Alice Liddell,
Photographed by Charles Dodgson July 1860
(8 years old)

Alice from Page 67 of *Alice's Adventures Underground,* drawing by Lewis Carroll

Alice from Page 5 of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* drawing by Sir John Tenniel

Chapter 3- Alice

Since Charles Dodgson wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published in 1865 under his penname Lewis Carroll, over 55 different translations have been produced with countless adaptations worldwide, including Disney's popular 1951 film *Alice in Wonderland.* Each adaptation, whether it be a stage production such as Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus' Broadway show or a song written by Jefferson Airplane or Taylor Swift, portrays a different Alice. This manifold of Alices started from her very conception, when Charles Dodgson first told the tale to his child friend Alice Liddell and her siblings one day on the river. The Alice we know today as the sweet little Victorian girl who gets lost among many confusing creatures despite giving herself very good advice mainly stems from Sir John Tenniel's drawings included in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as well as her depiction in the Disney film. However, this prim and proper version of Alice is not the kind of girl

we see in Lewis Carroll's first drawings in his original manuscript of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground,* nor is it the original conception of Alice based on Alice Liddell. This chapter will look at the body and clothing of the three different Alices represented in the different portrayals of her in Carroll's original sketches compared to Tenniel's drawings, while also noting Charles' Dodgson's initial inspiration for the beloved character.

Charles Dodgson first received inspiration for his Alice stories from his child friend Alice Liddell. Alice was the daughter of the Dean of Christ's Church, where Dodgson was a member of the clergy. Dodgson became close friends with the Liddell family and was known to make up stories for the children and take them on outings. One such outing, famously on a rowing boat trip, Dodgson made up what would become *Alice,* and Alice Liddell asked him to write it down for her, which he did under his penname Lewis Carroll. That book became *Alice's Adventures Under Ground,* and when Carroll decided to get it published with The Macmillan Company, he extended the book and named it *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

According to Alice, a book has no use unless it has pictures in it. Naturally, it was very important for Carroll when completing *Alice* to include pictures in his children's story that would enhance the text and excite the children reading the story. As English literature professor Robert Douglas-Fairhurst points out in his book *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland,* although Carroll tried to illustrate *Alice* on his own, his drawings just weren't good enough. Douglas-Fairhurst critiques some of Carroll's drawings saying that, "Alice's head and arms [appear] to belong to different bodies," and "the caterpillar [coils] himself up

like an embarrassed snake" (142-143). Realizing this, Carroll asked John Tenniel, the lead cartoonist for satirical *Punch* magazine, to illustrate the newly expanded Alice adventures. Interestingly enough, many of Tenniel's ideas for his Alice drawings seem to be based on earlier cartoons he produced for *Punch,* and a few of his pieces after *Alice* were published depicting characters from the novel. Despite Tenniel's detailed drawings that were produced for *Alice,* the process had its rough patches; "after years of [Carroll] having complete freedom to illustrate his own stories suddenly he had to deal with a collaborator who was unwilling to be treated as a skilled prosthetic hand" (Douglas-Fairhurst 143). The two had clashing ideas about the characters, as seen through the different versions of Alice that ended up being produced.

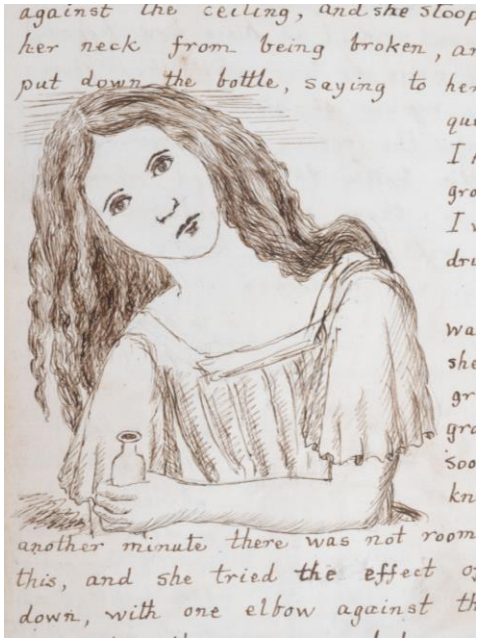
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland's title character looks very different in Carroll's drawings compared to Tenniel's drawings, but they both represent different Victorian beauty ideals. As Alison Lurie explains in her book *The Language of Clothes,* early Victorian beauty was small and slender like Queen Victoria, and as the Queen grew up, so did the ideal woman (64). Charles Dodgson, however, never seemed to let the little girl go, photographing female children for most of his life and obsessing over the innocence and purity that the figure of the little girl supposedly possessed. Dodgson believed that little girls were pure members of a "species of a questionable origin", as opposed to the ugliness and uncleanliness of little boys (Auerbach, *Romantic* 131). As Victorian critic Nina Auerbach states in her book *Romantic Imprisonment,* in the Victorian Age "little boys were allowed, even encouraged, to partake of original sin; but little girls rarely were" (148).

