

The Film Collector's Alice: An Essay and Checklist



BY DAVID H. SCHAEFER

TO MANY, THE WORDS "ALICE IN WONDERLAND" CONJURE UP ONLY ONE SET OF images—Disney's animated characters. Indeed, it is possible that more people know of the *Alice* stories through motion pictures than through reading the actual books. In 1903, only five years after Carroll's death, the first *Alice in Wonderland* film appeared. More than fifteen motion picture versions of the Alice stories have been produced since then. There have been shorts, full-length features, silent films, musical versions, television versions, animated adaptations, and a drug education version. Even the real-life Alice, Mrs. Alice Liddell Hargreaves, has been captured on newsreel film.

Part I of this article chronicles the major *Alice* films, with special attention to the silent versions. Part II lists all motion picture films known to the author that relate to Lewis Carroll.

I

It is interesting to speculate about Lewis Carroll's knowledge of motion pictures, and to wonder if he ever went to see this new invention. As a highly accomplished amateur photographer, he must have had an interest in the development of this offshoot of his hobby. As early as February 1896, the Lumière Cinematograph was being shown as part of the entertainment at the Polytechnic in London. In the late

1890s, Brighton, one of Lewis Carroll's favorite resorts, was a major film production area. At the time of Carroll's death in 1898, motion pictures were widely shown in vaudeville houses as "chasers" at the end of the stage presentation.¹

By 1903 theaters exclusively devoted to motion pictures had arrived. These small theaters, known as "nickelodeons" in the United States, were generally converted stores with chairs rented from a nearby caterer or funeral parlor. Here a nickel bought a variety of film presentations that were repeated every fifteen minutes or so. Similar theaters in England were called "electric palaces" or "bioscope theaters."

Among the subjects available in 1903 was the first motion picture version of *Alice in Wonderland*. This ten-minute film was produced by Cecil Hepworth, one of the major producers of films in England. In the early 1900s the Hepworth organization produced more than one hundred motion pictures a year at its primitive studio at Walton-on-Thames. In spite of the apparent mass production, the operation was a family affair. In the *Alice* film, for example, Mrs. Hepworth is the Queen. Miraculously, fourteen out of sixteen scenes of the Hepworth *Alice* have been preserved by the British Film Institute. Even though the film is faded in parts and large amounts of emulsion are missing, it is technically excellent and is enjoyable to watch.

The most interesting scenes show Alice growing and shrinking (Figs. 1 & 2). It appears that these shots were made by the superposition of two films, although they are so well done that it is difficult to tell. Trick photography had become common by 1903, with the Frenchman Méliès producing fantastic films on such subjects as trips to the moon. His films, however, used stage settings, and many of his special effects were those of the live stage. In contrast, in the Hepworth *Alice* the shrinking and growing scenes are completely photographic, and appear to be a step beyond the technique of Méliès. A more common type of special effect occurs in the rabbit's house where a very overgrown Alice escapes by fanning herself and slowly fading away. Other sequences involving trick shots include the metamorphosis of the Duchess's baby into a very lively little black pig, and the abrupt comings and goings of an actual cat. Toward the end of the film pleasant outdoor shots of children in the royal procession marching to the croquet ground contrast sharply with the photographic trickery of earlier scenes.²

Silent films knew no bounds due to language, and these films circulated freely through Europe and America. The Hepworth *Alice* was released in the United States by the Edison Manufacturing Company, appearing in their January 1904 catalogue. Six years later in 1910, the Edison Company filmed its own *Alice In Wonderland* in the Bronx. This first American *Alice*, like its British predecessor, is just ten minutes long. It consists of fourteen scenes all relating to *Alice's Adventures*. Scene Twelve (Fig. 4) is a surprise. The Edison Company advertising describes it as showing "a banquet at which the dastardly Knave steals the tarts and gets away with them, as told in the familiar rhyme. Although Alice is the only one to see him, she refuses to tell even when summoned to the trial, which takes place in the next scene."³



