

### **Book Review by Virginie Iché**

JAQUES Zoe and Eugene GIDDENS. *Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History*. Farnham (England): Ashgate, 2013, xiv + 248 p., £95, ISBN 97814-09419037.

Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens's book came out one year before the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a timely moment indeed to address the question of the durability and versatility of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. In the fourth volume of the Ashgate series "Ashgate Studies in Publishing History, Manuscript, Print, Digital," Jaques and Giddens do not merely meticulously unravel the intricate tale of the publication history of Carroll's 1865 and 1871 *Alice* books, they also set out to tell the story of how *Alice* came to be adapted and transformed mainly through print, illustration and film—in keeping with the Ashgate series's purpose to investigate textual creation and multimedia dissemination.

In Chapter 1, Jaques and Giddens relate the publication history of both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and go over the well-known twists and turns that led to the eventual publication of the *Alice* books. While those not already acquainted with Carroll's ever-fastidious demands (with illustrator Tenniel, publisher Macmillan or printer Clay) will welcome the authors' thorough synthesis of previously published research and primary material (in particular Carroll's diaries and letters), those already familiar with these data will most probably be interested in the authors' claim that Carroll's objections to the initial printed version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* probably stemmed from the poor quality of the paper used, which resulted in considerable show-through (30). More importantly, the first chapter introduces the key paradox that characterized Carroll's relationship to the *Alice* books according to Jaques and Giddens: although he was determined to keep a firm grip on his *Alice* books, he was just as adamant that the best versions and adaptations possible should be disseminated as widely as possible (even if he had mixed feelings when it came to the U.S.).

Chapter 2 further proves this point by focusing on what the authors call "Early Adaptation," that is to say *The Nursery Alice*, Henry Savile Clark's 1886 stage adaptation, and, more astonishingly, *Alice*-themed biscuit tins and Carroll's "Wonderland postage stamp-case," in order to bring to light Carroll's "dual concern for market and quality" (60). Though Carroll welcomed and sometimes even initiated *Alice* adaptations or merchandising, he was also extremely anxious to maintain some degree of artistic control over these various productions—more or less successfully though, as the typically Carrollian demand that the *Alice*-themed biscuit tins should be sold empty was not to be met. Chapter 2 also argues that in his later life, Carroll decided to alter the (supposedly) moral-free tone of the original *Alice* books and "reinscrib[e] *Alice* within a moral world"—some passages of *The Nursery Alice* in particular being the epitome of didactic literature (71). If *The Nursery Alice* is undeniably more didactic than the original *Alice* books, the assumption that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* are entirely devoid of any didactic content has been challenged, namely by Jean-Jacques Lecercle who has demonstrated that Nonsense has pedagogic aims.<sup>1</sup> Jaques and Giddens's statement at the beginning of this chapter that "the notion of lessons is ridiculed and continually undermined" (71) should accordingly be qualified or properly discussed.

Chapter 3, "Becoming a Classic," first shows how both *Alice* books became classics—somewhat paradoxically, since Carroll kept changing the odd comma, added prefatory

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<sup>1</sup> See namely Lecercle, Jean-Jacques. *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*. London: Routledge, 1994.

elements, and even altered the ‘Tis the voice of the Lobster’ poem, so much so that Goodacre and other critics deplore the absence of any definitive text (104). This attention to details is a distinctive Carrollian feature, but the authors reflect that it is also characteristic of his persistent wish to remain in control of his *Alice* books, as much as it reveals the “innate elasticity” of Carroll’s works (106). This chapter then focuses on what could equally have been discussed in the second chapter of the book as another instance of early adaptation, Carroll’s insistence on having *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* translated. This is obviously yet another clue of Carroll’s wish to disseminate his work, but also hints at the growing perception that the *Alice* books are children’s classics, or at least children’s classics in the making. Finally, the third chapter offers an examination of *Alice*’s appearance in America. As is well-known, Carroll did not hold Americans in high regard and agreed to have the first discarded printed versions of every *Alice* book shipped to the U.S.A. What is not as well-known, and what Jaques and Giddens broach, is that this led to the publication of multifarious versions of the *Alice* books, namely with illustrations other than Tenniel’s (because English copyright did not apply in the U.S.A). The authors then contrast the somewhat audacious experiments of American illustrators with the tame 1907 English illustrations (except for Rackham’s). They convincingly attribute this English reluctance to illustrate the *Alice* books anew to the fact that the copyright on the *Alice* books only expired in 1907 in England, making it harder to separate Carroll’s text from Tenniel’s illustrations.

Chapter 4 deals with the “textual afterlives” (153) of the *Alice* books. Given the plethora of adaptations of the *Alice* books, Jaques and Giddens choose to limit the scope of this chapter to what they deem to be noteworthy adaptations that they divide in three subcategories: “adaptations for children, illustrated editions, and new retellings” (153). The key argument of this chapter is that all these adaptations tend to either target young readers (by making the original illustrations less scary) or place the text out of their reach (namely by deliberately drawing attention to the disquieting elements of the original *Alices* thanks to radically new illustrations, by creating high-end editions or writing political parodies and pastiches of the original *Alice* books), while the original *Alices* did not exclude any group of readers. If the argument that publishers and illustrators decided to render the *Alice* books less scary than Carroll’s original books in order to make them more marketable for children is rather conclusive, the opposite, rather implicit, belief that “violent” books are only meant for adults (underlying namely p. 178: “Here is a game of hide-and-seek, but it is an adults-only one; the books impose an aggression, fury, and violence that make them distinct from childish delights and pleasurable dreams”) should be explicitly addressed if it is to be more persuasive. Indeed, it has been shown, in particular by Maria Tatar in *Off with their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood*, that children’s books are far from being devoid of any violence.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 5, entitled “Alice Beyond the Page,” is a descriptive overview of movies, theatrical representations and songs which used the *Alice* books as a source, and which, according to Jaques and Giddens, are proof that *Alice* “is a living text, with a publishing history, and a publishing future” (227).

Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens have probably read every book and article ever written on Carroll’s *Alice* books (Lecerle’s books and articles being the exception) and consulted a great many textual and non-textual adaptations, as the impressive 14-page bibliography testifies. The absence of reference books on history and theory is a bit surprising. The discussion of Carroll’s decision to have his *Alice* books published on commission could have benefited from a brief examination of the various methods of publishing available at the time

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<sup>2</sup> “We have seen the way in which the representation of violence is placed in the service of retaliatory justice, demeaning sadism, pedagogical zeal, and cathartic pleasure. But there is one class of stories that traffics in violence for no other evident reason than to stage scenes of doom and gloom.” (Tatar, Maria. *Off with their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992, 186)

(as described by Samuel Squire Sprigge<sup>3</sup>, for instance). More astonishing, none of the major works on adaptation studies (namely Hutcheon<sup>4</sup> or Leitch<sup>5</sup>) are mentioned in Jaques and Giddens's presentation of the extremely diverse adaptations of Carroll's *Alice* books. *Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History* is however no doubt a precious addition to Carrollian studies, as it is a thoroughly informed book, in which you can find all you want to know about the publication of the *Alices*, without having to read the vast amount of letters written by Carroll and of articles and books written by Carrollian scholars. While the first three chapters are the most compelling, the last chapters offer possible venues for further research in Carrollian adaptations.

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<sup>3</sup> Sprigge, Samuel Squire. *The Methods of Publishing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009 [1890].

<sup>4</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York & London: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and its Discontents*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, UP, 2007.