever that is), about childhood and literary representations of childhood, about the relation between books for children and books for adults, about 'nonsense' as a genre and classification, about dreams, and of course about reading.¹¹ *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* originated as a children's story and was marketed as a book for children, yet since the day of its first publication it has always appealed to adults too and, with the Bible and Shakespeare, is reputed to be the most quoted of English texts. Carroll's two dream books about a seven-year-old middle-class Victorian girl offer themselves as absurd and riddling parables of narrative and linguistic innocence, but they are also allegories of experience: incarnations of philosophical sophistication and perverse intellectual wit, constructed around the adventures of a child.

What is ultimately at stake in disagreements about the 'innocence'

of such children's classics as the Alice books is, I suspect, a debate about the relationship between adulthood and childhood – and where in that complex, troubled and mesmerizing relationship the interest of 'innocence' is to be found and in whose interest. Talking about Carroll, W. H. Auden wrote that 'there are good books which are only for adults, because their comprehension presupposes adult experiences, but there are no good books which are only for children'.¹² In this sense, it is natural for children's books to become adult books if they are any good; since all adults have been children, books for and about children are always potentially for and about adults too. William Empson has said that the Alice books are about 'growing up', which is certainly true.¹³ They are also, perhaps more surprisingly, about grown-ups. Alice, after all, is, apart from a fleeting baby (who turns into a pig) and those stuffed archetypal schoolboys Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the only child in the books at all. Like Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, the stories give us not so much an adult's view of childhood as a child's view of adulthood. Seen through the lens of Alice, the world of adulthood is as dismayingly bizarre and perverse as those of Dickens and James.

Virginia Woolf resolves the question of readership in a different way. 'The two *Alices* are not books for children', she wrote in 1939, 'they are the only books in which we become children'.¹⁴ According to Woolf, his childhood, 'lodged whole and entire' inside Dodgson, forming 'an impediment at the centre of his being' which 'starved the mature man of nourishment' but enabled him in fiction to 'do what no one else has ever been able to do . . . return to that world' and 'recreate it . . . so that we too become children again'. This is a large claim and magically dissolves the barrier between adult and child. In *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* Woolf herself tried to 'recreate' that childhood world too, so her tribute to Carroll is born out of a sense of affinity. Carroll should be placed with the modernist novelists Proust, Joyce and Woolf, as well as the Oedipal father of modern childhood, the psychoanalyst Freud, as part of a cultural movement placing the child's story at the heart of adult culture.

The Alice books are children's literature, but also, as much as Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, part of the nineteenth century's expanding

literature about childhood. In foregrounding problems of language and meaning, they are as formally disorienting and psychologically searching representations of childhood subjectivity as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* or Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. 'Adventures' and 'Wonderland' suggest 'fairy tale' and 'romance', but Alice's most parlous adventures underground and through the mirror are intellectual and social rather than physical, dialectical rather than folkloric. The Gryphon, Monstrous Crow and Jabberwocky are comparatively harmless antagonists compared to all the querulous logicians and niggling philosophers of meaning she meets on her travels, all ready to pounce like vultures on any phrase or idiom, however 'normal', that can be wrested into the discomforting abnormality of 'nonsense'. The author of the Alice books was an Oxford logician, and at every turn of her looking-glass quest, Alice's conversations bring her into close encounters not only with figures from games of cards and chess like the Queen of Hearts and the White Knight, or from the traditional repertoire of nursery rhymes like Humpty Dumpty and the Unicorn, but with the persistent puzzles, paradoxes and riddles which haunt the apparently stable mirror theories of language which have dominated the philosophy of the West.¹⁵

The question of the meaning of nonsense haunts Alice and many of her interlocutors. "It's really dreadful", Alice reflects at one point, "the way all the creatures argue. It's enough to drive one crazy!"¹⁶ Many of these maddening arguments concern the questions of meaning, identity, names, logic and the philosophy of language which have vexed philosophers since Plato. The seven-year-old Alice is caught up in a series of bad-tempered dialectical duets which call in question or put into play the conceptual foundations of her world. It is no wonder that the relation between children, jokes and meaning raised by the Red Queen should haunt readers of Lewis Carroll's story.

2: *Biographical*

One familiar – and familiarizing – way of re-framing the riddle of the Alice books is biographical, to look to the life of the author for clues