

# Knight Letter

*The Lewis Carroll Society of North America*



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**THE ROUNTREE  
ILLUSTRATIONS**

Mark Burstein

Many collectors are a bit baffled when it comes to Harry Rountree and his *Alices*: were there two sets of illustrations? Three? More?

We asked Michael Pirie, the world's foremost expert on Rountree, who is currently producing a bibliography of his work for the Imaginative Book Illustration Society (IBIS). He tells us that Rountree's first illustrations for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, all 92 of them, were in color and came out in an edition published by the Scottish publisher Thomas Nelson in 1908. There were five binding-color variants: blue, cream, green, gray, and red. (This lavishly illustrated edition, in a blue cover, was published in an exquisite facsimile by Calla, a high-end imprint of Dover, in 2011, and carries my highest recommendation.) Its twelve full-page plates especially, but not exclusively, came to form the basis of the many and varied editions published by Nelson up until the mid-1920s. Individual smaller plates, such as that of the caterpillar on the mushroom, also appeared in several other of their many *Wonderland* editions.

Then Thomas Nelson had Rountree adapt some of these original 1908 illustrations into black-and-white line drawings for later editions, beginning in 1925 with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland with Bruno's Revenge*, a small book of 158 pages with red cloth boards.

In 1928, another Scottish publisher, William Collins, commissioned him to illustrate a completely new edition of *Wonderland*, and this time *Through the Looking Glass* as well, for which he produced several new color illustrations and a multitude of line drawings. The style and accessibility of these new illustrations led to many subsequent editions being published by their imprints "Col-



lins Clear-Type Press" and "The Children's Press" throughout the 1930s, '40s, & '50s.

Now we know.

Many thanks to Michael Pirie and Selwyn Goodacre.

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*What Would Alice Do?: Advice  
for the Modern Woman*  
Pan Macmillan, 2016  
ISBN-13: 978-1447288527

Back in the '90s, WWJD ("What Would Jesus Do?") became a grassroots evangelical catchphrase, soon co-opted into the popular culture as a "snow-clone"—"What Would Brian Boitano Do?" "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" all the way down to "What Would Scooby-Doo?"—so I suppose it was inevitable that we would end up with a book called *What Would Alice Do?* Macmillan UK is the publisher, TV "presenter" Lauren Laverne wrote the foreword, and the small, square book is a macédoine of quotes from the books, with ancillary advice like "Be firm with yourself."

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*Alice in a World of Wonderlands:  
The Translations  
of Lewis Carroll's Masterpiece*

Jon A. Lindseth,  
General Editor,  
& Alan Tannenbaum,  
Technical Editor

Oak Knoll Press in cooperation  
with LCSNA, 2015

3 Volumes

ISBN 978-1584563310

Jan Susina

The three-volume *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* is an immense and comprehensive labor of love.

An impressive scholarly accomplishment, the set will serve as a valuable reference tool for those interested in the thorny issues of literary translation. It stands as a testament to the global readership of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

*Alice in a World of Wonderlands* involved the work of 250 volunteers under the editorship of Jon Lindseth and Alan Tannenbaum, who also curated the "Alice in a World of Wonderlands" exhibition at the Grolier Club in New York City. This ambitious study echoes the collective and collaborative research accomplished by the "Great Team" of nineteenth-century English folklorists who incorporated contributions from individuals across the British Empire; folklore scholar Richard Dorson examined this feat in *The British Folklorists* (1968). The impulse to record, categorize, and classify the known world is very Victorian in nature—think of the nineteenth-century explorers, the work of the Early English Text Society, or *The Oxford English Dictionary*—so it seems fitting that such a Victorian text as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* should receive a similar comprehensive treatment. While this study is for both academic and general readers, the intended audience is primarily those who have a very serious, perhaps slightly obsessive, interest in Carroll and the many translations of his most famous children's book. These carefully researched volumes will be housed in reference departments and rare book and private libraries. These are not going to be books to take to bed for light reading.

One of the first things that I did upon receiving *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* was to stack the three volumes next to Warren Weaver's *Alice in Many Tongues: The Translations of Alice in Wonderland* (1964). Weaver's book was the inspiration for the Lewis Carroll Society of North America to com-

pile the current collection as a way to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. By itself, *Volume One: Essays* dwarfs Warren's modest volume; with 837 pages, *Volume One: Essays* is six times the length of Weaver's 147-page study. In *Alice in Many Tongues*, Weaver was able to locate 336 editions of *Wonderland* in 44 languages. Since that time, the publications of translations of *Alice* books have greatly increased. Those changes are ably addressed in Emer O'Sullivan's "Warren Weaver's *Alice in Many Tongues*: A Critical Appraisal." It seems fitting that this expansive, three-volume study is dedicated to Warren Weaver; his "The Universal Child," the opening chapter from his pioneering study of *Alice* translations, is reprinted in *Volume One: Essays*.