Charles Dodgson tried to capture this image of a little girl as an emblem of innocence and purity in his photographs, such as the adjacent picture of Alice Liddell. In this picture, taken in the summer of 1860 when she was 8 years old, Alice is wearing white with a high collar, which serves to give a sense of modesty and also of spirituality or purity. Her hair and face are soft to represent the innocence of childhood and she is looking straight at the camera, which reflects Alice's bravery and curiosity.

Yet in Carroll's drawn version of Alice, we see a girl, as Nina Auerbach argues, more reminiscent of the pre-Raphaelite drawings of fallen women. The concept of the pre-Raphaelite style of painting started when the art critic John Ruskin, of whom Lewis Carroll photographed twice after much persuasion by Carroll, "called for artists to take nature as their source" (King). Many of these pre-Raphaelite painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt were obsessed with drawing the female face and figure, cloaked in the melancholy of the tortured soul and the beauty of nature. For only about a twenty-year period in the middle of the nineteenth century, these male artists were producing paintings focused on women with medieval and historical influences, occasionally nude but always enlightened. These women usually had long flowing hair and many loose and thin layers of clothing, such as in William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience,* depicting someone's mistress. Prostitutes were a common figure in many Pre-Raphaelite

paintings, such as in *Found* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. These artists seemed to be so enamored with portraying the effects of prostitution on women because it played with the idea that these immoral women had agency of their bodies, but were still trapped in the confines of society. Most portrayals of prostitution, and most Pre-Raphaelite paintings in general, showed women in some state of death or illness, such as in Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia.* This idea of a woman having agency and passivity seems to be represented in Carroll's depictions of Alice, reflective of Pre-Raphaelites with her loose clothing and long hair. Carroll's drawing of Alice in this way makes her more adult; the clothing she wears is more befitting of an older girl.

This Alice can be seen in the left hand picture where she is looking at a door in a tree that will lead to the beautiful garden she has longed to be in. Her outfit is plain and hangs loosely off of her body. The sleeves, which end at her elbow, look a little old for a girl her age. They are flowing and limp, similar to her skirt with its very low waistline that falls above her hips, contrary to the popular style of the 1860s of clothing fitted at the natural waist. This serves to elongate Alice's torso, accentuating her flat chest and limp shoulders. The following picture shows a more detailed drawing of Alice's bodice. Alice's neckline is quite low for a young girl to wear during the day. The style of her sleeves does not reflect the popular style during the 1860's, which was either a short puffed sleeve sloped low on the shoulder which limited movement, or a long, ruffled sleeve, keeping with the



melting shoulder effect of the low shoulder seam. Alice's neckline here is square and low instead of rounded and close to the neck, and her bodice is loose and flowing to suggest the absence of a corset that young girls wore to improve posture and prepare them for adult societal fashion. This depiction serves to set Alice apart from the usual fashion of the day, and thus the traditional role of a young girl to fill. Little girls were seen as Victorian mothers and wives in training, dressing in the same clothing as their mothers that was both morally restrictive and physically constrictive. Because Carroll's Alice is not dressed in the same fashion, nor is she wearing a corset, Alice is noticeably set free from the traditional role of the little girl. This gives her more agency and authority over herself and the way she dresses.

In addition to the way Carroll designed Alice's dress, another notable description of Carroll's Alice is her hair. This Alice has long flowing hair that falls in her face and moves with the wind rather than sticking in place. This is perhaps what best ties Alice to the image of pre-Raphaelite fallen women.

Carroll's divergent Alice is vastly different compared to Tenniel's drawings of Alice and her clothing, which are clearly seen in the well-known

image of Alice drinking from a bottle marked "DRINK ME" that inevitably makes her shrink. In this depiction, Alice's outfit is much more appropriate for a Victorian little girl in the 1860s to wear than Carroll's. Her skirt is shaped with crinoline underneath, puffing out from her natural waist. The bodice of Alice's dress is tight and close to her body, with her short sleeves extending from a low shoulder seam to restrict movement. Alice has a high neckline with a little collar, looking very proper in her petite black shoes. Most notably Alice is wearing her very iconic apron that prepares her to clean anything at the drop of a hat without getting her dress dirty, and her hair is slicked back away from her face. All of this sets up Alice to be the perfect wife and mother in training. Alice has just embarked on this mysterious journey through Wonderland, and she is very ill-prepared because of her impractical shoes for walking to the tea party and running from the Red Queen, restriction of shoulder movement from her sloping sleeves, and tight bodiced dress.

