In an unpublished essay of 1939, Virginia Woolf tried to resolve what must have seemed at the time a challenging paradox: that Lewis Carroll — this awkward, girl-fixated neurasthenic, as the biographers then had it — should also have been a writer of sure instincts and powerful effects. Woolf wrote that the power derived from his childhood [which was]...lodged in him whole and entire. He could not disperse it. And therefore as he grew older this impediment in the centre of his being, this hard block of pure childhood, starved the mature man of nourishment...But since childhood remained in him entire, he could do what no one else has ever been able to do—he could return to that world; he could re-create it, so that we too become children again. (82)

One can feel Woolf struggling, unsuccessfully, to lay out the dynamics. Was Charles Dodgson, the "mature man" who wrote the Alice books, "starved" and malnourished? Would it not make more sense to say that he was nourished by his memories of childhood? What could it mean that Carroll's childhood remained in him "entire" or undispersed, and what was unique about his ability to return to childhood, such that "no one else has ever been able" to return so fully? What sort of experience is being described, that transforms readers into "children again"?

Woolf is on more certain ground as she approaches her desired endpoint: that the experience of reading Carroll restores to the adult reader the peculiar strengths of childhood.

In order to make us into children, he first makes us asleep... Down, down, down we fall into that terrifying, wildly inconsequent, yet perfectly logical world where time races, then stands still; where space stretches, then contracts. It is the world of sleep; it is also the world of dreams...[T]he two Alices are not books for children; they...
Difficulties remain: sleeping and dreaming are unconvincing metaphors for reading Alice; the insistence on becoming a child is merely puzzling. It may be that Woolf recognized the problems and postponed work on the project, probably a review essay of the Complete Works of Lewis Carroll, she completed only four paragraphs. But her values are clear: the ideal Carroll reader becomes childishly literal and blasé, heartless, ruthless, and passionate. In the final paragraph, she adds a sixth quality: reading Lewis Carroll "made us laugh as children laugh, irresponsibly." One imagines not so much a childish reader as a defiant, Nietzschean one – and, indeed, Nietzsche might have been a solid starting point for her meditation.

Woolf may have been the first sympathetic observer to try to articulate how rereading the Alice tales first encountered as a child could make a chaotic life appear coherent and purposeful. Such an observation could not have been easy to frame in 1939; it could not have been widely possible at all much before then. Decades of sporadic experimentation slowly developed the awareness that the Alice books could be used transformatively, as Woolf felt they could be used, and not just reiterated with a different style or spin.

By 1996, it was much easier for another novelist, Joyce Carol Oates, simply and gracefully to capture the experience of an adult looking back on a vividly-remembered and intensely-formative intellectual and emotional encounter. Oates recalls the 1946 Grosset and Dunlap edition of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, a gift from her grandmother.

If you could transpose yourself into a girl of 8, in 1946, in a farming community in upstate New York north of Buffalo, imagine the excitement of opening so beautiful a book to read a story in which a girl of about your age is the heroine; imagine the excitement of being taken along with Alice, who talks to herself continually, just like you, whose signature phrase is "Curiouser and curiouser," on her fantastic yet somehow plausible adventure down the rabbit hole, and into the Wonderland world. (par. 2)

Many adult readers today could tell a parallel story of their first encounter with Alice – a specific age and one particular edition converging in a uninspiring environment – the gesture of opening and re-opening the book parallel to finding the entrance to Wonderland – especially treasured might have been the intuition that the story was written exclusively for oneself, holding one's very own volume – an intentionality surviving from the stories' first, handwritten incarnation,
"Curiouser and curiouser," says Alice, and isn't this the most apt expression to describe our world? The admixture of the real and the surreal; the sense of normality shading into nightmare and back again; a strong female protagonist; bizarre, comic, threatening, mysterious figures – these are all elements in my own writing. It can't be a coincidence that one of my early novels is titled, Wonderland. (Vadnal par. 1)

The world of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are wonderlands to that same group of sympathetic readers, and "expressions to describe" that world are found throughout Carroll's Alice stories; drawing upon Alice to adumbrate, to resist, and possibly to correct that world has increasingly been an option for artists. It may be that these artists – taking the term broadly, to include that writerly child "who talks to herself continually" – have access to the intuition or to the experience Woolf and Oates describe. That feeling is not so simple as nostalgia or regret or a brief recovery of innocence. That instinct is an assertion, however labored, that the remembered Alice is an ongoing source of resiliency and strength.