The three volumes certainly function well as an interlocking set, but each appears to have a slightly different audience in mind. *Volume One: Essays* is the most accessible to the general reader. The strong selection of "Preliminary Essays" and those essays that appear in the "Illustrations," "Additional Essays," and "Appendices and Back Matter" sections are well written and highly informative. They help frame the biographical and translations issues and details found in *Volume Two: Back-Translations* and *Volume Three: Checklists*. The 166 essays on the various translations of *Wonderland* into different languages, dialects, alphabets, or constructed languages vary in quality and are often written by the translators. There is a repetitive nature to these essays, in that the writers address the challenges faced in producing a translation of Carroll's text that stays true to the spirit of Carroll's original book, but is also accessible and understandable in a different language and culture. The two editors wisely quote Umberto Eco from his *Experiences in Translation*: "Every sensible and

rigorous theory of language shows that a perfect translation is an impossible dream." So, in the end, the attempt to create the perfect translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a Snark hunt. Given that Martin Gardner's multiple editions of *The Annotated Alice* have provided better understanding and clarification for many contemporary readers in English of Carroll's supple and subtle language and Victorian references, it is understandable that a translator faces significantly greater challenges and problems when translating *Wonderland* into another language.

Carroll's playful use of language and frequent use of parodies, puns, and poetry are the major, and seemingly universal, challenges that translators confront. To overcome these problems, translators devise various clever poetic and linguistic alternatives and tricks. Characters' names are changed. Poems that Carroll parodied are changed to verses that will be recognized by readers of the other language. Pun-parallels become elusive. Translation is showed to be as much an art as a science; a literal word-for-word translation can result in a surprisingly confused and/or dull text that lacks much of the original humor. Yet one begins to wonder—even though creative translations are necessary, as they take into account the varying social, cultural and emotional value of words—is something lost



in the translation? Jean-Luc Fauconnier, who translated the text into Walloon, a Romance language used in parts of Belgium, suggests that translating a text such as *Wonderland* is "a dangerous exercise where one continually goes from a very accurate translation to an adaptation that is sometimes a long way from the original." When does a translation become an adaptation of *Wonderland*? Is it really a translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when the protagonist's name is no longer Alice?

*Volume Two: Back-Translations* shows the challenges that translators face when they attempt to put *Wonderland* into a different linguistic landscape. The theory that is outlined in *Volume One: Essays* is put into practice in *Volume Two: Back-Translations*. Here, translators were asked to translate a sizable section of "A Mad Tea-Party" from chapter 7 of *Wonderland* without referring to Carroll's original text. The results show that "literal translations are virtually impossible and would not be understandable to the target audience." For example, translators frequently mention problems with cultural issues involving items such as the pig or wine. Further, the editors summarize that the back-translations reveal two major models of presentation: those languages that use conversational punctuation and those languages that present the speaker's name and quotation without special punctuation. But it seems to me that while *Volume Two: Back-Translations* is a rich source of information for linguists and those interested in the art of translation, it gets a bit repetitive in terms of making its point. Does *Volume Two: Back-Translations* really need to emphasize the impossibility of literal translations of *Wonderland* with examples in languages from Afrikaans to Zulu? An attempt to read *Volume Two: Back-Translations* is like reading a dictionary. The information it pres-

ents is of great value to the scholar who wishes to see the challenges various translators encounter—for example in Hindi, Hebrew, or Hungarian—but I suspect most readers will confine their reading the essays in *Volume One: Essays*.

*Volume Three: Checklists* is a masterful compilation of the various editions of the two *Alice* books, including more than 7,600 editions of *Wonderland*, 1,500 editions of *Looking-Glass*, and 650 combined editions of the two *Alice* books. It also includes a list of libraries that house some of the more difficult-to-locate editions. This volume evolved from Joel Birenbaum's database of approximately 2,100 non-English editions of *Alice*, a bibliography he has developed over the years, which was initially based on Weaver's study. *Volume Three: Checklists* is a godsend for bibliophiles, booksellers, and rare book librarians. Also in *Volume Three: Checklists*, Alan Tannenbaum and Clare Imholtz include a shorter, but equally useful, list of the various illustrators of the *Alice* books, which includes 1,201 unique illustrators.

As previously mentioned, *Volume One: Essays* features essays focused on illustrations, including Nilce Pereira's discussion of illustration as a form of translation and a discussion of Carrollian comics by Byron Sewell and Mark Burstein. Following *Alice's* lead in *Wonderland*, where she notes the importance of illustrations, *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* does not skimp on illustrations. *Volume One: Essays* includes 15 pages in full color of various *Alice* covers from around the world. The endpapers of the three volumes also feature an elegant, sepia-colored world map by Connie Brown so that readers can connect the 174 translations to their appropriate language locations.

