

Alice in Antiworld

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Abstract

This paper describes why Lewis Carroll completed *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, the other Alice tale, in 1872, eight years after the psychological breakup with the Liddell family in 1864. Although it is often regarded as the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to entertain more children, they are quite different in terms of the roles of Alice. Even a simple comparison of the two titles implies that Carroll's attitude was inordinately intentional and purposeful in the latter. The reason why Carroll allowed such an asymmetry in spite of his usual logical and geometrical thinking is worth examining. Alice crawled into the world of chess through the looking glass with an active voice. Lewis Carroll successfully made Alice eternally reflecting in the alternate dimension. This study has focused on the contrivances to reveal his deeper mentality buried under that of the Victorian literary figure and diligent mathematician with childlike curiosity.

Keywords : Curiosity, Looking-Glass, Dream, Chess, Memory, Voice

1. Curiosity

She put the Mirror into his hand. Curiosity induced him to take it, and Love, to wish that Antonio might appear.

Matthew Lewis, *the Monk*

Curiosity is the first element to understand the hidden message of *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (hereinafter, referred to *Through the Looking-Glass*).

Lewis Carroll (hereinafter, referred to as Carroll), pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a mathematician at Christ Church, Oxford, was educated at home while he was a small boy. It was 1880 when he reached 48 years old that the compulsory education was extended to children of age 10 by law in the UK.

It was fortunate for Carroll to learn individually during his first eleven years, from 1832 to 1843, in his birth place, the village of

Daresbury, approximately 11 kilometers from Warrington in the country of England. The nature around his house was a good textbook, and it is worth mentioning that he grew up in the neighborhood with plenty of oaks.

Throughout the British history oaks were crucial for shipping and building. "In that oak-hard boat" mentioned in *Beowulf* conveys current readers their tangible value in ancient times, which was also the roots of the symbolism.

The oak was recognized as the national tree of England, but it was the Celtic that observed the sanctity of oak trees, dating back to the days long before the Saxons came to Britain and made it England. Throughout his boyhood the mysterious nature of oaks could have stimulated Carroll's imagination when fairies were still believed to exist.

What stimulated his curiosity with more traceable impact was the sharp contrast between a newly built construction enabled by the

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Industrial Revolution and a very old historical structure. One of the most impressive memories for Carroll in his early years was probably his close encounters with the two magnificent man-made creations during his three-day family trip to the island of Anglesey, approximately 120 kilometers away from his home. Their horse-drawn carriage steered across Menai Suspension Bridge completed in 1826, which was a technical manifestation of the advancing civilization, and then Carroll was provided with a chance to explore the dark maze-like passages of Beaumaris Castle on the island constructed in the 13th Century, which was an outstanding ancient relic.

It was no wonder his naïve consciousness absorbed not only the practical power of well-organized construction based on precise calculations that could make the huge artificial structure possible, which would par with the power of oak but also the profound significance of the misty past still preserved in awe.

Thanks to the journey, Carroll could have picked up *Beowulf* some time later. Since the modern English version of the legendary epic had just been published in 1837, it was not surprising that one copy was purchased for his home library.

Carroll was an ardent and curious reader and his reading experience in childhood should also be mentioned. Once back at home he had easy access to literary works in his home library. Reading was a vital part of his self-learning. His bookish habit expanded his curiosity further to find another world preserved in written forms. According to the record written by his great-aunt Mar, Carroll read *the Pilgrim's Progress* completed in 1678 at the age of 7. The monster with dragon-like wings that he encountered during his reading of the story could be regarded as prototype of "Jabberwocky".

The Pilgrim's Progress, apart from its

adventurous aspects, also attracted Carroll's linguistic interest, discovering word forms in shift through the formation of Modern English and also John Bunyan's allegorical use of ordinary nouns with emoji-like manipulation to express human characters.

The two-part structure of the religious story, although the numbers of chapters are not precisely matched, seeped into his unconsciousness, and emerged several years later as the mathematically well-balanced formats of the two Alice tales.

