Translating the “Untranslatable”


In a letter dated 24 October 1866, Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, wrote to his publisher Macmillan about concerns raised by members of his Oxford circle regarding the novel Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865). The extensive use of puns and other language games, cultural references and parodies of Victorian poetry, together with Carroll’s signature nonsense, led his friends to describe Alice as “untranslatable”. Fortunately, translators did not think so. The first translations (into German and French) appeared as early as 1869 and the novel has since become one of the most translated works in the English language.

Today, 150 years after its initial publication, Carroll’s perennial classic is available in 174 languages (including extinct languages such as Latin, and invented ones such as Esperanto and Blissymbols) and 7,600 editions, all of which have been listed in the three volumes that make up the impressive reference work entitled Alice in a World of Wonderlands: Translations of Lewis Carroll’s Masterpiece. Published by Oak Knoll Press (with the support of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America), Alice in a World of Wonderlands was first conceived as a catalogue for the exhibition of the same name, organised by the Grolier Club in celebration of the novel’s sesquicentennial. Building on the theoretical and methodological foundations set out in Warren Weaver’s pioneering study Alice in Many Tongues (1964), the project quickly outgrew the confines of an exhibition catalogue and over six years (2009–2015) turned into “the most extensive analysis ever undertaken examining one English language novel in so many other languages” (Vol. 1: 21).

Volume One opens with a note and introduction by the general editor, Jon A. Lindseth, and a foreword by the eminent linguist David Crystal, dedicated to the Victorian fascination with language and different forms of language play. The assembled preliminary essays explore a diverse assortment of topics, ranging from the lives of Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell (both essays are by Morton N. Cohen, who also writes about the status of the Alice books as classics of English literature) and Carrollian comics (Byron W. Sewell & Mark Burstein) to the reception and status of Disney’s Alice in Wonderland (1951) around the globe (Matt Crandall). Edward Wakeling and Selwyn Goodacre both write about translations of Alice – during and after Carroll’s lifetime, respectively – while Michael F. Suarez discusses the significance of Alice in a World of Wonderlands in the context of global bibliography. In addition to an excerpt from Weaver’s Alice in Many Tongues, the essay section also includes Emer O’Sullivan’s critical appraisal of that same book. While, as Lindseth notes in the introduction, illustrations of Alice translations certainly merit a
separate volume, *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* provides a possible basis for that volume in the form of four essays: Lindseth and Stephanie Lovett, President of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America, provide an overview of *Alice* illustrations, Nilce M. Pereira discusses illustrations as a form of translation, and Kiera Vaclavik examines the influence of *Alice* on fashion. Adriana Peliano looks beyond the “classic” *Alice* illustrations by John Tenniel and introduces a number of artists from around the world who have “translated” Carroll’s words into pictures.

The central part of Volume One encompasses 164 essays devoted to translations of *Alice* into many different languages. It should be noted that the term “translations” is used quite broadly, and the book considers not only *Alice* in a number of global languages, but also in several English dialects (Appalachian, Cockney, Cornish-English, Middle English, Old English, Scouse and Sussex) and alphabets (alphagram, Braille, shorthand, ciphers and codes, etc.). Despite inevitable differences in length, tone and depth of analysis, the texts typically provide basic information about the target language and culture, comments on specific challenges faced by translators, and explanations of their choices. The volume also includes a 15-page selection of covers of *Alice* translations, seventeen appendices (particularly notable among these is the list of translation articles dealing with *Alice*), a list of Lewis Carroll Societies around the world, and notes on the 251 contributors who participated in this immense undertaking.

Weaver, to whose memory the book is dedicated, is repeatedly cited as the spiritus rector behind this monumental project, and it is his technique of back-translation that is used in Volume Two (prefaced by general editor Lindseth and technical editor Alan Tannenbaum) to give readers some sense of what it is like to read *Alice* in different languages. To this end, contributors were asked to find a previously assigned passage of text (inherited from Weaver) in the first and a recent translation (provided, of course, the novel has been translated into a given language more than once!) of *Alice* in a particular language and translate it back into English. The assigned text – eight pages from the “Mad Tea-Party” chapter, beginning with the “Twinkle, twinkle little bat” poem and ending with the Dormouse being shoved into a teapot by the Mad Hatter and the March Hare – was chosen because it showcases some of the major challenges Carroll’s playful prose poses for translators, such as parodies of poems which are virtually unknown to readers outside Britain, made-up names, wordplay and references to British/Victorian culture and customs. Four tables found at the end of Volume Two focus on some of these problematic parts, specifically the “Twinkle, twinkle little bat” poem, the “milk-jug” phrase, words beginning with “m” mentioned in the Dormouse’s story of the treacle well (mouse-traps, the moon, memory, muchness), and characters’ names. Each translation is accompanied by copious footnotes explaining and contextualising translators’ choices with reference to the target language and culture.