It is an intuition largely reserved for the thoughtful and sympathetic readers, then, but one more easily accessible as a tradition of transformational Alices has developed. Alice's Adventures and Looking-Glass, taken together, constitute what Brian A. Rose calls a "tracer text" – the starting point for a long-term, collaborative creative effort: "A group-text (or body of adaptations extended over time) that has grown from a tracer has the potential of becoming a larger, reflexive body of narratological, performative, and cultural elements: a culture text" (2). The retellings and adaptations, sequels, prequels, and derivatives that have grown out of the Alice stories, while still primarily stories, i.e., narratological, have branched out into nearly all media, performing and visual arts included, and have become massively reflexive, to a degree only attainable by thousands of active participants. For twenty-first century readers and writers, reimagining Alice is no longer an interaction of an individual mind with two books; "Alice in Wonderland" today names an evolving worldwide oeuvre of 150 years' development, shaped not only for consumption, but for deployment.

Carolyn Sigler's Alternative Alices: Visions and Revisions of Lewis Carroll's Alice Books documents adaptations from 1869 through 1928. Of the early authors Sigler samples, none came close to Dodgson's own effortless relocation of Alice from Wonderland into Looking-Glass World. At the disposition of other authors, through the early twentieth century, Alice was either formulaically reiterated (in Anna M. Richards's A New Alice in the Old Wonderland[1895], a bold American girl, Alice Lee, dreams of visiting Wonderland come true; she uses Alice’s Adventures to navigate the territory and its eccentric inhabitants) or employed as a brand name for some non-literary purpose, often using the trope of the curious girl, for example, in John Kendrick Bangs's anti-
socialist *Alice in Blunderland* (1907). Not included by Sigler are a number of well-intentioned attempts to lighten a classroom burden (e.g., *Alice in Grammarland*, Louise Franklin Bache, 1923 [Allen]; *Alice in Orchestralia*, Ernest La Prade, 1925). Whatever narrative innovation may have accidentally invaded this first wave of Alice reproductions was effectively stifled in 1933 when the second *Alice in Wonderland* to feature sound (the first talkie was short, awkward, and unsuccessful) was produced by Paramount, and for the next sixty years Alice reiterations became a staple of Hollywood and, soon, television. New print editions of the originals during these decades also stressed visualization, as Tenniel's illustrations were often modified or altogether replaced by more colorful or detailed images; many commentators on the mid-century illustrations have noted their "distinct lack of diversity and imagination," according to Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddons (172).

But while publishers and filmmakers were simply reiterating Alice in minimally original versions during these decades, a new source of creativity began reenergizing Carroll's texts. In describing the fortunes of *Alice's Adventures and Looking-Glass* between 1930 and 1960, Sigler writes, "the Alice books were taken out of the literary public domain by virtue of their reclassification as serious objects of scholarship" (xx). Book reviewers had actually been active in construction of the group text since shortly after Carroll's first publication, but by the 1930s critics and theorists were seeking out heretofore-unsuspected depths and complexities. Virginia Woolf's abandoned reader-response piece was part of this wave. Of greatest importance and probably most frequent were the psychological/psychoanalytic/Jungian/archetypal readings – the four orientations overlapping and supporting each other – appearing between William Empson's "The Child as Swain" (in *Some Versions of the Pastoral*, 1935) and Judith Bloomingdale's "Alice as Anima" (1971). In 1937, Joseph Wood Krutch wrote that Alice had entered "the new Wonderland of psychoanalysis" (187); Sigler strikes a similar note in observing of the Alice books that "like dreams, they can mean whatever readers need them to mean" (xiv). Critical and scholarly interpretations were supplemented by Martin Gardner's *The Annotated Alice* (1960), which was the final piece of a now unquestioned truth: the Alice texts trafficked in symbols already, though imperfectly, known – tunnels, keys, floods, tricksters – but that these were subsumed into a larger esoteric system that could either elucidate mysteries or generate them, much like the academic construct sometimes called "theory" by the 1990s.

