



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 34
Number 1

Article 11

10-15-2015

Notes

Seona Ford

Joe R. Christopher

Tarleton State University, Stephenville, TX

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ford, Seona and Christopher, Joe R. (2015) "Notes," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 34: No. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol34/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Online MidSummer Seminar 2025
More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy
August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

<https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm>



Notes

Abstract

An obituary of long-time Mythlore advisory board member and Sayers scholar Barbara Reynolds, who was closely associated with Dorothy L. Sayers. An anniversary appreciation of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; attempts to analyze its literary staying power.

Additional Keywords

Barbara Reynolds; Dorothy Sayers; Alice in Wonderland

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

NOTES

IN MEMORIAM: BARBARA REYNOLDS

SEONA FORD

EVERYBODY BARBARA REYNOLDS—ALWAYS KNOWN AS BARBARA—was born in Bristol in 1914. Her father Alfred was a composer for the theatre and later musical director of The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith in London. Barbara's mother was a singer, Barbara Florac, who had been in the cast of a production directed by Alfred. Their marriage foundered soon after their daughter's birth, however, and at the age of seven she was taken by her mother to live in Detroit. Just as impulsively, she was brought back to Britain seven years later. From those early years Barbara retained an American openness and "can-do" approach to life.

After St Paul's Girls School in London, she read French and Italian at University College, also in London. Her early jobs including teaching Italian to Richard Tauber's wife so that she could help the singer prepare for parts, and working as a translator for the London correspondent of a French newspaper. While the British press kept the public in ignorance of the imminent Abdication crisis, Reynolds was relaying the latest doings of Mrs. Simpson to Paris.

In 1937, she was appointed assistant lecturer in Italian at the London School of Economics. When this was evacuated to Cambridge at the start of the war, she went with it. She had recently married Lewis Thorpe, later professor of French at the University of Nottingham and an expert in Arthurian legend. They had a son, Adrian, who is a former diplomat, and a daughter, Kerstin, now a retired headmistress.

It was while Barbara Reynolds was working in Cambridge, having gained a post there in 1940, that a most significant person entered her life, almost by chance. Reynolds had spotted an announcement of Dorothy L. Sayers's forthcoming translation (of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) for Penguin on the back of her paperback copy of *The Odyssey*. Although other academics were snifty about Sayers's qualifications for the task, Reynolds invited her to lecture at a summer school in Cambridge that she was organizing to revive Italian studies after the war. Sayers at that time was still best known for her crime fiction and the creation of the aristocratic sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey. By 1948, when they met, Sayers had stopped writing the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries

which had made her name during the inter-war years. Instead she gave freer rein to her interest in spiritual matters and, having previously read languages at Oxford, taught herself medieval Italian to study Dante.

Sayers's dazzling ideas and sheer vigor proved a revelation to the younger woman, and a deep fellow feeling was at once established between them—they even shared the same birthday. As a married woman with children, Reynolds had faced a struggle against the prejudice that she should not have a career, and she perhaps took Sayers as her model in showing what women could achieve. In time, the influence of Sayers's writings on faith even brought Reynolds back within the fold of the Church of England. When she was baptized as an adult, the writer stood godmother to her. Such was the impact of Sayers's intellect and personality on her that Reynolds subsequently made both the author and Dante the inspiration of her life's work.

Dorothy L. Sayers is still best remembered for her detective novels, but she considered her finest achievement to have been her translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Sayers published her renditions of *Hell* and *Purgatory* in 1949 and 1955 respectively, but when she died unexpectedly aged 64 in 1957, the final 13 cantos of *Paradise* remained to be done. By chance, according to Dante's original biographer Giovanni Boccaccio (the author of *The Decameron*), these were the same cantos which the writer's sons could not at first find after his death and whose hiding place was revealed to one of them by Dante in a dream.

E.V. Rieu, the founding editor of Penguin Classics, asked Barbara Reynolds to see the final volume through to the press. This was no simple task, involving as it did the writing of all the explanatory footnotes as well as translating about a third of the text. (At the same time, Reynolds was also supervising another vast linguistic project as general editor of the *Cambridge Italian Dictionary*, the first for half a century. Reynolds led a large team of specialists in different spheres of language, coordinating entries on cards stacked in an ever-growing number of shoe boxes. The first volume, Italian-English, appeared after fourteen years, and English-Italian another two decades later. Her efforts were rewarded by its being hailed as authoritative, both in Britain and Italy, and in 1978 she was appointed a *Cavaliere* by the republic.)