Coupled with the essays on translations found in Volume One, the back-translations aptly illustrate the various challenges faced by translators, especially when they are dealing with a book that is so immersed in a particular time and place. Some translators opt to retain the Victorian quality of *Alice*, providing (more or less) literal translations of parodic poems and adding explanations of British customs in footnotes. Others attempt to make the novel more accessible to target audiences by “domesticating” it, i.e. by substituting references to
British/Victorian culture and specificities of the English language with those pertaining to
the target culture/language. The German translation, for instance, inserts a parody of the
popular Christmas carol “O Tannenbaum” (O, Christmas tree) in place of “Twinkle, twinkle
little bat” (a parody of the nursery rhyme by Jane Taylor “Twinkle, twinkle little star”),
while the Japanese text omits Alice’s quarrel with the Mad Hatter because the mores of that
particular culture deem it unacceptable for a child to defy his/her elders. In their attempt to
bring Alice/Alice closer to Croatian readers, the analysed translations avoid references to
the story’s British setting, or to English as the heroine’s mother tongue. Names and animal
species are particularly interesting in this respect: depending on the language, various
translations replace the Dormouse with a marmot, bushbaby, koala or hamster, while the
March Hare becomes the April Fool Hare, Pentecostal Hare, and even the Easter Bunny.

Volume Three consists of bibliographical checklists of the different editions of Alice’s
Adventures in Wonderland (more than 7,600 editions in 174 languages) and Through the
Looking-Glass (more than 1,500 editions in 65 languages). The checklists are framed by an
introduction by Jon Lindseth and former President of the Lewis Carroll Society of North
America and avid Alice collector Joel Birenbaum, a list of abbreviations of the novels’
library holdings, and a highly useful alphabetical list of Alice illustrators from around the
world.

Due to its impressive scope and depth, a single review cannot possibly do justice to
this remarkable and extremely significant publication. The editors and contributors are to be
congratulated on their immense efforts, and the final result of their hard work deserves the
highest of praises. Unfortunately, the dynamic nature of the subject of this thorough study –
i.e. the fact that new translations of Alice are constantly being published – implies that it is
destined to (soon) lose its status as the authoritative reference. However, this by no means
diminishes the significance of this ambitious undertaking; on the contrary, Alice in a World
of Wonderlands is an outstanding achievement that will remain relevant and useful even
after it (inevitably) ceases to be definitive. Providing, in the words of Michael F. Suarez
(“Alice and Global Bibliography”, Volume One), “a model for translational study in the
humanities” (45), this invaluable contribution to translation, literary and cultural studies,
as well as linguistics, stands out within the plethora of exhibitions, symposia, theatrical
productions, concerts, publications and lectures as perhaps the most significant component
of Alice’s 150th jubilee.

Nada Kujundžić

The Many Faces of Alice

Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens. 2013. Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in
Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History. Farnham:

In the fourth volume in Ashgate’s series “Studies in Publishing History”, Zoe Jaques,
Research Fellow at Anglia Ruskin University, and Eugene Giddens, Director of Research
in Arts, Law, and Social Sciences at the same university, provide an overview of the initial
publication of Lewis Carroll’s enduring novels Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865)
and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), and their afterlives and transformations in various textual and non-textual media. The highly informative and accessible *Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History* brings together a wide range of cultural, historical, social, and biographical elements to delineate the 150-year publishing history of the two *Alice* novels, which stretches from their “pre-history” to contemporary adaptations and retellings. Situated within the theoretical and methodological framework of sociology of the text, this well-researched study draws on a variety of sources: from Carroll’s letters and diaries to newspaper notices, sales reports and book reviews.

Jaques and Giddens efficiently build on previous research, while simultaneously identifying its blind spots and bringing important but often neglected topics to the forefront, such as the *Nursery Alice*, editions of *Alice* illustrated by artists other than John Tenniel (generally considered to be the “definitive” illustrator of Carroll’s work) and those published in the US (often dismissed as piracies). The book thus offers numerous novel insights into the field of Carroll studies, and challenges many popular misconceptions about the (in)famous author and his work. The discussion is organised in five chapters, framed by an introduction, index and bibliography (which includes a useful list of *Alice* editions and adaptations).