In the 1960s, artists and intellectuals began to claim Alice as a symbol of resistance to dominant cultural paradigms, and the movement toward the proliferation of strong Alices began. Alice functions as a shield against a world of dysfunctional authority figures in Jonathan Miller's 1966 television play *Alice in Wonderland*, whose Alice, according to Miller biographer Kate Bassett, reflects "the daily life of Carroll's child friend Alice Liddell. Those elements included domineering and eccentric relatives, servants and dons...[The film demonstrates] the Victorians’ ambivalent attitudes to childhood. On the one hand, they stifled it with proprieties, and on the other, they feared and mourned its passing" (152). That ambivalence sparks a good deal of busy-ness on the part of Wonderland's denizens (all human actors here; Carroll's animal characters are transformed back into the Oxford residents they were based on). In the spirit of Carroll's characters, this adult world is continually in movement, much
of it inexplicable, but seemingly compulsive: the Caterpillar’s formal and pointless interrogation of Alice; the “absurdist existential ennui” of the tea party (Kutner par. 3); an asynchronous pas de deux of the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon: needful rituals to maintain an invisible status quo. Alice, portrayed by a thirteen-year-old, is alternately bored by and alienated from that world of “relatives, servants and dons.” From the first scene of her stoically tolerating a muscular hair-brushing from a servant, Alice walks dutifully through the black-and-white dreamscape, not so much menaced as slightly annoyed by the adult rituals, nearly always looking away from that world into some other.

In this respect, the film is located quite thoroughly in the actualities of girlhood: dark interiors, hovering adults, unexpressed expectations, and aspirations elsewhere. This set of preoccupations is always close at hand in what we might term the Domestic Alice in a series of books and films, often involving Alice Liddell. Though always a presence in the biographies of Charles Dodgson, there were no "lives" of Alice until 1982, when two appeared: The Real Alice by Anne Clark and Beyond the Looking Glass: Reflections of Alice and Her Family by Colin Gordon. Both authors follow variations of the usual story, that Dodgson’s interest in Liddell was sexual in character, Clark presupposing Dodgson’s general predilection for girls (87), Gordon accepting the story that Dodgson had proposed a marriage to Alice to her mother (86-87). Sharing these interpretations were two Alice Liddell fictions in quick succession, David Slavitt’s novel Alice at 80 (1984) and the film Dreamchild (Millar, 1985). Both works begin with Alice Hargreaves’s trip to New York to commemorate Dodgson’s centennial in 1932, and in both, age and the occasion incline Alice to remember her relationship with Dodgson. For Slavitt’s Alice, Charles Dodgson was a first love, first sexual encounter, and never to be supplanted in her affections, even by eventual husband Reginald Hargreaves, but the early sexual awakening was damaging for Alice and the two other victims she meets. “Victim” is also the word for Gavin Millar's Alice, for her Dodgson was also a predator, albeit more in line with the stereotype of a repressed pedophile whose attentions halted at photographs and embraces. The relationship is dangerous on both sides: for the precocious child, Dodgson's affections are close to overwhelming; she responds to them, but defends herself from further involvement by ridiculing Dodgson; he is devastated. Intensifying her guilt, the creatures of Wonderland appear to her as vivid, grotesque hallucinations, carping at Alice, calling her old and stupid; in these scenes, as in the ones recalling Dodgson, the old actress is often replaced by an Alice of about ten years. At the end of the film, that child Alice is imaginatively reconciled to Dodgson, the two joining hands on the shore of the ocean that was the setting for the opening scenes. This reconciliation, Alice Liddell's comfort with herself and her past, is at least in part due to her being able to draw on the Alice books to objectify and confront images of her past and integrate them into her understanding of herself in the present.