In translating Dante, Sayers had followed his *terza rima* scheme, in which the sound of the last word of the middle line of each tercet provides the rhyme for the first and last lines of the next. This was trickier to emulate in English than in the musicality of Italian, but Reynolds had a talent for versifying and the jointly-realized *Divine Comedy* was finally completed in 1962. It has proved enduringly popular with a general readership and is still in print.

In the early 1970s, protests against the local council's plans to demolish Sayers's former home at Witham, Essex, led to the founding of the Dorothy L Sayers Society. The suggestion came from the actor Ian Carmichael, who was first to portray Wimsey on television.

From its early days, as chairman until 1994, and then as president of the society until her death, Reynolds was its moving force. Although she tolerated enthusiasm for the Wimsey novels, her aim was to broaden appreciation and study of the entire canon of Sayers's work. To this end she edited, between 1995 and 2002, five volumes of the writer's letters, which shed light on the conception of her books.

She also wrote a penetrating biography, *Dorothy L Sayers: Her Life and Soul* (1993). Reynolds's other books included *The Passionate Intellect* (1989), about Sayers's encounter with Dante. Her own work on the *Divine Comedy* culminated in *Dante: The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man*. Published in 2006, when she was ninety-two, it became something of a best-seller, introducing as she had hoped a wider readership to the vision of the father of the Italian language, the 750th anniversary of whose birth is currently being celebrated.

In 1963, she went as Reader in Italian Studies and warden of a hall of residence to the University of Nottingham, where her husband was. She retired shortly after his death in 1977. In 1982, she married Kenneth Imeson, a former headmaster of Nottingham High School. He died in 1994.

Her other publications included a work on Manzoni's contribution to forging the Italian language from its many dialects, as well as translations for Penguin of Dante's *La vita nuova* and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

She was also managing editor for 25 years of *Seven*, a literary review dedicated to the work of the seven British Christian intellectuals whose papers are held at Wheaton College, Illinois. They include C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, G.K. Chesterton and Sayers herself. She was a member of the editorial advisory board of *Mythlore*, the scholarly journal of the Mythopoeic Society, from 2000 until her death.

Barbara Reynolds remained alert and active into old age. "I certainly didn't expect to make it to 100-years-old," she said at the time of her birthday, "and never thought so many people would still remember me."

SEONA FORD is the Chair of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society.



ALICE'S [SUCCESSFUL] ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND: AN APPRECIATION OF ITS ONE HUNDRED FIFTY YEARS

JOE R. CHRISTOPHER

ONE HUNDRED FIFTY YEARS AGO, IN 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published—in fact, it was published twice. And it has not been out of print since. A very successful fantasy novel or children's fiction, whichever term one prefers. Or an important first example of nonsense fiction or, following Northrop Frye, a good example of the type of fiction he calls an anatomy. All of this is just to say that the book in several ways is worth celebrating.

However, it is a difficult book to laud on this anniversary for two reasons. First, because some readers mix, in their memories, episodes of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with episodes from its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*. Indeed, most stage and film versions of the books deliberately combine them—and so spread the confusion. Second and more importantly, I find some difficulty in deciding how much knowledge about the background of the book will be new to any reader—especially one in the Mythopoeic Society. Some readers probably will be members of the Lewis Carroll Society (established in Great Britain) and/or of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America; others' interests will lie elsewhere, although they have no doubt read the books.

Let me begin most mundanely with a history of how *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* came about. "Lewis Carroll" (the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) began his book as a tale told to a small group of children, rather as Tolkien began *The Hobbit* as a story written and read to his own children. Not all children's books begin as being presented in process to children—C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* famously did not—but the test of holding children's attention may well be helpful in the writing progress.

In the case of *Alice's Adventures*, it began as an impromptu tale told while three Liddell sisters, Lewis Carroll, and the Reverend Robinson Duckworth rowed down the Isis River from Oxford, England, to hold a picnic. Duckworth no doubt was there as a chaperon, since the middle-class or upper-class Victorians did not usually allow their daughters to go off alone with a single gentleman. In this case, Carroll was improvising on the name of the middle girl, Alice. The date was the 4th of July, 1862. Obviously, since this was in England, the 4th of July, as such, had no significance for the picnic. Furthermore, on the 6th of August, Carroll and the three girls and a friend of his, Augustus Vernon Harcourt, went rowing again; Carroll noted in his diary that he had to go on with what he called his "interminable fairy-tale of *Alice's Adventures*" (qtd. Woolf 159). Alice had asked him to write out the story of her adventures on the first occasion, and he had started writing out a list of the

episodes on the next day, while he was in a train going to London. Who knows, there may have been other occasions during July when episodes were told.