Chapter one, “The origins of *Alice*”, begins by dispelling the long-held belief that *Alice in Wonderland* was composed in a single afternoon, during the now famous boat ride on the River Thames. As the authors point out, not only did the story actually take shape over a lengthy period of time (the manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* was presented to the youngest Liddell girl nearly two and a half years after the outing on the Thames), but it continued to change even after its publication. Considerable attention is given to Carroll’s personal involvement in the publishing of his novels, the marketing strategies employed and Tenniel’s illustrations which proved to be a significant (if not the most significant) factor in making *Alice* a bestseller. Finally, Jaques and Giddens address the still mysterious withdrawal of the first edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, ascribing it to technical reasons (the poor quality of paper resulting in the poor quality of the printed images).

Chapter two traces the transformation of *Alice* “from book into product” (83) by focusing on the 1890 *Nursery Alice* (Carroll’s adaptation geared to child readers), Henry Savile Clarke’s stage adaptation of the *Wonderland* novel (1886) and so-called “product tie-ins” (5), such as biscuit tins and stamp cases. Through their analyses of the *Nursery Alice*, Carroll’s meta-commentary and his article “*Alice on the Stage*” (1887), the authors challenge the widely accepted notion that *Alice* is a book without a didactic agenda. The chapter also discusses the tension between Carroll’s intense dislike of commercialisation on the one hand, and his business nous and keen sense for the market on the other.

Chapter three is dedicated to the various changes Carroll introduced into the different editions of his novels. What is especially striking in this regard is not so much the concrete nature of the changes (for the most part minor), but rather their consistency, i.e. Carroll’s insistence on introducing changes into every edition, which points to his determination to maintain authorial control over his work. The chapter further traces *Alice’s* journeys and transformations beyond the borders of its homeland, especially after its copyright expired in 1907.
The remaining two chapters discuss adaptations of Carroll’s novels in different media (cinema, music, music videos, video games, iPad applications, etc.). The subject of chapter four is the textual adaptations and retellings which, unlike Carroll’s novels which may be described as cross-over books, tend to firmly separate the playful from the serious, and are targeted either at children (by means of shortening and modifying the text, conflating the two novels into one, introducing child-friendly illustrations, turning the book itself into a plaything by emphasising its tactile/visual aspects, etc.) or at adults (by emphasising the text’s dark overtones, introducing erotic elements, turning the book into a collectible/artistic object, etc.). Parodies, imitations and sequels to the Alice books also fall within the scope of this chapter. Chapter five, “Alice beyond the page”, examines non-textual adaptations/retellings of Carroll’s work, primarily on stage, in film and in music (videos). The trends mentioned in the previous chapter – the “Disneyfication and simplification of Alice” on the one hand, and its transformation into “adult” literature on the other (5) – are given prominence here as well, with special emphasis on the treatment of the protagonist’s gender.

For the most part, Jaques and Giddens skillfully navigate the plethora of information presented in the book and are ultimately successful in providing a comprehensive, cogently argued and insightful overview of the publishing history of one of literature’s most enduring works. However, while each chapter is commendable in its own right, the book as a whole is somewhat uneven. In comparison to the first three chapters which provide detailed information on the publishing history and textual afterlives of the Alice novels, and are complemented by numerous illustrations and photographs, the lengthy time periods and large number of genres and media selected for discussion in the last two chapters (devoid of visual aids) preclude closer examination of the corpus. Although some key trends and issues are identified, the thoroughness of the preceding discussions is missing, which makes these two chapters seem more like extensive lists of Alice-inspired movies, songs, graphic novels, etc.

Although, as Jaques and Giddens remind us at the very outset of their book, a publishing history is predicated on the notion of a single, immutable text, it is virtually impossible to speak of Alice in the singular. In other words, there is no “Alice” – only “Alices”. The latter refers not only to the innumerable incarnations of the popular literary heroine in different media and adaptations/retellings of the story, but also to the novels penned by Carroll which, as we find out from the pages of this engaging volume, exist in many different versions. By portraying some of the many faces of Alice/Alice, Jaques and Giddens’s study presents a valuable contribution to the fields of literary studies and publishing history in general, and Carroll studies in particular.

Nada Kujundžić
The Origins of Wonderland


Stumbling upon a forgotten black-and-white photograph labelled “Alice P. Hargreaves 1932”, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst re-opens the intriguing story of Lewis Carroll and the *Wonderland* tale “which began in other days / When summer days were glowing” (188). Having been fascinated by the *Alice* books since childhood, the author attempts to demystify Carroll’s biography and his complex works by engaging in thorough archival study which has resulted in *The Story of Alice*.