The word "progress" in the title also intrigued his imagination even more at the advent of the prosperity of the Victorian age. The religious travelog led him to liner thinking, enabling him to form the basic understanding of Euclidian geometry along with the Christian rectilinear consciousness on advancing time. To Carroll what "progress" meant was a one-dimensional numerical line that can proceed into eternal heaven.

Getting back to the natural setting around his house, Carroll's interest in insects and small animals are reported by his brother-in-law, Stuart Dodgson Collingwood in his vivid descriptions: *Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*. Carroll's intimate play with the small creatures turned into artificially deformed organisms in *Through the Looking-Glass* such as Horse-fly and Bread-and-butterfly. They are not mere imaginative products based on word play but technical transformation through his Descartes-like mechanical observations of the insects in his natural kingdom, which was the cabinet of curiosity for him.

His use of a magnifying-glass is not mentioned in any one of the books on Lewis Carroll and his own works, either, to the best of my knowledge, but it is natural that we believe he sometimes made the best use of it, considering a historical report that looking into a magnifying-glass was

popular among the British upper class in the 18th Century and a psychological statement that there are no boys who are not interested in a magnifying glass.

Enlarged images through the convex lens must have provided him with a chance to imagine scales and sizes in nature. From the micro-world point of view, the span of human life could have seemed to be eternally long to immature Carroll. The magnifying-glass was his first contrivance that physically and scientifically widened his perspective into another different world coexisting invisibly with his own. It is the world where mass is diminished.

At the same time, Carroll had another different world at home. When he looked at a mirror he found himself at the opposite side of the flat lens. It was also the other world on which his figure and everything around him were inverted.

2. Looking-Glass

The Mirror world is essentially different from ours.

Frank Close, *Lucifer's Legacy*

Mirror image was a powerful tool for human beings to reconfirm their identity from the time immemorial. The episode of Narcissus was so meaningful that his name metamorphosed into a psychologically accepted term to express self-love. In the famous tragic Greek myth, the surface of clear water in a fountain worked as a reflecting lens. It was a two-dimensional illusion, but to Narcissus it was a different identity that physically existed in the water.

In this way the word “mirror” has been associated with “mirage”, which is optical illusion of water in a desert. It appears naturally even though a viewer does not want it to happen. Similarly reflecting image is the function of a

mirror: spontaneous visual representation of the pseudo reality with left and right reversed.

That is why Carroll chose “looking-glass” for the title *Through the Looking-Glass* instead of “Through the Mirror.” Grammatically speaking, its spelling is just one common combination of an adjective with a noun similar to that of magnifying-glass, and in either case, it implies the intention of a person who holds the glass device to look further. What was more necessary for him in her second adventure was to impress more positive attitude of Alice on readers even before they start reading the story. “Mirror” was just inadequate for that purpose without the active gerund to express the intention of a user.

In the story the looking-glass is a large mirror attached to the wall above the fireplace as depicted in the illustration by Tenniel. It is impossible for Alice to carry it around unlike the magnifying-glass, but Alice intentionally, although she does not have to do so, looks into the other world through the framed mirror.

A similar attempt by a story teller can be witnessed in the title of Edward Gorey's selection of his favorite ghost and supernatural short stories. It is *The Haunted Looking Glass*. Readers need some courage to step into the weird dimensions through the looking-glass presented by the anthologist.

Another linguistic interpretation could analyze that it was no wonder Carroll picked up the former expression unconsciously because wealthy citizens during the Victorian Era would prefer “looking-glass” to “mirror”. The latter was a term mainly used by indigent workers in those days according to a lexicographical study. One such comparative evidence is “A fresh and healthy portrait the looking-glass presented...”, quoted from the first paragraph of Chapter 6 in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Charles Dickens's unfinished novel at the time of his death in 1870.

Since his childhood Carroll had been

interested in horizontally adverse appearances on the looking-glass. His pastime of playing with mirror image of handwritten words was well-documented in his diary and letters. His favorite prank on words has invited readers to uncanny experience to decipher the Jabberwocky poem whose words are mirrored at their first glimpse. Its message is not in this world.

The mirror image is a contradiction to the natural flow of English sentences called right-branching that settles on the sequence of words, the main subject described first, and additional information followed.

