



READ ME



BRIGHTON READS ALICE IN WONDERLAND





GOING UNDERGROUND THE CITY READS ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Between March and May, Brighton & Hove becomes one giant reading group, as the whole city heads underground in search of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Lewis Carroll's timeless fantasy was the first children's book with huge crossover appeal to adults. Though it remains a well-loved classic of children's literature, it can also lay claim to being one of the most original and experimental works of 19th-century adult fiction.

With pub readings, literary quizzes and critical discussions from key writers across the city, there are endless opportunities to take part in the City Reads. This Reader's Guide offers a whistlestop tour of Carroll's remarkable legacy, combining 'curious' facts and *Alice* ephemera with reading hints and points to ponder.

If you are coming to *Alice* for the first time, remember: nothing is as it seems, and nothing seems as it is. If you are revisiting after a long sojourn, welcome back to Wonderland!

The City Reads is part of the 7 cities, 7 books project organised by Penguin to celebrate their 70th year in publishing.

THE BRIGHTON CONNECTION

Lewis Carroll was a frequent visitor to Brighton from 1862 to 1885, staying with his old Oxford friend, the Reverend Henry Barclay at 11 Sussex Square. In 1887 Carroll watched the stage version of *Alice* being performed at the Theatre Royal in Brighton.

Sussex Square's secluded gardens conceal an ivy-strewn tunnel, which, over the years, has become the stuff of *Alice* mythology. Could it have been the inspiration for *Alice's* descent into Wonderland? Whether rooted in fact or entirely apocryphal, it is testament to the power that *Alice* still holds on our collective imaginations.

'Alice had been to the seaside once in her life, and had come to the general conclusion that, wherever you go to on the English coast, you'll find a number of bathing machines.'

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN
WONDERLAND, LEWIS CARROLL

'I love Alice's innocence and her discovery of a world that doesn't exist. It is fascinating and scary and truly surrealistic, the sense that everything is possible, that you can open your doors and go and invent a new world.'

JEAN PAUL GAUTIER

SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES

Alice in Wonderland is the most successful and enduring work of fantasy fiction of all time. Since Lewis Carroll (a.k.a. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) first sent his spirited heroine down the rabbit hole to Wonderland in 1865, her subterranean adventures have launched a hundred careers, a thousand imitators, and seeped into our cultural consciousness like nothing before or since.

Alongside its companion piece *Through the Looking Glass*, *Alice* remains the most quoted and translated book in the English language after the Bible and Shakespeare. Its nonsensical world of improbable encounters and incongruous characters has inspired

writers (James Joyce to TS Eliot); artists (Ralph Steadman to Salvador Dali); filmmakers (Walt Disney to Jonathan Miller), and rock 'n' roll icons (Jefferson Airplane to Marilyn Manson).

Adopted by fashion moguls (*Vogue* recently commissioned Annie Leibowitz to create a high-couture *Alice* fantasy with Jean Paul Gautier as the Cheshire Cat) and sci-fi philosophers (*The Matrix* is full of allusions to Carroll's elliptical fantasy), the influence of *Alice* is undiminished.



BUT WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Brazen political satire, absurdist take on Victorian society, dream-bound tale of childhood innocence or eccentric puzzle set by a mischievous logician? *Alice in Wonderland* has been psychoanalysed, interpreted and reinvented for the best part of 150 years. So what does it all mean?

To set you on the road to discovery here's a few handy signposts:

'Curiouser and curiouser'

Carroll uses paradoxes, puzzles, conundrums and riddles as a means of exploring the philosophy of language. All budding codebreakers should, however, take heed. In the words of the master illusionist: *'I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense'*

Forever young

'Childhood remained in him entire.'
Virginia Woolf.

A child's view of adulthood or an adult view of childhood? Is Alice Lewis Carroll's passport to Wonderland – a means of reclaiming the author's long lost childhood? Or a child's eye perspective on the illogic of the grown-up universe?

'I don't believe that there is an atom of meaning in it.'

ALICE

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND, LEWIS CARROLL

Dream a little dream

From *Piers Plowman* to *The Wizard of Oz*, the dream has been a time-honoured way of framing a fantastical narrative. Reading *Alice* as a post-Freudian symbolic orienteering exercise can be fun, but watch out for blind alleys and linguistic cul-de-sacs.