Figs. 1 and 2 - 1903 Alice changing size in the hall of doors



The motion picture film critic had come into existence in time for us to have the following review of the 1910 film, which appeared in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* on September 14, 1910:

Alice in Wonderland (Edison Sep 9)—This is the most original and most interesting film that has appeared in many a day, although its charms may not be quite evident to one who has never accompanied the heroine on her journey down the rabbit burrow. From first to last Alice's work was delightful: facial expressions can never say more than hers did in the very first scene. The shrinkage in her size was skillfully managed in the early part of her adventures. The duchess with the baby that turned into a pig, the diminutive hatter, the sleepy dormouse, the mad March Hare who put butter in his watch to make it go—all parade through the film until Alice defies the laws of Wonderland. Then they disappear in a whirling pack of cards. Although the making of such a film must have necessitated much time, labor and expense, the result has justified the outlay—at least artistically. It reflects credit upon all connected with it.⁴

A less positive view of the movie was taken in 1918 by an unknown person who scribbled on an index card in the Library of Congress: "Grainy, very crudely produced, but will always interest children." This is probably the last word on the merits of the production, as no copies of this film are known to exist today. Figures 3 and 4 are, however, actual frames from the film. They were deposited in the Library of Congress for copyright purposes.

After 1912 motion pictures began to have greater mass appeal, and comfortable neighborhood theaters began to appear throughout the country. In New York the movement away from primitive nickelodeons took a giant step in April 1914 when the Strand Theatre opened with gilt, marble, deep pile rugs, crystal chandeliers, original works of art, luxurious lounges, a mighty Wurlitzer to accompany the shorts, and a thirty-piece symphony orchestra to accompany the feature. The price of a ticket skyrocketed from the nickelodeon nickel all the way to a full quarter.⁵

Before members of the press and invited guests, and to the accompaniment of the thirty-piece orchestra, a delightful *Alice* had its "initial showing" at the Strand Theatre on January 19, 1915.⁶ This film, unlike its ten-minute predecessors, ran a complete hour. Various versions of this film are commercially available today. The print in my collection commences with Alice and her sister meandering through pastoral farm scenes, filmed on an estate outside New York City.⁷ After falling asleep on her sister's lap, a shadowy Alice leaves the body of the sleeping Alice and follows the rabbit (Fig. 5). Most of the sequences and characters of *Alice's Adventures* are incorporated, including a Father William who actually performs a back somersault and balances an eel on the end of his nose. The lobster quadrille scene was filmed on a rocky beach at Cape Ann on the Massachusetts coast. In this scene two tremendous