The adverse flow of information is the same phenomenon as the negative integers in a Euclidean number line.



Mathematically speaking, a negative world extends left-branching beyond zero. To Carroll the reflecting lens functioned as the dividing point of zero in the number line.

The magnifying-glass led him into the shrinking world into abyss while the looking-glass enticed him into an antiworld where everything is adversely shown. He naturally assumed that even time could move backward there.

While magical aspects of mirror could not be ignored even during the Industrial Revolution, Carroll was intelligent enough to expel the legendary and sometimes demonic image of mirror and to utilize its supernatural element unsensationally to present a familiar gateway to a more plausible and approachable dimension that almost every child can experience. It was a common looking-glass in the ordinary life setting to make Alice step into a dream world for the second time. She did not fall but jumped down as she had intended to this time.

3. Dream

I dread sleeping; my dreams appall me.

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

“Sleep hath its own world, and it is often a lifelike as the other”, wrote Carroll on 9th of February, 1856 in his diary.

In 1862 another new technology turned “dream” into “reality” by the name of “phantasmagoria” 60 years after the word came into English. It was the year when John Henry Pepper, English engineer, demonstrated the illusionary effect in an exhibition in London. The viewers witnessed ghosts in front of their eyes. It was the first performance of the famous Pepper's ghost, which has been referred to as partial inspiration to Carroll's imagination.

Behind this optical miracle was the technical design created by Henry Dircks, the other English engineer. The technique was named “Dircksian Phantasmagoria” after his name.

Carroll chose “phantasmagoria” as the title of his poem published in 1869. It presents a narrative discussion between a little ghost and “I”. The ghost said, “In every way, to fear the light, As Men to fear the dark.” While Carroll working on this poem, he was aware of darkness in which people feel fear, sleep and dream and ghosts live. Here again the duality lurking in nature to his mind; light and dark.

As far as the literary setting is concerned, the story development in a dream such as that of *the Pilgrim's Progress* is so banal that if the two Alice tales had been produced as mere fantasy for children, they would not have been read by all walks of people, studied by literature majors, and anatomized by academicians and psychologists.

“...but in dreams, perhaps everyone is a novelist.” is a convincing statement written by Stephen King in one of his terrifying novels: *Bag of Bones* to show that a dream was not a

prospective approach to entertainment Alice for the second time.

Carroll, however, needed the dream world, the same setting as in the first story to make her complete the mission to stay in eternity not as a different figure but as the unchanged icon to soothe his crave for returning to his unforgettable initial friendship with Alice Liddell. Another reading experience affected his approach.

Reading famous *Wuthering Heights* at the age of 24 was a remarkable experience. He wrote down his impression on the novel in his diary on 21st of May, 1856; "Heathcliff and Catharine are original and most powerfully drawn idealities: one cannot believe that such human beings ever existed: they have far more of the fiend in them."

Their extensive emotionality was probably embarrassing for adult Carroll who was still naïve. He discovered Catherine, gave birth to a daughter, who became the other Catherine. Even after "Mother Catherine" died the story continued with "Daughter Catherine" as the main character. Although he did not mention this sequence of love affairs in his diary, he must have been disgusted by the cyclical development of the story.

Several years later, when Carroll started to work on *Through the Looking-Glass*, he found it hard to insert the same emotion as that of Heathcliff into the new story because Alice was eternally a lovely girl to him even though Alice Liddell had been gradually growing up and been out of his sight.

Under such mental conflict it was crucial for Carroll to contrive a more mesmerizing trick to let her be involved in his second attempt.

A game of chess was prepared for Alice to work as a piece to win the game on the checkerboard as the second setting. The metaphoric arrangements of pieces were clear. They unveiled an exact mirror reflection of the

pieces aligned on the opposite side.

4. Chess

A God endgame is thus an endgame that only God could understand; it is simply not intelligible to human beings.

Peter Dear, *The Intelligibility of Nature*

Itemized below are Carroll's memos on chess in his diary.