'Off with her head!'

In the classic tradition of Grimm fairytales, *Alice* is deliciously dark with a morbid curiosity for death, decapitation and impending calamity. Could it be that Alice was the first Victorian Goth?

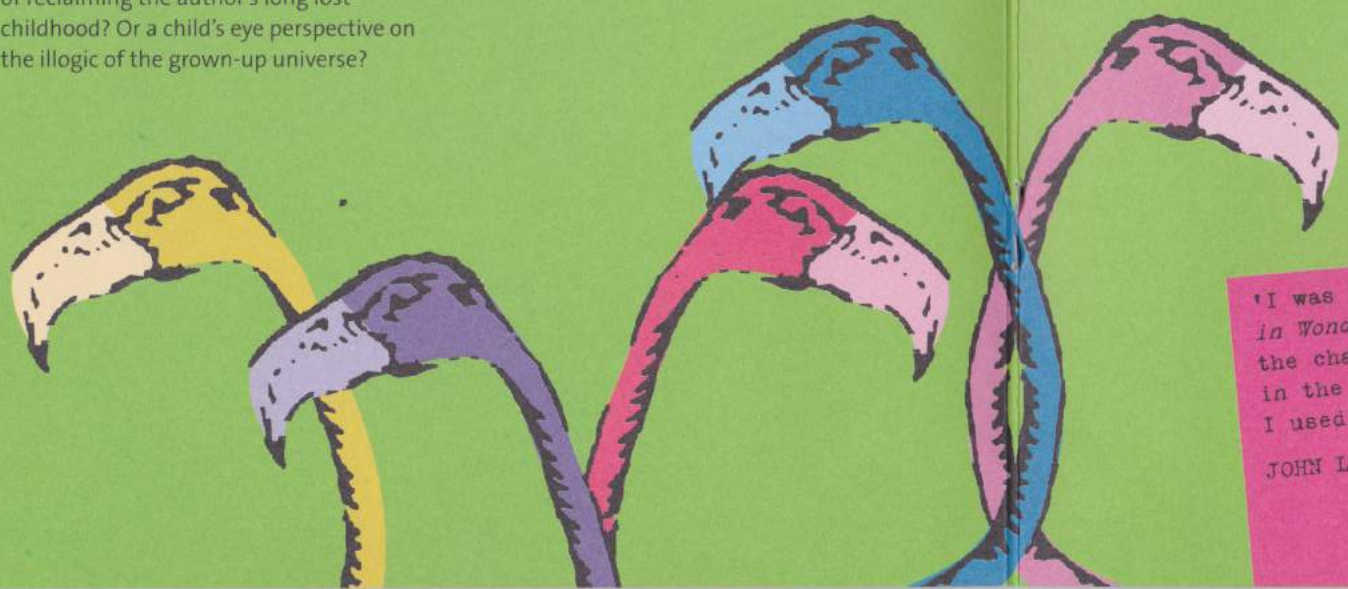
ALICE BANDS

Since Grace Slick famously sang: 'one pill will make you larger and one pill will make you small', Alice has become a recurrent theme of rock and pop culture. For the ultimate Alice soundtrack try:

- *Alice in Wonderland*, Neil Sedaka (Teen pop ballad from 1962.)
- *White Rabbit*, Jefferson Airplane (Surely the most *Alice*-inspired counter-culture head-trip to emerge from the swinging 60s.)
- *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds; I Am the Walrus*, The Beatles (classic psychedelia, directly influenced by Lennon's lifelong fascination with Alice.)
- *The Wall*, Pink Floyd (Play the archetypal 70s concept album alongside the 1951 animated Disney film for alarming moments of celluloid synchronicity!)
- *Alice*, Tom Waits (*Alice*-themed anthems from the original beatnik troubadour.)
- *Alice*, Kylie Minogue (2001 live dance version of *Alice* – a kind of 'Jackanory for the chemical generation' – with DJ Paul Oakenfold.)
- *What You Waiting For?*, Gwen Stefani (No Doubt's leading lady grapples with pink flamingos in a Technicolor Wonderland.)