The book does not prosaically describe the life and works of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a vague Victorian figure better known to wider audiences as Lewis Carroll, but goes deeper into the more personal spheres of Carroll’s personality, thoughts, passions, and difficulties, with special focus on his numerous child-friend relationships, most importantly the one he had with Alice Liddell – the “real” Alice.

Encompassing a little over 400 pages, the book is organised into five chapters which are divided further into smaller units, each written in easy-flowing and understandable language. The book starts with a “Prologue” in which Douglas-Fairhurst states that his fascination with Carroll’s stories and his bafflement at the unclear historical profile of Carroll were some of the reasons for writing the book. After seeing the photograph of Alice (Liddell) Hargreaves, taken when she was an 80-year-old widow visiting America, Fairhurst goes back in time recalling the days when her identity became known to the public as the little Alice who once persuaded Carroll to write down his story about her “adventures in Wonderland”. These events opened the door for many questions that had until that moment been unanswered; however, this also created opportunities for numerous false claims and lies which made Carroll’s figure even vaguer than it already was.

In the second chapter, “Before Alice”, as its title says, the author introduces C. L. Dodgson in the context of his family, growing up, and education. Readers are introduced to Carroll’s personal thoughts, likes and dislikes: he was addicted to puns, misdirection, miscellany, wordplay, and preferred infinity to putting an end to things. In 1851, at the age of nineteen, he enrolled in Christ Church College in Oxford. This period of his studies would turn out to be crucially important for the further development of events in his life: he continued to write and came up with the pseudonym “Lewis Carroll” which, from that point on, would become his *alter ego*. He discovered photography as a new passion, started writing a personal diary, and eventually met the Liddell children – Harry, Lorina (Ina), Alice, and Edith – and became friends with them, taking special interest in little Alice.

The third chapter, “Alice”, revolves around the relationship that was established between Carroll and Alice Liddell. Douglas-Fairhurst explains how Carroll had plenty of opportunities to be around children since he entertained, taught, and photographed them. Yet, among all the children, Alice was the one to attract most of his attention. She is described as “an imaginative child, who enjoyed acting” and had “a keen eye for the absurd” (109). As such, she was a great inspiration for Carroll in both photography and
storytelling, something that would later be ambiguously interpreted by the public. In this chapter, the author also provides some historical background to the ancient literary classics and scientific concepts of the time (e.g. Darwinism) that influenced Carroll’s work in order to aid our understanding of all the intertextual elements that can be found in the Alice stories. He especially elaborates on the idea of placing Alice underground since it “was a place to which the Victorians increasingly enjoyed making mental excursions” (121). The author further claims that the special influence of psychology can be traced in the idea of turning Alice’s entire journey underground into a dream. For Carroll, the dreamworld was a place where the strange and ordinary were brought together, which meant taking “ordinary fragments of above-ground life” and turning them “into something extraordinary” (125).

Soon after writing Alice in Wonderland, Carroll’s contacts with the Liddells were reduced to a few bashful encounters tersely marked down in his diary, where one can find a few pages missing, probably cut out by Carroll’s relatives. This was a period when rumours started rippling around Oxford, questioning Carroll’s intentions and his excessive affection towards Alice. In Carroll’s defence, Douglas-Fairhurst points out his innocent sentimental nature which can be noticed in many of his writings, either private or public, and the statements of children who knew him. As Alice in Wonderland became increasingly popular and was translated into different languages, Carroll started to work on some ideas that would become Through the Looking-Glass, a sequel to the first Alice story. Douglas-Fairhurst analyses some ideas that had an influence on this novel, such as the idea of a mirror or chess board, both of which play an important part in the story. The book was published in 1871 and again sent to young Miss Liddell. Although the tradition remained the same, their relationship was slowly but surely fading.