As is well known—at least to anyone that looks up the book title in the Wikipedia—some echoes of the experience appear in the book. In Chapter 3, when a group of characters meet Alice, having got out of the pool of her tears, they are made up of a Duck, for Duckworth; a Dodo, for Dodgson; a Lory, for Lorina, the oldest girl; and an Eaglet, for Edith, the youngest. The lorry is a type of parrot, and the dodo, of course, is an extinct, flightless bird, something like a chicken with a large bill. A stuffed dodo was in a museum at Oxford, and no doubt the girls had seen it there. Two other allusions to the girls appear later. At the first of the third chapter, a quarrel between the Lory and Alice has occurred, in which the Lory has said that she is older than Alice and so must know better. It sounds as if there might be a history behind it, for, when this story was told, Lorina Charlotte was 13, Alice Pleasance was 10, and Edith Mary was 8. The third reference in the book is in the seventh chapter, when the Dormouse refers to the three sisters who lived in a well, giving their names as Elsie (LC), Lacie (an anagram for Alice), and Tillie (a shortening of Matilda, Edith's nickname). And of course the sisters appear with Latin names in the book's prefatory poem about the creation of the oral tales.

What happened after this point is complicated. On 13 November 1862 Carroll began writing what first became *Alice's Adventures under Ground*. But on 27 June 1863, Lewis Carroll and the Liddells suddenly stopped most of their close contacts. One biographer, in 2010, makes a good case that Lorina, when she was fourteen, decided she was in love with Carroll, wanting to marry him, and her mother was stopping that situation, for Carroll did not have the position or the money to be Lorina's suitor. That biographer assumed the marital desire was one-sided, all on Lorina's part (Woolf 162-68). Probably so. Carroll finished the manuscript (including his own illustrations) and presented *Alice's Adventures under Ground* to Alice in November 1864, as an early Christmas present; the Liddells kept it out, to be read by guests to their home. (A reproduction of the manuscript was published in 1886.) Carroll had decided already to revise and expand his story for publication. He signed a contract with John Tenniel, a political cartoonist, to illustrate the book in April 1864, and he reached an agreement with Macmillan to print and distribute his book for a payment and a percentage of the sales. Obviously, if the book had been a failure, it would now be considered just another forgotten title produced by self-publishing, but the agreement with Macmillan was fairly common at the time.

At this point comes the two printings in 1865. The first was by Clarendon Press, 2000 copies by the end of June. John Tenniel complained that

the printing of the pictures was unsatisfactory; Carroll accepted Tenniel's decision. Most of the books were removed from their covers and were sent to the United States, to be rebound and sold by D. Appleton—obviously Carroll did not think the Americans would mind bad reproductions of the pictures. (Other copies of the first printing were given to children's hospitals in Britain.) Then Carroll had his book printed again, this time McMillan entrusting it to Clay's; this printing was successful. I had wondered in the past what Tenniel was objecting to, but on the 26th of June, this year, my wife and I went to see the *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* exhibit at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. Two copies of *Alice's Adventures* were displayed, side by side, one from the Clarendon printing and one from Clay's. Both had the same page-sized illustration and the same facing page of text. The illustration in the earlier printing was decidedly lighter, not *quite* to the point of vanishing, while the print of the text on its opposing page was a standard darkness for print. Of course, Clay's printing had the picture matching the darkness of the text.

One result of the way the story was first told is that the plot in the book is decidedly episodic. Take the first chapter: (1) Alice's boredom and the appearance of the White Rabbit; (2) Alice's lengthy fall after entering the large rabbit hole; (3) Alice's chase of the White Rabbit into a long hall with ("suddenly") a small table with a key on it; then she discovers the small door; then the bottle with "DRINK ME" on the table; then the glass box with a cake and "EAT ME" under the table. (The drinking and eating produce changes in size, marked by Carroll with rows of asterisks.) Sometimes the transitions between episodes are completely arbitrary. At the end of the seventh chapter, Alice walks away from the mad tea-party into a wood; then she sees a door in a tree, decides to enter, and finds herself in the garden she had been seeking. In the latter part of the ninth chapter, the Queen of Hearts, who has been quarrelsome at the croquet game and ordering people's heads be cut off, suddenly asks Alice if she has met the Mock Turtle—and takes her to the Gryphon, with instructions for it to take Alice to meet the Mock Turtle.