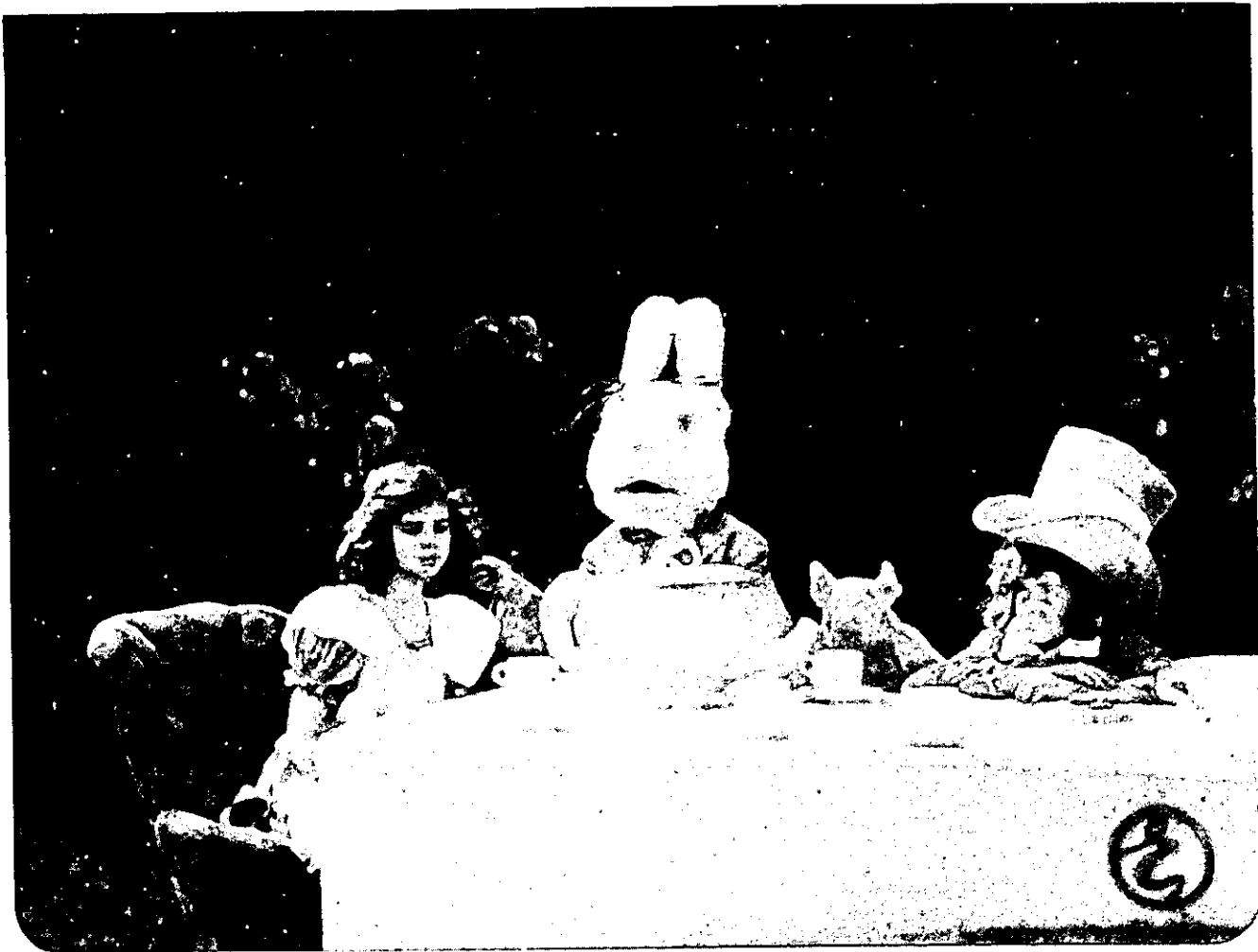


Fig. 3—1910 Edison Alice, *The Mad Tea-Party*

lobsters (with striped pants) come out of the pounding surf. On shore they meet a very sad Mock Turtle (Fig. 6).

This film is charming from beginning to end, with elaborate, as well as delightful, costuming. Actors who were midgets portrayed the animals so that Alice would always be taller than her friends. The use of natural surroundings throughout the film sets a tone totally missing in later productions. There is no attempt to have Alice change size, which is somewhat surprising considering the earlier films did include such changes. Interestingly, this highly successful film was directed by a newspaper editor whose only motion picture experience outside of *Alice* appears to have been as editor of British Government official war films.⁸ *Alice* was apparently exhibited in many different versions. The original contains both *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* sequences. Reviews at the time were most favorable, and as late as 1921 the film had a New York screening at Town Hall.

The silent film era ended with surprising suddenness in 1927 when the sound motion picture *The Jazz Singer* was exhibited amid much excitement. The first *Alice* portrayed with a sound track is a six-minute dance sequence from the 1930 film *Putting on the Ritz*. Joan Bennett is a beautiful Alice who goes through the looking glass and dances with characters from both *Alice* books, including a glamorous chorus



Fig. 4—1910 Edison Alice party

line of playing cards. The music was composed by Irving Berlin. Reviewers singled out the *Alice* sequence for special praise.