The chapter “After Alice” deals both with Carroll and Alice, following their life paths which went separate ways after Through the Looking-Glass was published. While the Alice novels were taking over the world, appearing on stage, in illustrations, parodies, and even politics, Carroll faced various problems, ranging from plagiarism and a “flood” of similar stories to his ever-growing fame (he preferred anonymity). What is more, controversy continued to follow him. This was a time when paedophilia became a psychologically acknowledged term and pornography entered photography. Unluckily, Carroll was taking photographs of naked children, which was a common thing at the time, but which became morally questionable in later years. Yet, Douglas-Fairhurst avoids making any kind of conclusion about Carroll’s innocence by stating that we simply do not have enough information about his relationships with children. To affirm that Carroll was indeed a peculiar figure, the author displays a range of his attitudes toward different topics: from child prostitution to child-actors in theatres. Sometimes ambiguous in his opinions and words, Carroll shows a childlike nature which obviously does not see the potential evil in things (or at least pretends not to see it). As a contrast to Carroll’s lifestyle, the author turns to Alice’s life which took a rather plain course. She had a traditional marriage which brought her great prosperity and apparent happiness. Soon after Carroll’s death in 1898, Alice Hargreaves began a darker period of her life. Having lost two sons and a husband, she and her youngest son Caryl found themselves in great financial distress. During these hard days, Mrs Hargreaves decided her original manuscript of Alice’s Adventures Under Ground should be put up for auction and from that point on her identity slowly began to be known to
greater masses, bringing the story of Alice back into the headlines. With the death of Alice L. Hargreaves in 1934, the whole story about her, Caryl and Carroll ceased to be important, leaving only the stories of Alice and her adventures in Wonderland.

In his final chapter, “Epilogue”, Douglas-Fairhurst briefly explains how he decided to write about Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and his uncertain biography interspersed with intentional or unintentional gaps.

Although the book is rather long, it certainly does not give this impression to the reader. It reads easily and is understandable to a wider audience which makes this book ideal for students, scholars, literature researchers, and practically anyone who finds Carroll and his works interesting. Viewed within the context of literary studies, The Story of Alice makes another contribution to a better understanding of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and his exceptional literary pieces, especially for those who will continue to work on fitting together the missing jigsaw pieces of his life which may open a door to a “Wonderland” of hidden meanings.

Andrea Tadić

Eine kaleidoskopische Einsicht in das Leben und Werk von Charles Dodgson alias Lewis Carroll


Die vielseitige Autorin, die in Wirtschaft, Politik und humanistischen Wissenschaften zu Hause ist, betrachtet Alice im Wunderland und Alice hinter den Spiegeln „als spannende historische Zeugnisse“ (12). Das Ziel der Autorin ist, die scheinbar willkürliche sprachliche und literarische Struktur der Werke mit Hilfe von Daten aus Dodgsons Leben und der kulturgeschichtlichen Situation zu deuten, in denen sie entstanden sind.

Das Buch setzt sich aus 16 Kapiteln zusammen. In jedem Kapitel wird ein Hauptthema behandelt, ohne dass die Autorin die allgemeine Struktur des Buches für einen Moment aus den Augen lässt. Der Anfang wird mit biographischen Angaben gemacht, die den Leser auf die darauffolgenden Analysen vorbereiten. Da Brown zudem eine Künstlerin ist, die sich mit dem Thema „Alice“ schon länger beschäftigte, werden auch künstlerische Gestaltungen der literarischen Hauptgestalt besprochen, um letztendlich die jeweiligen thematischen Einheiten zu präsentieren, die mosaikartig den Kern des Buches bilden.

Die Themen sind reich und vielseitig: von Elfen und ägyptischen Göttern, über paranormale Phänomene, Kausalitätsprinzipien, Tiersymbolismus, sexuelle Anspielungen, bis zu möglichen historischen Vorbildern für Alices Gestalt. Alle Ansätze werden kurz
und bündig dargelegt und bilden ein Kaleidoskop von Ideen, Bildern und möglichen Interpretationen. Im mosaikähnlichen Resultat erreicht die Autorin ihr Vorhaben und beweist, „dass die Erzählweise des routinierten Kinderunterhalters und tüftelnden Logikers sehr wohl Struktur hat“ (19).

Von den intertextuellen Verweisen, die Brown bespricht, sind die auf Aristophanes, Petrarca und Dante Alighieri zu nennen. Carroll soll sich auch auf Texte seiner Zeitgenossen bezogen haben, wobei er aber auch einige berühmte Personen seiner Zeit verspottet hat. Brown zeigt weiterhin auf, wie die Entwicklung der Fotografie, das Theaterleben, die modernen Wissenschaften und Carrolls Nähe zu den Freimaurern in seinen Texten zu erkennen sind. Die Autorin traut sich auch gewagte Thesen aufzustellen. Dementsprechend stellt sie fest, dass Alice eine ägyptische Gottheit darstellen soll (Kapitel 3), oder dass dem ganzen Werk esoterische Interessen des Autors zugrunde liegen (Kapitel 13).


Stephanie Jug
Prednja strana korica prvoga hrvatskoga prijevoda *Alice u Zemlji Čudesa*, 1944.
Izdanje Matice hrvatske, Zagreb.

Front cover of the first Croatian translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1944.