Since the adventures are a dream, arbitrariness of content may be expected—unless one is a psychiatrist. In the book, the implied going to sleep by Alice is just before the appearance of the White Rabbit at the first and Alice's awakening is described near the end of the last chapter. In contrast, Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, while it ends with a waking up, starts with the dreamer already asleep. Another contrast is the matter of didacticism. Lewis obviously is presenting a semi-Dantean work with a clear Christian emphasis. Carroll was noted at the time as presenting a work without the usual Victorian moral emphases. In fact, he parodies the giving of morals in the Duchess in Chapter 9. "Every thing's got a moral, if only you can find it," she tells Alice. When Alice comments about the croquet game, that it is "going on rather

better now," the Duchess replies, "'Tis so, [...] and the moral of that is—'Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!' (More likely, fear of the Queen ordering one's head cut off has the game going smoothly.) In this case, Carroll does not let the absurdity of the applied moral stand by itself; he adds: "'Somebody said,' Alice whispered, 'that it's done by everybody minding their own business!'" (Alice is thinking of what the Duchess said back in the sixth chapter, "'If everybody minded their own business,' the Duchess said in a hoarse growl, 'the world would go round a deal faster than it does.'")

Carroll does provide some structure to his book—it is not purely unrelated episodes. One can trace some continuing characters, for example. The White Rabbit is the most obvious instance. In the first chapter, Alice sees him in his waistcoat and with his a pocket watch; Tenniel, in his drawing, provides him with a vest and a cane also. He has two speeches, one in the English countryside and the other in a hall at the bottom of the "rabbit hole"; in both he is worried about being late. In the second chapter, he is worried about the Duchess's reaction if he is late; in the fourth, he is looking for his gloves and his fan and, later, involved in the effort to drive the giant-sized Alice out of his house. In the eighth chapter he is one of the guests at the Queen of Heart's croquet party, possibly having come with the Duchess, although that is not clear. And in the eleventh and twelfth chapters he appears as the court's trumpeter and the judge's legal adviser in the trial of the Knave of Hearts.

Likewise, one can trace some aspects of a plot. In the first chapter, Alice sees a garden—"those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains"—through a small door, but she cannot manage to reach it. (Saying the passage-way from the door to the garden is "not much larger than a rat-hole" may be accurate, but it seems to have negative connotations, or so one would think.) In the fourth chapter, after Alice escapes from the crowd outside the White Rabbit's house, she makes two resolutions: "The first thing I've got to do [...] is grow to my right size again; and the second thing is to find my way into that lovely garden. I think that will be the best plan." After her meeting with the caterpillar in the fifth chapter, she can control her size, with help of nibbling the two sides of the mushroom, and after the episodes of the Duchess and her baby and of the mad tea-party, she accidentally finds the door in the tree that leads her back to the entrance to the garden. The seventh chapter concludes, "and *then*—she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flower-beds and the cool fountains." Of course, the beautiful garden turns out, in the next chapter, to be (or at least to adjoin) the Queen of Heart's Croquet Ground. Carroll seems to undercut the beauty seen from a distance by showing the three gardeners painting white roses red; the beauty turns out to be artificial, in that case; of course, a garden needs upkeep by one or more

gardeners—but that does not normally extend to painting flowers. The “ridges and furrows” of the actual croquet-ground also undercuts—so to speak—the beauty of the garden. But Alice does not stop to consider the garden after her first entrance—I can only suppose, once achieved, the garden is not a lasting delight, at least in this Wonderland. The experience of the garden is succeeded by the game of croquet, the meeting with the Mock Turtle, and the trial of the Knave of Hearts.

So much for plot in the story. If one considers the main structure is episodic, not plot driven, then the primary experience of the reading of the book is the meeting with a series of different characters. Not realistic, rounded characters, such as one would expect in a novel, but characters based on (in a sixteenth-century term) humors. We would say, type characters. It is here when Northrop Frye’s insistence on there being four different types of fiction is useful. The realistic novel is not all there is. *Alice’s Adventures* belongs in a group with Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, some novels by Aldous Huxley, and Plato’s dialogues. Sometimes satirical, sometimes not, this type of fiction is driven by ideas, not by characterization and realistic settings. Note the Mad Hatter’s discussion of time in Ch. 7 and the discussion of schooling by the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle in Ch. 9, for clear examples of ideaphoria—if hardly of a philosophic kind.