Children's books were used as lessons to teach children the way they should act. Many children's books as well as books for adults used "this emphasis on reading as a means towards faith" and to teach "proper moral and social behavior" (Lam, "Be Good"). Professor and contributor to *The Victorian Web* Jacqueline Banerjee writes about the role children played in literature. She says, "the image of the child as innocent and redemptive can be found in many works of the Victorian Period;" although, Banerjee points out, "their innocence equates with piety" rather than a Romantic definition of innocence ("Ideas of Childhood"). The Victorian Period also saw a separation between "Books for Boys" and "Books for Girls." Reading for girls often consisted of novels that were "charmed by domestic scenes," compared to

boys' books that were "presented with racy tales of adventure at sea and at war" (Lam, "Boys Will Be Boys"). This was because "critics feared that girls would be dissatisfied with their prescribed domestic role" that was often outlined in "Books for Girls" to prepare them to grow up to be a mother and a wife (Lam, "Boys Will Be Boys"). "Girls serials emphasized lady-like behavior, religious conviction, cheerfulness under adversity and familial obedience" because these were qualities that Victorian girls should have (Lam, "Boys Will Be Boys"). Books depicting little girls were an example to girls on how they should act and be, and the Tenniel images of Alice that were included in the final publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* were an example of how little girls should dress.

In addition to the drawing of Alice drinking from a bottle, many other scenes Lewis Carroll drew for *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* are also depicted by Sir John Tenniel. One such scene is in the hall in the first and second chapters of *Under Ground* and *Wonderland* respectively, after Alice eats a cake with the words "EAT ME" written on it. Alice eats the entire little cake and quite suddenly shoots up "more than nine feet high" so her head hits the ceiling (*Under Ground* 8). In Carroll's drawing of this scene, Alice is standing with her hands tucked in and her head bowed, looking quite forlorn. Her hair is starting to fall and is covering parts of her face, but her outfit looks unchanged. She still has the low, square neckline and unusual sleeves, and her skirt still falls, deflated, to her knees. Her

whole body however has become elongated, not just her neck, and she looks startlingly thin. Her dress in this picture has a bit more texture to it than in other images, with sleeves looking ruffled and almost feather like. This drawing depicts a defeated Alice, leading to her tsunami of tears that she lets loose a page later. It seems that although Carroll's depiction of Alice represents an independent rule breaker, she also knows that children should be seen and not heard, and when Alice messes up and grows too big she worries about disappointing the authority. In this scene, Alice worries about upsetting herself, saying goodbye to her feet as they grow farther and farther away and worrying about who will take care of them and put shoes on them. She plans how she will send them new boots for Christmas in the mail, and then she scolds herself for crying, saying "You ought to be ashamed of yourself… a great girl like you…Stop this instant, I tell you!" (*Under Ground* 12). In this way Alice makes herself the authority she has to answer to.

Contrastingly, Tenniel's drawing of Alice from this same scene is much more comical. Alice's proportions are more or less realistic except for her giraffe-like neck, highlighting her collar that has risen to cover more skin, as more has suddenly appeared to preserve modesty. Otherwise her dress and apron are unchanged, giving more pouf to her sleeves and skirt and daintiness to her hands and feet. Alice's eyes are wide with surprise, and it's her expression that differs

her perhaps the most from Carroll's version. Alice does not look small and scared but instead amazed, with her hair sticking out like she just got electrocuted. Tenniel shows an Alice completely in the hands of another power, as Alice refuses to take fault for causing her own size to change. Notably, her clothes stay the same, leaving the imprint of a Victorian woman in training on her, despite her body's different appearance. She can't break free from this mold. Even as a Victorian woman changes and grows, she has the same duties to fulfill.

However, the world of Wonderland gives Alice an opportunity to change this embodiment of a pure Victorian woman, as she is given a chance to find out who she really is as her body changes size. As Nina Auerbach points out, other little girls traveling in literature such as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* ask, "Where am I?" Alice is constantly asking herself, "Who am I?" She gets quite confused during her journey, being mistaken for someone named Maryanne by the White Rabbit and for a predatory serpent by the pigeon, which leaves Alice quite distressed. Her journey through Wonderland is also a journey to find herself as a Victorian woman. This investigation is most clearly seen in the famous scene between Alice and "a hookah-smoking caterpillar" in Chapter 5 (Jefferson Airplane).