'I was passionate about *Alice in Wonderland* and drew all the characters. I did poems in the style of *Jabberwocky*. I used to love *Alice* ...'

JOHN LENNON



ONE HIT WONDERLAND?

Lewis Carroll's literary offspring has spawned unexpected influences and unholy liaisons that range from the sublime to the suitably nonsensical. Try this on for size:

- Writers directly influenced by Alice's adventures include Nabokov, TS Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, WH Auden, Jack Kerouac and Will Self.
- An original *Star Trek* episode features the Enterprise crew in an otherworldly encounter with Alice and an oversized white rabbit.
- There are over 100 film adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland* from early silent excursions to 21st-century re-imaginings.

'The fun of Alice ... is the rule flouting and rule questioning ... we have kept her this long, and we will not lose her yet.'

ZADIE SMITH



- Cary Grant once played the Mock Turtle to WC Field's Humpty Dumpty.
- Alice has been used to advertise television sets, Fender Stratocaster guitars, grape jelly, Ford motor cars, fridges and loft insulation.
- Ravi Shankar composed the soundtrack to Jonathan Miller's post-Freudian 60s film classic with Peter Sellers, Sir John Gielgud et al.
- Ginger Rogers, Jane Asher, Sir John Gielgud and Willie Rushton have all recorded audio versions of *Alice*.
- Meryl Streep once played Alice, Humpty Dumpty and the White Queen in *Alice at the Palace*, a little-known stage production.
- *Living in Neon Dreams*, the eagerly awaited postmodern reawakening of *Alice's* adventures will star the crown prince of darkness, Marilyn Manson.

'The rabbit hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well.'

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND, LEWIS CARROLL

TOP 10 TUNNEL TITLES

- *The Hobbit* - JRR Tolkien (Lots of furry creatures in and out of their burrows.)
- *The Underground Man* - Mick Jackson (Concerns a strange man who likes to build tunnels.)
- *Holes* - Louis Sachar (Less on tunnels but lots of digging.)
- *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* - Jules Verne (Stars big tunnelling machine.)
- *Time Machine* - HG Wells (The Morlock complexion is not a good advert for life underground.)



- *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* - Haruki Murakami (OK this one has a well, not a tunnel, but in Japanese fiction where there's a well there will be weird things.)
- *Montmorency* - Eleanor Updale (Victorian sewer adventure.)
- *Veniss Underground* - Jeff Vandermeer (Strange subterranean dystopia with sinister meerkats.)
- *Neverwhere* - Neil Gaiman (Strange tales of a London Underground peopled by monsters.)
- *Tunnel Visions: Journeys of an Underground Philosopher* - Christopher Ross (Does exactly what it says on the tin.)



'Would you tell me please,
which way I ought to go
from here?'

ALICE

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN
WONDERLAND

WHERE NEXT?

For details on the City Reads project and relevant events visit:

www.thewordproject.info

www.brighton-festival.org.uk

The City Reads is organising two further special events:

5 April, 7.30pm

The Sanctuary Café – *Alice* discussion with local authors and celebrities.

29 April, 7pm

The Hanbury Ballroom – Screening of Jonathan Miller's 60s film classic.

For more *Alice* facts and *Wonderland* background check out:

BOOKS

Annotated books

The Annotated Alice, Martin Gardner, 2001

Biography

Lewis Carroll, a Biography,
Michael Bakewell, 1997

Carroll Criticism

Alice in Wonderland: Norton Critical Edition,
Donald J. Gray, 1992

The Alice Companion, Jo Elwyn Jones
and J. Francis Gladstone, 1998

Logic and Puzzles

Lewis Carroll's Games and Puzzles,
Ed. Edward Wakeling, 1995

The Universe and the Handkerchief,
Ed. Martin Gardner, 1996

On Alice Liddell

The Other Alice, Christina Bjork, 1993

On Nonsense

The Field of Nonsense, Elizabeth Sewell, 1952

Nonsense, Susan Stewart, 1980

On Illustrations

*The Illustrators of Alice in Wonderland
and Through the Looking Glass*,
Graham Ovenden, 1979

Sir John Tenniel: Aspects of His Work,
Roger Simpson, 1994

LEWIS CARROLL SOCIETIES

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USEFUL WEB SITES

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