The Queen of Hearts, with her constant shouting and orders to behead people, is a type. She is consistent both at croquet and in the final court-room episode. Even when Carroll uses her as a transition to Alice’s meeting with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, she ends by going off to see about some executions. The White Rabbit has perhaps two aspects to his character—worried about time and observant of rules—when he gives Bill the Lizard instructions about getting Alice out of his house and when he gives the King of Hearts instructions about how to run a trial, he is following class or legal rules. *Perhaps* his checking his watch at the first of the book is just another example of observing rules—the social rules of getting things done on time.

The Duchess seems also to have two aspects to her character, but those are noted by Alice herself. She thinks that perhaps when she visited the Duchess (in Chapter 6) she was influenced by the pepper in the cooking and in the air—certainly the Duchess is abrupt, insults Alice, and mistreats the baby she is holding. When they meet at the croquet-game (Ch. 9), the Duchess is agreeable to anything Alice says, including mustard being a mineral.

Related to this discussion of characterization is one curiosity. In the whole book, Alice only calls one character that she meets her friend. That is the Cheshire Cat. The Cat, of course, was at the Duchess’s home early on, and then it appeared to Alice afterwards in the woods (both Ch. 6). When the Cat’s head appears at the croquet-game, Alice is glad to see it, thinking now she will have

someone to talk to; when she introduces the Cat to the King of Hearts, Alice says, "It's a friend of mine—a Cheshire-Cat [...]: allow me to introduce it." Perhaps the Cheshire-Cat's indirect relationship to Wonderland—it does not sneeze from the pepper in the Duchess's home—is what causes Alice to be able to claim friendship.

Critics, not finding much to say about some standard fictional topics, have looked for themes in the book. I see by the Wikipedia listing for the book that they have discussed such things as eating and drinking, perhaps (I suggest) as a parody of children constantly being told to eat their meals so they will grow up healthy—here it makes Alice either to grow up or down. This, combined with the Liddell children going on picnics or getting other treats, may explain in part Carroll's emphasis. Critics have also suggested that there are mathematical passages in the book reflecting Carroll's professional life as a math teacher at Christ Church College, Oxford. For example, in the second chapter, when Alice is worrying about who she is, she tries to work some simple arithmetic mentally: "Let me see: four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is—oh dear! I shall never get to twenty at that rate!" A.L. Taylor, in *The White Knight: A Study in C.L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)* (1952), first worked out the sequence: "Carroll was counting each calculation on a different base [extending it by 3 in each case]. Therefore, 4×5 equals 12 on base 18; $4 \times 6 = 13$ on base 21; and so on. It goes all the way up to $4 \times 12 = 19$ (on base 39). And sure enough, Alice never does get to 20 by continuing this way, because $4 \times 13 = 20$ does not work on base 42" (Woolf 57). Perhaps hidden mathematics does not really amount to a theme, but it seems appropriate for the type of fiction concerned.

I want to mention a theme or two not included in the Wikipedia account. First, about death. It strikes me surprising how many references there are in the book to someone dying. Perhaps the high infant mortality rate in the Victorian age had something to do with it. For example, in the first chapter, when Alice is falling down the rabbit hole, she says to herself, "After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs! [...] Why, I wouldn't say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house!" After this appears a parenthetical remark by the narrator, "(Which was very likely true.)" This comment establishes the narrator as someone more sophisticated than the child protagonist, given to irony in saying something the younger reader will accept as merely a reinforcement of Alice's statement but suggesting to the older child reader and the adult that Alice, after a fall from the top of the house, would not be able to say anything—she would be, at least, unconscious and, more probably, dead. The Art of the Parenthesis, one might call it. (I count ten other parentheses in the first chapter, although they are not as understated as this one.)