In her first appearance as an active seeker of danger – a warrior in training, like those to come twenty years on – Alice is again a child of about seven interacting with domestic menaces. In Jan Švankmajer’s Neco z Alenky (Something from Alice, released as Alice in 1988), Alice’s stuffed white rabbit comes alive and runs off to a writing desk at the top of a hill, into which he scrambles through the top drawer. Alice
follows him into a Wonderland with few of the comforting features of Carroll's original, but rather the grim interiors of a rambling, run-down middle-class home: pantries with shelf after shelf of biliously-colored fluids in canning jars; tool rooms with nails, saws, and squares; off-kilter walls and door frames; and cast-off toys grown to Alice's size. The implication is that a curious girl is exploring her own house on an idle afternoon. Alice speaks all the lines of the story, her own and the other characters', the camera close up on her mouth. This technique emphasizes the fact that Wonderland is Alice's dream, every aspect, setting, character, and line, and that in confronting Wonderland's dangers, Alice is confronting herself – at least partially fulfilling Empson's prescient observation, "Wonderland is a dream, but the Looking-Glass is self-consciousness" (257). As also in the case of Dreamchild, Alice confronting herself is what the culture text finally generates.

By 1990, all the recurrent features of the millennial Alices were in place, awaiting artists and critics to reconfigure them in useful ways. The twenty-first century Alices are various, but they share some of the founding characteristics adumbrated above, and they draw on common social and literary contexts. One of the most important elements of the context is the history of film adaptations that kept Alice in public view, established that Wonderland could look different from generation to generation, and showed us that Alice herself could be different ages. Charlotte Henry was nineteen when she starred as Alice in Norman McLeod's 1933 film. Carol Marsh was twenty when she played the role in a French production in 1948. Thirteen-year-old Kathryn Beaumont was both the voice and the visual model for Disney's Alice in 1951 ("About Disney's 'Alice'"). A seven-year-old Alice is a great rarity after Švankmajer's film; recently, both onscreen and in print, she is normally in her late teens or early 20s. But as Alice grows older, she is often more clearly and explicitly linked to her childhood. Brian McHale observed in 2011 a common feature of both the Tim Burton film (Alice in Wonderland, Disney, 2010) and Nick Willing's 2009 television production Alice on the Canadian station Showcase: the main action in both films follows a grown up Alice returning to a Wonderland of her childhood, which she dimly remembers and whose inhabitants seem to recall her. Nascent also in Dreamchild, the return of an adult Alice to the once-innocent, now-menacing Wonderland is another parallel to the experience of an adult reader taking up the Adventures again, only now seeing its perils and violence.

The contemporary Alice is not only older, but more fleshed out, more deeply felt, and more complicated, colored with both trauma and aspiration. She is a "she" now and not just a token or construct. More is at stake for the critics as well as the novelists. Thus Donald Rackin in 1991 reproaches Alice for "her class- and time-bound prejudices, her frightened fretting and childish, sometimes abject tears, her priggishness and self-assured ignorance, her sometimes blatant hypocrisy, her general powerlessness and confusion, and her rather cowardly readiness to abandon her struggles at the end of the two adventures" (14). What powerful evidence this is of the intellectual and moral ascendancy of Alice in the modern world, that a distinguished professor of English should feel compelled to scold her, a fictional seven-year-old, for feeling confused or powerless or weary of adventure; and in fact, to scold her as if she were not fictional at all. Evidence of a different sort can be found in the sheer number of Alice sequels, prequels, and spinoffs. The volunteers at the social
Scholars and storytellers have interacted more freely since 2000, though still at a distance; one of the first evidences of their cooperation is a series of returns to the Domestic Alice as well as to the drama of Charles Dodgson and Alice Liddell. For the critics, this meant revisiting the kind of biographical criticism that had largely faded since the Freudian fads of the 1930s and 1940s; for the novelists, it meant an exploration of the possibilities and especially of the dangers of girlhood. In 1995, Morton Cohen published *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* to great acclaim; after decades of work on Carroll's life, letters, and photographs, Cohen's *Biography* was regarded as definitive. In retrospect, the volume may have felt unquestionable because of Cohen's careful articulation of long-standing assumptions about the life of Charles Dodgson, which began to take shape as the tragedy of a man not at home among adults, but only among female children, whom he longed for sexually, but who limited himself to erotic photographs as a substitute for more direct contact. Cohen believed that "Dodgson's suppressed and diverted sexual energies caused him unspeakable torments" (231). Such is the figure we find in Katie Roiphe's 2001 novel *Still She Haunts Me*: awkward, withdrawn, stammering in the company of adults, at ease and eloquent among female children. Roiphe's Dodgson befriends and subsequently photographs little girls, grooming them for the experience like any serial child molester; Will Brooker calls him "the image of a paedophile" (193). Roiphe follows Cohen in postulating that Alice's mother learned of Dodgson's sexual motivation and put an end to the relationship (Roiphe invents a nude photo of Alice for her mother to discover). Richard Peabody's collection *Alice Redux* (2006) is likewise dominated by Domestic Alice narratives in which Dodgson's predations torment his child friends, sometimes to madness.