The first full-length "articulate" *Alice in Wonderland* was filmed in Fort Lee, New Jersey (the former capital of silent films) in 1931. The actors are not well known, and the sound techniques are abysmal. Added to these troubles, the rabbit proclaims his love for the Duchess and confesses that he stole the tarts for her!

A full-blown Hollywood production of *Alice* arrived in 1933. Paramount proudly proclaimed that the film had forty-six speaking parts, each played by "a well-known actor." Stars from Cary Grant to Baby LeRoy appeared in the film. Charlotte Henry, the film's Alice, was selected from seven thousand girls who applied for the part with urging from a national publicity campaign.

This film provides a bonanza for lovers of special effects. The illusion of Alice going through the looking glass is close to perfection. The ability to have a giant Alice pick up and inspect small live chessmen who squeal in frightened horror is remarkable, and a leisurely fall down the rabbit hole is skillfully accomplished. Growing and shrinking occur on four different occasions. Unfortunately, cylindrical lenses were used for three of these shots—a technique that causes Alice to visually undergo wild distortions while being contracted or expanded. In addition to the



Fig. 5—1915 *White Rabbit*

major feats called for in the books, the film also presents minor ones such as “drink me” bottles that suddenly appear, a Cheshire Cat that surprisingly leaves not only his grin but also his ears and eyes, a White Queen changing into a sheep, and a leg of mutton that is mobile and articulate. Befitting a Hollywood spectacle, live flamingos are used as croquet mallets.

In 1948 the puppeteer Lou Bunin made an *Alice in Wonderland* in France. The film had puppets for all characters except Alice. The English version arrived in the United States just as the Walt Disney *Alice* was being released. Annoyed, Disney went to court in an unsuccessful attempt to delay the showing of Bunin’s film. However, it never offered any real competition to Disney. The Disney film was first distributed in 1951 and again appeared on American screens in 1974.⁹ The critical reaction of audiences and reviewers in 1951 was generally negative, and at that time the film was not a financial success. Despite its early troubles, however, the impact of the film has been great. This is evidenced by Disney Enterprises’ ability to promote everything from Alice rides at Disneyland and DisneyWorld to Alice bibs for babies. The Big Golden Book of Walt Disney’s (mind you) “Alice in Wonderland” went through its twenty-fifth printing in 1974—one example of Disney’s imprint on the *Alice* image.



Fig. 6—1915 Mock Turtle filmed at Cape Ann, Mass.

The latest feature film adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* was produced by Joseph Shaftel in 1972. The film, in wide screen Technicolor, should have been a success since it is both visually beautiful and is laden with a cast of stars. The sets faithfully followed Tenniel and the dialogue is from the book. The songs, however, are not in the Carroll spirit and tend to ruin the film's continuity. The film was not well received in either England or America. It is now available for 16mm. rental, and is shown frequently on television.

Alice in Wonderland has always been a challenge for film producers. Every time there have been advancements in film techniques, an *Alice* has appeared sporting these improvements. Even though many of the productions have not been considered outstanding examples of film art, they have provided a powerful stimulus to continued interest in the Alice stories.

II

The following checklist shows the many forms taken by motion picture and television productions based on Carroll's stories. Some of the entries are attempts at

faithful presentation while others, to varying degrees, are "inspired by" Carroll's art. To those desiring further information, a limited number of reviews and secondary references are provided.