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* during her journey, after coming upon a curious mushroom, Alice "stretche[s] herself up on tiptoe" to see a "large blue caterpillar" sitting there (*Wonderland* 26). After looking "at each other for some time in silence," the Caterpillar "addresse[s] her in a languid, sleepy voice," saying, "Who are *you*?" (27). Alice, having just fallen "miles" down "near the center of the earth," almost drowning in a sea of her own tears, coming across many strange

creatures she's never seen before, and changing size three times, has no idea who she is at this point (2). And so she answers, "I- I hardly know, Sir, just at present- at least I know who was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then" (27). When asked by the Caterpillar to explain herself, she replies "I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir, because I'm not myself, you see" (28). The Caterpillar doesn't see, and Alice is forced to explain further how she "can't understand" herself "to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing" (28).

Just as Alice complains to the Caterpillar, throughout her journey Alice changes size seven different times, five of which are a result of her own doing. Alice either eats or drinks something to make her change, until the last scene in which she starts growing not of her own accord. Alice is the cause of her changing size. No outside force results in her metamorphosis, but actions Alice does result in her changing proportions. Alice is both the act and the causer of the act. She floats away in a sea and yet is the one who cries tears to create the sea; she changes size and drinks or eats to cause the change. This seems to give her agency. And yet, her clothes don't change but instead stay the same with her changing body, revealing the trace that conventional little girlhood leaves on her life. She is forced to conform instead of having her own authority and freedom to grow as a child. Her size changes but her clothes don't, thus the stamp of a Victorian woman is always on her.

Alice has potential to become something more than the societal definition of a Victorian woman as defined by what she wears, however. It is possible for her to do more with her life than in the confines of a house caring for her children in an

apron and kempt hair, as shown through Alice's attempt at self-improvement. Throughout her journey Alice constantly references facts from places she has read them. She tells the King of Hearts that the Cheshire Cat is allowed to look at him because "a cat may look at a king," to which she backs up that she has "read that in some book" (*Wonderland* 57). Unfortunately, Alice doesn't remember where she read it. This happens to Alice again when she is in the trial of the Knave who stole the tarts, and despite it being her first time in court, Alice "[has] read about them in books, and she [is] quite pleases to find that she [knows] the name of nearly everything there" (*Wonderland* 73). She then goes on to name everything she sees, "being rather proud of it: for…very few little girls of her age knew the meaning of it at all" (*Wonderland* 73). Alice again uses this literary knowledge when she points out that she's read in newspapers that in trials there is "some attempt at applause," but it is "immediately suppressed by officers of the court" (*Wonderland* 77). She says something similar when she proves to the Duchess that the croquet game they are watching is improving "by everybody minding their own business!" because she remembers that that's what "somebody said" (*Wonderland* 60). Through all of her reading and misremembering, Alice shows the reader that she is trying to become more learned and more adult, and that she has the potential to be something greater than an innocent little girl, and instead have more power over her life. She doesn't want to be seen and not heard, as was custom for children to be during the Victorian Age, but is trying to give herself a voice through knowledge of the world.

It was part of society in the Victorian Age for children to have a separate place. Young boys were sent away to boarding school, or as it was called "public

school," for their education. These schools were also Protestant and connected with the Sunday School Movement of the Victorian period. It was also common for children and young adults to read publications of manners and etiquette books designed to teach them how to improve. One such publication entitled "Practical Hints to Young Females," written by an "evangelical Christian woman" Ann Taylor, "deals with the duties of a wife and mother" (The British Library). The book teaches young women how to keep a home and "bring gentleness, unselfishness, fortitude, cool temper, and unlimited support into the home" (The British Library). These ideas were taught to girls at a young age through the teaching of Sunday School lessons and reading books about manners and etiquette, such as this one by Ann Taylor.