In 1999, Karoline Leach argued that a century of Carroll biographers – she might have implicated fiction writers and filmmakers, had she wished – had built upon each other's work to create the "Carroll myth" of the repressed pedophile. The backlash of professorial abuse Leach subsequently endured – in a 2000 review, August Imholtz wrote that Leach's thesis "scandalizes and enrages orthodox Carrollians" (551) – subsided as Leach's account drew supporters is evidence of how much was at stake, again perhaps especially for scholarly participants in the Alice group text, in retelling the story in just the right way. Melanie Benjamin's *Alice I Have Been* (2009) follows Leach (whom she acknowledges, though not by name, in an afterword [355]) in having both older sister Ina and governess Mary Prickett mistake Dodgson's courtesy as courtship. In Benjamin's rendering, the conventional Ina misreports Dodgson's behavior during the "beggar child" photography...
session, and her mother misinterprets a question in one of Dodgson's letters to Alice (“Do you remember how it felt, to roll about on the grass?” [341]). In a rage of indignation, Mother banishes Dodgson from their home, as we know Lorina Liddell did in June 1863. But Benjamin clears Dodgson of any offense: it was the eleven-year-old Alice experimenting with her own sexual power who marred her own and Dodgson's life: “My lips sought, asked; not his...It was I who reached up, met him – and kissed him, ardently, my lips parting his, asking him to be happy – may we be happy” (339). The horrified Dodgson pushes her away.

Both Benjamin and Roiphe endow Alice between the ages of seven and ten with a bold curiosity – often noted of the fictive Alice as well – and an openness to sexual exploration; a plausible, even predictable set of qualities for a real girl of that age, but a significant revision of the Alice of Carroll's Adventures. Kali Israel has described the “pervasiveness in [late-twentieth century] Alice works of questions of sexuality and boundaries” (258). Sexual boundaries, their observance and trespass, are the main subject of Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's graphic novel Lost Girls (1991-2006), in which the imagination and the daily life of the female child in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are thoroughly sexualized; Victorian girls are continually faced with a world of men determined, usually in some culturally symbolic way, to reduce them to sexual creatures and use them accordingly. In Moore and Gebbie's universe, that symbolism is literalized. Lewis Carroll's Alice is one of three women – the others are Wendy Darling from Peter Pan and Dorothy Gale from The Wonderful Wizard of Oz – who are thrown together by accident and begin to tell each other their life stories, which are stories of their lives as sexual beings. Alice is raped at age fourteen and becomes a sexual predator herself as well as a drug addict institutionalized for years. The lives of all three protagonists are represented as ongoing pornographic scenes of exploitation and degradation. In Carroll's Wonderland, our protagonist is seven years old and adrift in a world of grown-up men, mostly – incompetent men, to be sure, but threatening in their lunatic rants and ramblings; Alice is quite old enough to have been warned off vaguely by her mother and in more graphic detail by her sister to avoid such figures or risk ruination. The same is true of Dorothy and Wendy, blown out of one male-dominated world into another, and unlikely to trust altogether in professions of good will. Moore and Gebbie's fantasy reminds us that real Victorian girls and their cousins in America lived in a world of continual sexual threats and shadowy revelations; Frank Baum's Dorothy awakens from her exile to find herself in bed surrounded by five men. “Desire's a strange land one discovers as a child,” says Moore's adult Alice, “where nothing makes the slightest sense” (vol. 2, 19). Desire then is Wonderland itself, which one first discovers as a child; it begins to make some sense upon recollection in later years.