- 1903 *Alice in Wonderland*. Produced and directed by Cecil Hepworth. Filmed in Great Britain. Alice is played by May Clark. The film has sixteen scenes, all from *Alice's Adventures*. Running time: approximately ten minutes (one reel).
- 1910 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (A Fairy Comedy)*. Produced by the Edison Manufacturing Company, Orange, New Jersey. Alice is played by Gladys Hulette. The film has fourteen scenes, all from *Alice's Adventures*. Running time: approximately ten minutes (one reel). Reviewed: *N. Y. Dramatic Mirror*, 14 September 1910, p. 32. Full description with illustrations: *Edison Kinetogram*, 1 September 1910, p. 7. Description also in *Moving Picture World*, 3 September 1910, p. 533. Edwin S. Porter is often listed as the director of this film; however, George Pratt, Associate Curator of Motion Pictures at George Eastman House, says this is impossible since Porter left the Edison Company late in 1909 and the film did not appear until September 9, 1910.
- 1915 *Alice in Wonderland*. Produced by Nonpareil Feature Film Company, directed by W. W. Young, "picturized" by Dewitt C. Wheeler. Alice is played by Viola Savoy. The film as originally made contained scenes from *Alice's Adventures* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Running time: approximately fifty minutes (five reels). Reviewed: *The Moving Picture World*, 6 February 1915, p. 841; *Motography*, 20 February 1915, p. 307; *New York Times*, 22 March 1921, p. 15. Book illustrations from film: *Alice in Wonderland* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1918).
- 1930 *Alice in Wonderland*. Produced by John W. Considine, Jr., directed by Edward H. Sloman. Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. Joan Bennett is featured in this six-minute dance sequence from the film *Putting on the Ritz*. Eight- and sixteen-millimeter versions released by Nu-Art Films, Inc. *Putting on the Ritz* reviewed: *New York Times*, 15 February 1930, p. 15.
- 1931 *Alice in Wonderland*. Commonwealth Pictures Corporation. Screen adaptation by John E. Godson and Ashley Miller. Produced at the Metropolitan Studios, Fort Lee, New Jersey. Directed by "Bud" Pollard. Alice played by Ruth Gilbert. The first sound *Alice*. All scenes are from *Alice's Adventures*. Reviewed: *New York Times*, 28 December 1931, p. 22.
- 1932 *Alice in U.S. Land!* Paramount News. Newsreel of Mrs. Alice Liddell Hargreaves, eighty, arriving for one-hundredth anniversary celebration of Carroll's birth. Talks of trip down the river with "Mr. Dodgson." Her son, Caryl Hargreaves, and her sister, Rhoda Liddell, are identifiable. Filmed aboard the Cunard Lines *Berengaria* in New York harbor, April 29, 1932. Running time: seventy-five seconds.
- 1933 *Alice in Wonderland*. Paramount Productions. Produced by Louis D. Leighton, directed by Norman McLeod, screenplay by Joseph J. Mankiewicz and