- Spent a good deal of the day watching the "Chess Tourney". 10 August, 1866
- Received from Vincent 250 copies of the blank registers for chess games - chess is the family occupation at present, consultation-games are most interesting, far better than the ordinary single game,...3 September, 1866
- Left Oxford by the 8.25 for Birmingham... We had to wait an hour at Normanton, when I brought out my in status quo chess-board, and had a game with one of my travelling companions. 24 December, 1866

He must have been fascinated with the game of chess since his childhood partly because it is a logical mind game and partly because it does not require much talking, which often made him stammer.

It is a silent indoor game, but it is a psychological, intelligent and strategic battle between two parties. On a checkerboard with 64 squares the players must move their 6 types of pieces, 16 in total according to their functions under the strict rules.

What Carroll learned on the checkerboard was that to win the game serial analysis of all possible outcomes of each movement is required.

As his manifestation that chess is a very important motif for *Through the Looking-Glass*, he presented one problem of chess to readers at the outset of the story just before they are about to read it. It is the instruction to make Alice to

join the game and win in eleven moves. Since it was too complicated for ordinary readers Carroll added some helpful explanation to its 1896 version.

In the story Alice started as a White Pawn, the weakest piece, went through several odd experiences and finally captured the Red Queen at the end. Alice completed her mission and returned to her life again to find herself holding her kitten which was the Red Queen in the dream chess world. She had been talking to her little cat before she went through the looking-glass.

From the strict view point of chess players the actions of characters in the story are not always consistent with the chess rules. According to the sidebar comment in *The Annotated Alice* one movement of the White Queen to get away from Alice is an illegal move in an orthodox chess game.

The value of the story, however, has not been undervalued at all. The chess was the second contrivance to let Alice complete her mission on behalf of Alice Liddell, who had already grown up to stay away from the reach of Carroll. "Alice seems changed a good deal, and hardly for the better -probably going through the usual awkward stage of transition.", wrote Carroll on 11th of May, in 1865, when he saw her at the age of 13 in the quadrangle of his college. It was two years before he started to work on *Through the Looking-Glass*.

What Carroll needed most in his miserable years was the adverse flow of time to return to their golden summer afternoon, which was unattainable in his real life. He made Alice astonished at "living backward". She found the adverse order of incidences when she had a talk with the White Queen in Chapter V.

The chessboard, although it is a simple geometric 8-and-8 grid checkerboard with limited space on it, has a profound message. The

simple multiplication of 8 times 8 to produce the total number of squares on the board is a metaphor to imply eternity.

Possible combinations of piece movements are astronomical and beyond the reasoning of human beings and only artificial intelligence can step in the realm of divinity, where accurate, efficient and strategic judgment based on the move of its opponent is crucial to win the game. The chess board is a mind-boggling space where two players struggle to find better actions from among the unlimited choices.

As a mathematician who was a voracious reader as well, Carroll might have considered number 8 in a more spiritual way. Visual sophism could reach infinity symbol ∞ , a 90 degree turn of 8. It also symbolizes a dimension beyond nature according to Gematria, Hebrew numerology.

This remark is not out of the question when Carroll's mentality toward Alice Liddell is taken into consideration during his writing *Through the Looking-Glass*.

His subconscious mind yearning for little Alice manipulated his curious, mathematical, and linguistically creative mind to transform growing Alice into the juvenile girl again, who was his own Queen in his own kingdom once. To ordinary Alice fans the chess story was her progression to reach the higher status of the game, but it was her retrogression as far as the mentality of Carroll is concerned, into his passed memory domain, which was the driving force to make the *Through the Looking-Glass* possible.

5. Memory

...; why we remember the past and not the future;...

Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*

Alice was confused with the comment of the

White Queen regarding the inversed sequence of time in the looking-glass world ; It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen replied. "What sort of things do you remember best?" Alice ventured to ask. "Oh, things that happened the week after next,," the Queen replied in a careless tone.

Carroll changed the arrow of time intentionally to emphasize the opposite mirror image, and the White Queen was the manifestation of his psychology that his lost happy moments might be rewound to the present.

The flow of time associated Carroll with the river flow against which he rowed the boat with the Liddell sisters on a sunny day in July, 1862. *The Time Machine*, a famous science fiction novella by H. G. Wells was not published yet, but a simple and similar approach could revive his memory and make it everlasting.