Other tribulations, major and minor, are scattered among the Domestic narratives. In Damon Albarn and Moira Buffini's Wonder.land, a musical first performed in 2015 at the Manchester International Festival, Aly is a disaffected twelve-year-old in the present, whose parents, in the midst of a hostile divorce, harass her about the cellphone constantly in her hand. There she unexpectedly finds an appealing role-play application, Wonder.Land, which allows her to experiment with personae: “Bullied at school and unhappy at home, wonder.land lets her escape from her parents, from
teachers, from herself... Online, Aly becomes Alice: brave, beautiful and in control" ("wonder.land"). The Wonderland mythology is more diversely therapeutic in Gregory Maguire's After Alice (2015), in which the parallel between Wonderland and the conundrums of adolescent girlhood are made explicit. Alice's friend Ada follows her down the rabbit hole later on the same day. She encounters most of the same perils as Alice – with one or two new ones – and manages them successfully. Meanwhile, in Oxford overhead, Alice's older sister Lydia (Maguire alters names and family relationships) faces perils of her own: uncomprehending parents and the presence of a handsome young man, whose time and attention Lydia must subtly monopolize until his politeness becomes interest. The rules above and below ground are equally arbitrary and illogical, requiring wits and quick experimentation, but the exercise is liberating: even as she falls into the magical land below, Ada is released from the iron corset she's worn for years as a painful and ineffective treatment for scoliosis, and at once feels herself growing stronger and more agile.

The second millennial Alice emerges from the Domestic, and in two steps, from Mad Alice to Warrior Alice. In the first step, it is not the world but the girl that is insane, putatively: she has been confined for her inability or unwillingness to conform and has become uncertain of her own sanity. In Christina Henry's Alice (2013), the protagonist, now in her late teens, has been institutionalized for ten years. She and the inmate in the next cell, Hatcher (i.e., Hatter), have been drugged into amnesia, but when a fire frees them, their memories of violent pasts gradually return; they search a desolate "Old City" controlled by territorial gangsters – Walrus, Carpenter, Cheshire, and other names drawn from Carroll – looking for a legendary vorpal sword. Another girl accused of madness is Bryony Hollander in A.G. Stone's Spades: The True Wonderland Awaits (2015); despite her vivid, counter-reality dreams of Wonderland – in this respect, she is comparable to Aly in Wonder.land – she is saner than she thinks, though madness runs in her family, descended from Alice Liddell. In the video game, American Magee's Alice (2000; "American" is the designer Magee's first name) and the sequels Alice: Madness Returns (2011), an Alice traumatized by the death of her family is alternately confined as mad, returned to Wonderland, or residing in an orphanage; in Wonderland – now a more dangerous and violent place – she fights for clues that restore her to sanity.

Rachel Falconer has demonstrated the poignancy of allusions to Carroll – the falling, the underworld, the questioning of identity, the looking glass, etc. – in the "autopathographies" (8) of mentally ill women. At least for the more erudite among them, Wonderland provides "a radicalizing influence on its patients" in part because the patient "often finds herself in (perceived) opposition to a series of male antagonists" (11). Thus the trials of Domestic Alice drive her to madness: traumatized or displaced or blamed, she becomes confused about her own identity, like Carroll's Alice. The series of male blocking figures provokes resistance, and she develops into the Warrior Alice. These incarnations are clearly influenced by The Hunger Games series, both books and films, in which an impoverished sixteen-year-old girl is drawn into the machinations of a post-apocalyptic American government that pits teenagers against each other in combat. Frank Beddor's Alyss Heart in The Looking Glass Wars (2004) is the prototype: a princess and heir in Wonderland, Alyss escapes a revolution inspired by
her Aunt Redd by jumping into a magic pool, emerging in nineteenth century Oxford, where she is adopted by the Liddell family. They are frightened whenever she recalls this fantasy of being a princess in a magical realm - adolescent girls being subject to madness - so she learns to keep quiet. She tells her true story to the avuncular Charles Dodgson, and feels betrayed when he alters the real horrors into the fancied anxieties of Alice's Adventures Under Ground. The widespread availability of the Adventures in Wonderland enables Alice's bodyguard Hatter to locate her several years later; returned to her home country, Alice leads the people (and other creatures) in overthrowing Redd. She has then become the awaited "Warrior Queen," much akin to the Alice in Burton's film who defeats the Red Queen by slaying the Jabberwocky.