Other references to death include Alice's fear of shrinking away altogether (Ch. 2), the verse about the crocodile eating the little fish (Ch. 2), Alice's discussion with the mouse about her cat's ability to catch mice (Ch. 2), the poem about the Fury condemning the Mouse to death (Ch. 3), and Alice's comment about her cat's eating of birds (Ch. 3)—and all of those are in the first three chapters; one has not come to such things as the Mad Hatter's reference to murdering time or the Queen of Heart's tendency to shout "Off with his head!" Even Alice turns callous at one point. When the White Rabbit, at the croquet game, tells her that the Duchess is under sentence of execution, Alice comments that she does *not* "think it's at all a pity" (Ch. 8). What is the reason for this emphasis in the book? Whatever might have been the personal reason for it, if any, artistically it sets up a contrast to the vitality of Alice. She becomes even more assertive as the book goes along: she grabs the White Rabbit and kicks Bill the lizard in Ch. 4; when she arrives at the Duchess's home, she opens the door and goes in without invitation (Ch. 6); she joins the mad tea-party without invitation and leaves it upon being insulted (Ch. 7); she interrupts the trial of the Knave of Hearts with her comments (Chs. 11-12); and she ends the dream by exclaiming, "Who cares for *you*? [...] You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (Ch.12).

Another theme or motif in the book is that of nonsense. I note three uses of the word *nonsense* in the book, and I may well have missed some. When Alice is growing in size, she imagines sending presents to her feet and then exclaims, "Oh dear, what nonsense I'm talking!" (Ch. 2); when Alice attempts to recite "'Tis the voice of the sluggard," the Mock Turtle comments that the result "sounds like uncommon nonsense" (Ch. 10); and, during the trial scene, Alice tells the dormouse "Don't talk nonsense" when he complains of her growing (Ch. 11). These uses do not prove anything by themselves, of course, but they suggest a partial support for the treatment of the story as a nonsense fiction. In this context, the episodic nature of the narrative is appropriate. Alice's difficulty over such things as the Dormouse's account of the three girls who lived in a treacle well, drawing pictures of treacle and muchness, may be an example of rationality confused by nonsense (Ch. 7). May I complicate this episode further? I feel certain that for Alice Liddell and her sisters, the word *treacle* would have meant what is normally in the United States meant by *molasses*. But if one checks a good desk dictionary, one will discover that treacle may also refer to a medicinal compound for curing poisonous bites or poison generally—and an obsolete meaning of a "sovereign remedy," that is, something which can cure any problem. When the dormouse says the girls lived on treacle and Alice says they would have been ill, he says "they were" ill, "*very* ill." She means that the girls could not have lived just on a diet of

molasses, but his reply—whether or not Carroll knew it—pushes the nonsense a paradox further: the girls, living on a remedy for all illnesses, are still very ill.

Perhaps this paragraph on nonsense, in addition to being on a theme of the book, may also be considered one example of the techniques of humor in the book. Let me briefly indicate some other techniques, with one example each.

First, puns. Of course, one pun is pointed out, by the King of Hearts, on the word *fits*, whereupon the creatures in the court room laugh (Ch. 20); but we want an example that is not pointed out. A simple illustration is when the Mock Turtle says that the Classics master at the school which he and the Gryphon attended taught Laughing and Grief (Ch. 9). In the nineteenth century, schools for boys in Britain still taught the classical languages—so the two subjects were Latin and Greek. Carroll's uses of two opposite emotions in *laughing* and *grief* makes for a relationship between the two puns simply as emotions, that ties the terms as closely as do *Latin* and *Greek* as two languages.

Second, parodies. The obvious thing to do is to point to the poems within the fiction: seven of the nine are parodies of actual English poems. Presumably, the Liddell girls had heard the didactic poems read to them. But one of the poems is known, from Carroll's diaries, to be tied especially to them and him; this is the Mock Turtle's song, titled "Turtle Soup"; it begins

Beautiful Soup, so rich and green,
Waiting in a hot tureen!
Who for such dainties, would not stoop?
Soup of the evening, beautiful Soup!

Thus the Mock Turtle. Earlier Carroll had heard the Liddell children sing "Star of the Evening," with words and melody by James M. Sayles (1855). It begins:

Beautiful star in Heaven so bright,
Softly falls thy silv'ry light,
As thou movest from earth afar,
Star of the evening, Beautiful Star. (Ch. 10)

So Carroll turns a Victorian popular song about how nature elevates the soul into a song about soup. Using a term from science-fiction fandom, Lewis Carroll is a filk-song writer.