- William Cameron Menzies. Music by Dimitri Tiomkin. Alice played by Charlotte Henry. An all-star cast of forty-six includes: W. C. Fields as Humpty Dumpty; Edward Everett Horton as the Mad Hatter; Cary Grant as the Mock Turtle; Gary Cooper as the White Knight; Edna May Oliver as the Red Queen; May Robson as the Queen of Hearts; and Baby LeRoy as the Deuce of Hearts. Scenes from *Alice's Adventures* and *Looking-Glass*. Running time: ninety minutes. Reviewed: *New York Times*, 23 December 1933, p. 19; *Time*, 22, No. 26 (December 25), p. 20; *Newsweek*, 30 December 1933, p. 30; *Nation*, 17 January 1934, p. 84. Book illustrations from film: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.); *Alice in Wonderland* (Racine, Wisconsin: Whitman Publishing Company, 1934)--tells the story as it is presented in the motion picture.
- 1933 *Betty in Blunderland*. Cartoon directed by Dave Fleischer. Animation by Roland Crandall and Thomas Johnson. Betty Boop follows *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* characters from a jigsaw puzzle via subway station down the rabbit hole. Running time: ten minutes.
- 1936 *Thru the Mirror*. Walt Disney Productions. A Mickey Mouse cartoon based on *Through the Looking-Glass*. "A brilliant short cartoon."¹⁰
- 1948 *Alice in Wonderland*. Produced in France at Victorine Studios by Lou Bunin. Directed by Marc Maurette and Dallas Bowers; script by Henry Myers, Edward Flisen, and Albert Cervin. Marionette animation by Lou Bunin. Alice played by Carol Marsh. Voices for puppets by Joyce Grenfell, Peter Bull, and Jack Train. The prologue, which shows Lewis Carroll's life at Christ Church, has Pamela Brown as Queen Victoria and Stanley Baker as Prince Albert. Color. Produced in French and English versions. Condensed version distributed by Castle Films. Exclusive of the prologue, all the characters are puppets except Alice, who is a live adult. Reviewed: *New York Times*, 27 July, 1951, p. 15.
- 1950 *Alice in Wonderland*. Television production shown on the Ford Theater in December 1950. Alice played by Iris Mann and the White Rabbit by Dorothy Jarnac.
- 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*. Walt Disney Productions. Production Supervisor, Ben Sharpsteen. Alice's voice by Kathryn Beaumont. Animation. Color. Sequences from *Alice's Adventures* and *Looking-Glass*. Running time: seventy-five minutes. (Available 8mm sound sequences are "The Mad Tea Party" and "Alice and the White Rabbit.") Reviewed: *New York Times*, 30 July, 1951, p. 12; *Saturday Review*, 11 August 1951, p. 30; *Time*, 6 August 1951, p. 69.
- 1955 *Sweapea Thru the Looking Glass*. King Features Syndicate cartoon. Executive Producer, Al Brodax. Directed by Jack Kinney. Color. Sweapea goes through a looking glass and falls down a golf hole into the "Wunnerland Golf Club."
- 1962 *Mad Gardner's Song*. Animation by Jacques Espagne. Produced in France. "Un délicieux film d'animation."¹¹
- 1966 *Alice of Wonderland in Paris*. Childhood Products Inc. Color. A cartoon about

- some adventures of Alice in Paris. Running time: fifty-two minutes.
- 1966 *Alice in Wonderland or What's A Nice Kid Like You Doing in a Place Like This.* Made for television. Hanna-Barbera Productions. Book by Bill Dana. Music and lyrics by Lee Adams and Charles Strauss. Color. Animation. Alice's voice by Janet Waldo; Cheshire Cat by Sammy Davis, Jr.; White Knight by Bill Dana; Queen by Zsa Zsa Gabor. Running time: fifty minutes. Alice follows her dog through a television tube.
- 1966 *Alice Through the Looking Glass.* Television production shown November 6, 1966, and rebroadcast November 22, 1974. Script by Albert Simmons, lyrics by Elsie Simmons, music by Moose Charlap. Judi Rolin as Alice; Jimmy Durante as Humpty Dumpty; Nanette Fabray as the White Queen; Agnes Moorehead as the Red Queen; Jack Palance as the Jabberwock; The Smothers Brothers as Tweedledum and Tweedledee; Ricardo Montalban as the White King. Running time: ninety minutes.
- 1966 *Alice in Wonderland.* BBC television production. Directed by Jonathan Miller. Relatively serious presentation of Wonderland as a Victorian social commentary. Grand production with a star cast: Sir John Gielgud as the Mock Turtle; Sir Michael Redgrave as the Caterpillar; Peter Sellers as the King; Peter Cook as the Hatter; Sir Malcolm Muggeridge as the Gryphon; Anne-Marie Mallik, a young schoolgirl, as Alice. Reviewed: Malcolm Muggeridge in *New Statesman*, 72 (December 23, 1966), 933; John Coleman, p. 947. Also discussed by Sibley and Benayoun; see notes 10 and 11.
- 1969 *Alice in Acidland.* Bernhard Films. Shown in adult film houses. Running time: sixty-seven minutes.
- 1969 *The Three Voices.* Amateur surrealist film produced by Peter Blundell-Jones. Shown at the Lewis Carroll Society, London, May 15, 1969. A film version of Carroll's poem first published in 1856.
- 1970 *Alice in Wonderland.* O.R.T.F. (French television) production. Directed by Jean-Christophe Averty. Burlesque with stunning visual and auditory overlay. Alice Sapritch and Francis Blanche as the King and Queen. Discussed by Benayoun; see note 11.
- 1972 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Executive Producer, Joseph Shaftel. Producer, Derek Horne. Director, William Sterling. Musical Director, John Barry. Lyricist, Don Black. Alice played by Fiona Fullerton. Peter Sellers is the March Hare, Dame Flora Robson is the Queen of Hearts, Dennis Price is the King of Hearts, and Sir Ralph Richardson is the Caterpillar. Color. Wide screen. A lavish production, visually beautiful. The Tenniel illustrations were faithfully followed. Sequences from *Alice's Adventures* and *Looking-Glass*. Running time: ninety minutes. Reviewed: *Washington Post*, 14 February 1973, p. F-1; *The Evening Star* and *Daily News* (Washington, D.C.), 14 February 1973, p. F-11. Book illustrations from film: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1973).