Beginning in 2013, Cameron Jace's Insanity series follows the struggles of Alice Wonder, a reincarnation of Carroll’s character in contemporary Britain, in an alliance with a similar creature, Professor Carter Pillar (both Alice and Pillar are imprisoned as homicidal maniacs), to stop an invasion of "Wonderland monsters" into Oxford. A few have already arrived: the Red Queen, the Duchess, and the Cheshire Cat are grotesque mass killers. This arrangement gives Jace the opportunity, in Pillar's voice, to comment upon the twenty-first century scene: "The craziness you've seen in the so-called sane world is too much for you...I mean, just click your TV on and look at the madness in the world. Wars, killing, envy, hatred, and the whole nine yards" (Insanity, Ch. 28, par. 20). "Don't you love the carelessness of the sane world? I mean, I could be wrapped up in dynamite and no amount of warning will make them do something about it" (Insanity, Ch. 33, par. 19). Alice would prefer to hide in her own personal asylum, but she is drawn toward saving innocents, especially the girls who have been caught up in the Wonderland invasion. Likewise compelled to violence is the contemporary punk-ish teenager Alyssa in A.G. Howard's Splintered series (2013-2015): another descendant of Alice Liddell, Alyssa is certain that she's inherited the family's mother-to-daughter insanity; like her own institutionalized mother, she hears insects and flowers speaking to her as well as other inner voices that lead her through a mirror into her true, forgotten home, Wonderland. She too defeats an evil Queen Red to become Queen Alyssa.

The precarious path from child to adult, personal and social maladjustments, and the need for agile defenses are not the only themes associated with Alice in the new millennium, but they are probably the most frequent and the most energetically pursued; and though any one volume of Alice fiction may foreground one theme over the others, they are rarely found in strict isolation from each other. Rather, they form an implied arc, an arc in fact implied repeatedly in the new Alice narratives since 2000: a disturbed woman returns mentally or physically to a site of childhood creativity – re-experiencing the wounds caused by the judgment imposed by adults – what is imagined is not real; this return to Wonderland arms the woman with reassurance of sanity and agency; a wholeness of character is restored intertextually as our writers collectively crown Alice the queen of her own fate.

This sense of integrity and purpose, and especially the strength they generate for facing "the madness in the world," drives the contemporary uses of Alice. We should not confuse these uses with any "perennial appeal," so often the moving target of critical inquiry. Rather, Alice today is a place
for introspection and marshalling of resources, perhaps nascent in Carroll's texts, but which had to wait, first, until an accidental army of artists, adapters, musicians, and commentators had, over several decades, lodged Alice firmly in the collective consciousness of the Western and most of the Eastern and Southern world; second, upon critical readers and writers, who could begin to see that Alice's project from the beginning had been to make Wonderland intelligible; and third, our Alice had to wait upon the skepticism toward authority embodied by 1960s radicalism, and radicalism's reverse, the rise of ideological absolutism as a political position in the following decades. Thus critics who believe her attraction is making sense and establishing order have it almost right. Donald Rackin allies Carroll and Alice with the existentialists, "making order and meaning out of, essentially, nothing" (327). A maker of meaning in the face of nihilism is a plausible Alice, especially for a nihilistic adult. But in evolving Alice from innocent to traumatized child, thence to warrior and to (in some form) queen, the recent Alice fabulists have asserted that Alice reconnects the child and the adult in a single span, and in a way that enhances both Wonderland and Oxford.