Throughout the novel, Alice tries to properly recite her lessons. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is riddled with recitations and verses read by Alice and the other characters that mimic common Victorian poems and verses used to teach children. Because Victorian families had to save money to send their children to school, most boys went to school but girls weren't as widely educated, because "daughters'… schooling seemed less important" (Mitchell 178). Girls "did not need preparation for public life" since they "would grow up to be a married woman" like their mothers, and they "were thought to need more social and moral protection than boys," so they were often educated at home under a governess (Mitchell 178). This is reflected in the opening scene of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* when Alice's sister is sitting with her by the riverbank reading a book with no pictures. Alice tries to recite "How doth the little-" to figure out who she is, proving to herself

that she has not "been changed for Mabel," her less intelligent friend, but she gets it wrong and rather than reciting "Against Idleness and Mischief" by Isaac Watts, she recites her own made up version "How doth the little crocodile" (*Wonderland* 9). Realizing she has said all the wrong words that makes the poem out to be a frightening tale of a predatory crocodile rather than a lesson in keeping oneself busy and sharp to keep out of mischief, Alice is disheartened to figure she must be silly Mabel with her "poky little house" and "next to know toys," because knowledge is based on wealth in Alice's life in Victorian England (*Wonderland* 10). So even though she does not try to recite "How doth the little" for a grade or for a teacher or governess, the purpose of reciting her lessons is to prove to herself and to some greater power that she is smart and therefore wealthy. She is able to demonstrate this higher knowledge to the societal norms that are telling her to do so. But we know that Alice is so much more than capable of knowledge, because she, in this dream that she has formed, wrote this version of "How doth the little." Alice herself created all of the incorrect poems said in the book, just as she created all of the characters who recite them, because this is her dream. Alice is, in her own way, an author, capable of showing off her creative knowledge, but she is so obsessed with finding herself and proving that she has intelligence that she doesn't acknowledge her creativity. Victorian little girls didn't have much room to explore their curiosities because they "began their 'apprenticeship' very young, by looking after babies and helping their mothers with the laundry or needlework" (Mitchell 178). The societal expectations of Alice bleed into her thoughts and actions during her

journey through Wonderland, sticking to her mind just as her clothes cling to her body.

In comparing pictures of the three Alices, we see these contradictory images of an innocent and pure child, a mold breaker who continues to adopt the idea that children should be seen and not heard, and a perfect and proper Victorian woman in training. In the adjacent picture of Alice Liddell taken by Charles Dodgson in the summer of 1858, Dodgson depicts a forlorn little girl, again wearing a light color to give a sense of spirituality. What's notable is she is not looking at the camera but instead looking away, seemingly lost in thought, or possibly embarrassed or shy. She looks very young and frail here, something Dodgson wanted to preserve as a picture of childhood sacredness. Comparatively, Carroll's drawing of Alice in *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* has a different effect. Here, Alice does not look shy but instead powerful, looking out over the ocean of her own tears that she created, with the wind blowing through her long hair. Her feet are tucked up under her to present an idea of properness and neatness, so she is still conventional, but the focus, similar to the picture of Alice Liddell, is solely on Alice and her person because she is not looking at the "camera." In this scene in the novel, Carroll describes Alice as "sorrowful and silent" because all of the birds had just flown away from her after

she talked about her cat Dinah loving to eat birds (32). However, Alice "recover[ed] her spirits quite quickly" and moves on to the next obstacle during her journey. Carroll's drawings of Alice show a more self-aware and strong Alice who is able to do things on her own. Tenniel also drew a picture of Alice in the same pose, pictured in *Alice in Wonderland.* Here, she is looking back at the White Rabbit as he scurries away down the long hallway. Alice has just landed after her long fall and does not know where she is, and in this drawing she looks very feminine with her hand under her chin in a state of surprise. Her torso is tucked in close as she tries not to take up too much space, and her face isn't too expressive as to not make a scene with her emotions. Her left arm is extended to try and grab on to something as she is not stable, and her skirt is perfectly splayed out around her knees while her feet are tucked in under herself. This image of Alice is quite different than the other two Alices because here she makes herself very small while keeping a very properly feminine pose.

These three pictures of Alice appropriately embody the three types of little girl each artist depicted- a shy and quiet girl who epitomizes childhood female innocence, a Victorian rule breaker who has her own sense of agency, and the perfect Victorian woman to be. As Carol Long states in her article on Alice's many adaptations, "through all of the confusion, however, Alice neither forgets her manners nor loses her sense of humanity" (133). Alice's whole body changes and she is subject to commands and mocking from the tenants of Wonderland, but she is

always polite, not wanting to be rude to the extremely ugly Duchess even though her pointy chin is cutting into Alice's shoulder, and always looks the part in her perfect dress and slicked back hair. Tenniel's drawings have survived as the example of what Alice in Wonderland looks like because she is the most appropriate form for the Victorian woman in training that the story follows. Charles Dodgson's original depiction of Alice as a loose, quiet girl with agency gets replaced with Tenniel's polite and perfect version of Alice that prepares her for adulthood. Tenniel's version reminds us that along with the prospect of marriage looms the death of childhood, so we must hold onto the image of childhood innocence as long as we can, by reading about young Alice over and over again to keep her alive.

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