Another device is what may be called that of "black is white," involving various types of reversals. At times, this may become a playing with paradoxes, but not in the illustration I will use. Perhaps I have not found the proper term for what I have in mind, but I offer it for others to consider. Certainly my illustration is another one of the metamorphoses in the book,

perhaps related to Alice's changes in size. At any rate, let us consider the episode when the Duchess's baby becomes a pig. Alice's acceptance of the baby's transformation is typical:

So she set the little creature down, and felt quite relieved to see it trot away quietly into the wood. "If it had grown up," she said to herself, "it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig, I think." And she began thinking over other children she knew, who might do very well as pigs [...] (Ch. 6)

Ugly child, handsome pig is what I mean by black is white. Perhaps it is a paradox, after all.

A final technique for humor is the mis-use of logic. Since Carroll, toward the end of his career as Dodgson, became very much interested in syllogistic reasoning, it is not surprising to find this early emphasis on logic, even if here deliberately misapplied. For example, the Cheshire Cat's assertion that all are mad in Wonderland is backed up with two exemplary cases: the cat's own instance and Alice's. The former is built of the assumption that dogs are sane and the cat is, by comparison, insane. The latter is brief enough to quote here:

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
"You must be, said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."
Alice didn't think that proved it at all [...]. (Ch. 6)

Two cases of support is a very short form of induction.

An example of deduction may also be offered. At one point when Alice is extremely tall from a bite of mushroom, her neck becomes flexible (rather like Plastic Man in Jack Cole's comic books); she is maneuvering her head back down below a tree when she is met by a mother Pigeon, nesting in the tree top.

"Serpent!" screamed the Pigeon.
"I'm not a serpent!" said Alice indignantly. "Let me alone!" (Ch. 5)

As their discussion continues, Alice asserts that she is a little girl.

"A likely story indeed!" said the Pigeon, in a tone of the deepest contempt. "I've seen a good many little girls in my time, but never *one* with such a neck as that! No, no! You're a serpent; and there's no use in denying it. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!"

"I *have* tasted eggs, certainly," said Alice, who was a very truthful child; "but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpent do, you know."

"I don't believe it," said the Pigeon; "but if they do, why, then they're a kind of serpent: that's all I can say."

As one can see, this is clearly syllogistic reasoning. The Pigeon's position can be drawn up this way:

MAJOR PREMISE: Only serpents eat eggs.

MINOR PREMISE: But all girls eat eggs.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, all girls are serpents.

The form is correct, but the major and the minor premises are not factual. First, the major. A number of animals besides serpents eat eggs. In America, weasels and skunks, for example. No doubt there are like animals in Britain. The minor premise is also false. Surely there are a few girls who are raised without having eggs to eat. This second premise is based on Alice's statement, so one has to suspect that her middle-class background distorts her knowledge. But the implied syllogism in the Pigeon's argument is nevertheless a delightful misuse of logic.

No doubt some other person would classify Carroll's devices for humor somewhat differently in part, but this listing at least suggests that there are a variety of approaches. What I would like to conclude with, however, is not humor, but the rather sentimental close to the book. After Alice has awakened and told her dream to her older sister—a sister obviously older than Lorina was to the real Alice—then the sister thinks of Wonderland and even offers an explanation of some of the noises of the real world that had worked their way into Alice's dream. But the last paragraph of the book makes a different point:

Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her ripper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood [...].
(Ch. 12)

The passage goes on, to imagine her telling fairy-tales to children, but Alice Liddell herself married a wealthy cricketer and became a society hostess; she is reported as having been very rigid with her servants. Whether she ever told fairy tales to her three sons is unknown. But the words of the epilogue—saying "how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago"—may not have been true for Alice Liddell, but "the

dream of Wonderland of long ago"—of 150 years ago—has been told to or read by children and adults—or presented on screens for the viewing by them—in the years since its first publication. This fantasy has been the delight of many readers, some reading it time and again. Insofar as it is a work of nonsense, its appeal is difficult to analyze, but its continued popularity speaks for itself. What is the value of nonsense? It does not teach the *tao* in the Confucian or Lewisian terms. As the story abundantly indicates, it does not lead to escape from death (even if the King of Hearts pardons those his wife has condemned at the croquet game). Unless one is a Freudian psychoanalyst, it does not explore the sexual life. But it continues to give pleasure and to be read. Perhaps that is the final paradox.

WORKS CITED

- "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*." *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice's-Adventures-in-Wonderland>. 15 Sept. 2015.
- Carroll, Lewis (pseud. of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. 1865.
- Woolf, Jenny. *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man Who Created Alice in Wonderland*. Foreword by Edward Wakeling. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011. [First published in Britain in 2010.]