In her memoir On Rereading (2011), Patricia Meyer Spacks details a long history with Alice, beginning with that childhood experience of ownership: "Alice in Wonderland, I felt, belonged to me alone" (25). Spacks differs slightly, perhaps, from other Alice enthusiasts in the strength with which she maintained her attachment to the books, reading them "repeatedly" as a child (26) and again "from time to time" in her early teens. Some decades passed; not until she was an established professor at Wellesley did she turn to Alice again, this time as a text for a seminar she taught entitled, significantly, "The Independent Woman" (28); one longs to hear how Alice's independence compared to that of the grown-up "women" on the reading list. Then in preparation for the memoir, she took the volumes up again, probably around the age of eighty, finding then the character's "intelligence, practicality, and eagerness":

My version of Alice interests me more than her sister's vision ["the simple and loving heart"] does. But my Alice – the Alice, I would argue, that Carroll depicted – has rebellious potential. If the creatures of Wonderland are parodic versions of Victorian elders, Alice's willingness to ask herself mental questions about them hints at the possibility of a child's challenging established hierarchies [and] overturning a courtroom" (32-33).

One notes the redoubled emphasis on "my Alice": the possessiveness of the child reader is not diminished. But in possessing the book, the adult possesses also the strength and resourcefulness that are necessary to rebel, to question, to challenge, to overturn. Perhaps some combination of challenging and overturning were on Virginia Woolf's mind when she recalled laughing at Carroll "as children laugh, irresponsibly."

Summarizing the experience of rereading Alice and a few other childhood favorites, Spacks writes, "Rereading children's books, for me, has meant above all rereading my younger self. The sameness, the stability that we seek in
rereading involves more than the solidity of a text: it entails also the solidity of personality” (52). It may be that rereading any childhood favorite has the potential to establish that intuition of solidity and depth, reminding the adult of life’s promises and continuities; but in the opening decades of the twenty-first century, no other childhood classic approaches Alice in the number of writers and readers who turn to her for inspiration and resolve.

Notes

1. Woolf does not describe her own first encounter with the Alice books, but given their frequent traces in her work, most biographers believe that she read the books early and that they remained important to her. She would have had the reinforcement of her peers; of Bloomsbury in particular and the late nineteenth century child generally, Juliet Dusinberre writes, “Carroll’s books ran in the bloodstream of that generation” (2).

2. An accurate count of Alice derivatives is not possible, given how quickly works go into and out of print; Kindle- and Nook-only novels appear and disappear at a much higher rate. But great accuracy is not necessary, given the manifest and extraordinary popularity or Alice as a starting point for new fiction, music, dance, and drama.

Works Cited


Alice in Wonderland. Directed by Jonathan Miller, performances by Anne-Marie Malik, Freda Dowie, and Jo Maxwell Muller, BBC, 1966.


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The twenty-first century will be the make-or-break century for Planet Earth. Immense transformations of all kinds—political, social, economic, and more—will rumble through the century, driven primarily by the twin forces of demography (which has incredible mass) and technology (which has incredible velocity). Our green valley will not escape the whirlwind. Lift your gaze up from that copy of Modern Maturity, and you will see the world transformed. Vote with your ballots, vote with your dollars, vote with your words and deeds. Use the internet as a fulcrum. Do as little or as much as you can. And remember—.
abstracted from his book Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century, forthcoming from Monthly Review Press in 2016. A longer version of this article was presented to Imperialism: Old and New, an international conference in Delhi, 9-10. The 21st Century has been conceived as: The age of Globalization, the age of Knowledge Economy, and the Information age. Globalization refers to the contemporary social reality, which is characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, complexity, interdependence and diversity. Knowledge has become the most important factor in economic development in a globalized world, hence the use of the term Knowledge economy to refer to the contemporary global economy. Consequently, the ability of a society to produce, select, adapt, commercialise, and use knowledge is critical for sustained economic growth and improved living standards (World Bank, 2002).