His photography froze the time of Alice Liddell successfully but her still figures did not express Carroll's emotions when the motion picture technology was not put into practical use.

In *Through the Looking-Glass* Carroll presented the evoking poem at the end to express his final farewell to Alice Liddell.

Carroll wished that he could travel back to the days when Alice was his beloved partner. The season was summer.

In reality, however, Alice became one of the common teenage girls. His brilliant memory had faded, and his mental state had been trapped in winter since he lost a chance to invite Alice Liddell to another boating trip.

November 4 is the day when *Through the Looking-Glass* starts and it is one day before the Guy Fawkes Day. Alice says in Chapter 1, "Never mind, Kitty, we'll go and see the bonfire to-morrow."

November sounds hardly winter, but it is no longer autumn in the UK. It is a season for cold

winds to start to blow. It is also the moment to feel solitude. Comfortably curled up in a corner of the great armchair, Alice was thinking about sleeping till summer comes, hearing snowing against the windowpane. It was a substitute twitter from Carroll.

Carroll's memory turned into the emotional poem at the closing section of *Through the Looking-Glass*. It sounds like an elegy and was ingeniously and invisibly dedicated to Alice Liddell. Reading the initial letters of the poem lines vertically finds her full name; Alice Pleasance Liddell. Carroll's voice toward Alice was articulately woven to be witnessed, reconfirmed, and shared.

6. Voice

...it was due to the darkness of the room that I focused so much on his voice,...

Marie Brennan, *A Natural History of Dragons*

Voice was the only mode for daily communication before the ancient civilizations invented writing. Enchanting and rhythmic voices of Sirens lured nearby sailors to shipwreck.

Even today voice is still an effective, powerful, and sometimes magical tool to send messages.

"Now, Kitty, let's consider who it was that dreamed it all?" is the question that Carroll asks every reader who has shared the same experiences with Alice in the story to conclude *Through the Looking-Glass*. As I mentioned in the abstract, Carroll put her in an active voice in the title. The active voice was presented in the form of her question and the subject word turned into *you*, italicized for emphasis, so that the readers will keep thinking about her innocent inquiry as a recurrent memory, especially when they look into a mirror.

It seems that Alice completed her mission in

the chess, but she had been assigned additional and everlasting task by Carroll to stay in the minds of the readers to live forever.

Photography was the tool that Carroll relied on for this purpose during his honeymoon period with Alice, but he finally realized that photos would be static. Alice in the wonderland, the first story setting, was also passive, often influenced by the other characters and strange phenomena.

Carroll gave up photography in 1880, when Alice Liddell married at the age of twenty-eight. It was ten years before a motion picture film camera was invented in France.

If the cinematography had been materialized years earlier, Carroll would have jumped to the new technology and produced motion pictures of active Alice.

The maliciousness of technological history, however, persuaded Carroll to finish *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which Alice turned out to be more active and reflecting. She aggressively moved according to the instruction of Carroll in the eleven moves to become the Queen, and the final move was to present the question to contemporary and future readers, which made her mission completed in the twelfth moves, corresponding to the number of the chapters again, doubling the perfect number six.

Alice left her voice, and it has been preserved both in the dream world which consists of darkness and in the mirror world which could be made up of antiparticles.

In this way Carroll successfully captured Alice in spacetime named literature not in a conventional way but in a mathematical and optical way so that her eternal presence would be discovered by curious future researches through the scientists' progress.

Her experiences have already intrigued and mesmerized some astrophysicists such as Michio Kaku and Paul Davies who try to delve into the

mystery of antiworld. Alice has been and will be a guiding light that can assist them in exploring the truth buried deep in the darkness-dominated universe.

In real life Carroll, the creator of Alice, was a miserable loser in terms of failing to keep romantic relationship with the girl he loved and admired most, but the day will come when the hidden message he left through the voice of Alice will be highly evaluated.

"You see Kitty, it *must* have been either me or the Red Queen. He was part of my dream, of course - but then I was part of his dream, too!" She reached her own conclusion, but asked readers which the dreamer is.

The voice of Alice echoes eternally in the world of looking-glass, the other side of ours.

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