THE FILM COLLECTOR'S ALICE

- 1972 *Curious Alice*. Written, designed, and produced by Design Center Inc., Washington, D.C. Made for the National Institute of Mental Health. Color. Part of a drug course for elementary school children. A live Alice has a journey among animated characters. The Caterpillar smokes marijuana, the Mad Hatter takes LSD, the Dormouse uses barbituates, and the March Hare pops amphetamines. The White Rabbit is a leader already into drugs. The Cheshire Cat is Alice's conscience. Running time: approximately fifteen minutes.
- c.1972 *Jabberwocky*. Produced by Karky Film, Prague. Screenplay, design, and direction by Jan Svankmajer. This animation begins with a reading of "Jabberwocky." "Sequence of images composed of seemingly nonsense activities." Color. Running time: fourteen minutes.
- 1973 *Through the Looking-Glass*. BBC television production. Produced by Rosemary Hill; adapted and directed by James MacTaggart. Twelve-year-old Sarah Sutton as Alice; Brenda Bruce as the White Queen; Freddie Jones as Humpty Dumpty; Judy Parfitt as the Red Queen; and Richard Pearson as the White King. Reviewed: *The Sunday Times* (London), 30 December 1973, p. 34.

NOTES

1. See Rachael Low and Robert Manvell, *History of the British Film 1895-1906* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), Ch. 4.
2. I would like to thank Miss Elizabeth Hepworth, Executor of the Hepworth Estate, for her assistance and for permission to publish Figs. 1 & 2.
3. *Edison Kinetogram*, 1 September 1910, p. 9.
4. *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, 14 September 1910, p. 32.
5. Information about the Strand Theatre is contained in Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art* (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 53.
6. *The Moving Picture World*, 6 February 1915, p. 841.
7. W. W. Young, "How Alice Got Into the Wonderland of 'Movies,'" in the program to a benefit performance of the 1915 *Alice in Wonderland* film at Carnegie Hall, 5 April 1920. A copy of the program is in the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
8. *Who's Who in America 1928-1929*, p. 2294.
9. Brian Sibley has a complete discussion of the Disney production in his article "A Californian Yankee at the Court of Queen Alice," *Jabberwocky: The Journal of the Lewis Carroll Society*, 2, No. 2 (1973), 5-14.
10. Brian Sibley, *Microscopes and Megalosopes* (Kent, England: privately printed, 1974), p. 4.
11. Robert Benayoun, "Tout ce que peint mon imagination," *Lewis Carroll*, ed. Henri Parisot (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1971), p. 98.

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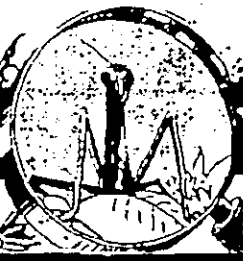
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