In 1866, Carroll wrote to his publisher that "Friends here seem to think the book is untranslat-

able." Yet, this massive study of the many subsequent translations of *Wonderland* shows how wrong friends can be. It is fascinating to learn that while *Wonderland* has been published in 174 languages and 7,609 editions, its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*, has had, in comparison, a more modest number of translations—into 65 languages and 1,530 editions. One of the most illuminating essays in these books is Edward Wakeling's "Translations of *Alice* during the Lifetime of Lewis Carroll," which examines Carroll's active participation in the translations for the German, French, and Italian editions of *Wonderland*. Wakeling also points out that these translations of *Wonderland* had very modest sales. By 1876, Carroll wrote Macmillian asking that the publisher stop advertising them, since their sales did not pay for the advertising. While there were translations of *Wonderland* into seven languages during Carroll's lifetime, all of them were in European languages, and there seems to have been no translation of *Looking-Glass* done while Carroll was alive. Selwyn Goodacre notes in "The Real Flood of Translations" that the increased number of translations of *Alice* began to emerge in the twentieth century. In the 1950s, the *Alice* books were beginning to be recognized around the world as children's classics, and illustrators other than Tenniel were asked to add to the texts. Goodacre also points out that the early Dutch editions from 1874 and 1875 were the first editions that included colored adaptations of Tenniel's illustrations, giving Carroll the idea for using color in *The Nursery "Alice"* in 1889. For Goodacre, whether Weaver's *Alice in Many Tongues* had any direct influence on the flood of translations is an open question.

After reviewing all the material found in *Alice in a World of Wonderlands*, one might assume that *Wonderland* is the most translated

book in the world, but Jon Lindseth and Stephanie Lovett, in "The Most Translated English Novel," explore the difficulties confirming that claim for *Wonderland* or any other title. Using information provided by Wikipedia, they suggest that John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with approximately 190 translations, has the best claim to be the most translated English novel. They are confident that *Wonderland* is the second most translated English novel at this date, and that Carroll's book far exceeds the number of translations of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, and Hans Christian Andersen's *Andersen's Fairy Tales*, which have all been mentioned as the most frequently translated text. As to the often-stated claim that Shakespeare and Carroll are the most frequently translated English authors, once again Lindseth and Lovett acknowledge the difficulties in obtaining reliable documentation to confirm this statement. But the careful documentation found in *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* confirms the global interest in the *Alice* books; *Wonderland* is certainly one of the most frequently translated English novels in the world.

Just as Carroll warns of the dangers of "padding" in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno*, I think there are some sections of *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* that come perilously close to that. There is no question that Morton Cohen's *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (1995) is the standard biography of the author. Since *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* appeals to *Alice* enthusiasts, most, if not all, will be familiar with Cohen's masterful biography. Consequently, the two essays by Cohen that are brief biographies of Carroll and Alice Liddell seem redundant and unnecessary, as does his discussion of the *Alice* books as classic texts.

The publication of *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* is intended

as a significant contribution to the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; yet, the ghost of the ill-fated *Alice 125* in Australia of 1990 haunts some of these pages. As Jon Lindseth explains, the ambitious goal of that earlier project was to display 125 translations of *Wonderland*. Although the catalogue for *Alice 125: A Celebration* was published, its listing of 125 translations revealed that some never existed, were only fragmentary, or, in some cases, had not yet been begun. In reading the various entries by the translators in *Alice in a World of Wonderlands*, there are a surprising number of references to forthcoming translations. It seems to me that if one is attempting to make an accurate account of a book's translations, the study should only consider those translations that are completed and published. It appears, on closer inspection, that some of the translations that are discussed are promising works-in-progress rather than completed translations. I may be humor impaired, but I also felt that Byron Sewell's spoof on translations, with an ironic discussion of his translation of *Wonderland* into the imaginary Zumorigénflit language, was unnecessary and

inappropriate for what is primarily a serious scholarly endeavor.

*Alice in a World of Wonderlands* declares itself to be "the most extensive analysis ever undertaken examining one English language novel in so many other languages." Michael Suarez in "Alice and the Global Bibliography: Reading the Whole Book" praises the three-volume study as "a remarkably comprehensive bibliography of the translations of *Alice* in 174 different languages and dialects." He suggests that the three-volume set can serve as a model for transnational translation studies. This is a monumental study of the translations of the *Alice* books, but like all monuments, it will eventually age over time. Additional translations of the *Alice* books will appear, and perhaps there will be updated editions in the future reflecting even more translations. One can only imagine the size of the updated edition of *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* in 50 or 100 years, given the continued global interest in the *Alice* books. Let a hundred new translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* bloom.

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*Beware the Little White Rabbit:  
An Alice-in-Wonderland-  
Inspired Anthology*  
Shannon Delany,  
Judith Graves (eds.)  
Leap Books, 2015  
ISBN 978-1616030421

Rose Owens

When you turn 150 years old, it's only natural that everyone who has grown up with you, engaging with you and sharing your life, would want to celebrate, to shout your story from the rooftops. So it is with Alice and her many adventures, and the multiplicity of her fans all have their own take on the matter. Thirteen reimaginings of Carroll's classic tale have come together in a young adult collection by the name of *Beware the Little White Rabbit*.

Alice is alive in these stories, battling the world around her with ingenuity, street smarts, and a palpable sense of wonder. Some of the stories are looser than others with their interpretations, with subtle allusions to the original tale, and these are the more successful stories. The readings that forge their own path, not relying heavily on Carroll's work, are fresh, intriguing, and dynamic. In op-

