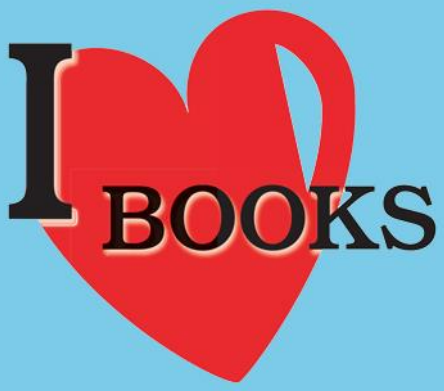


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Opening extract from

Wonderland: Alice in Poetry

Written by

Lewis Carroll & Others

Illustrated by

Sir John Tenniel

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Foreword

As a child I went to the local primary school, where on Fridays we had class library time. The books were kept in a folding metal contraption. It would be wheeled to the front of the classroom, unlocked, unfolded and the books would be revealed.

And so, into my hands came *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Into the strange world of Alice I tumbled, never to entirely return. Alice's little golden key let me into a world of adventure and colour and strength and impossible possibilities. I loved her stalwart and stoical confidence as she quietly stood up for herself and continued in her journey. I loved the plays on words, the fun and nonsense. But most of all I loved the verse in the story. I reread those verses. I still know most of them by heart. By heart.

Now it's time to reply to Lewis Carroll and to Alice – to celebrate those wonderful verses, outlandish characters and events and those slightly disturbing illustrations. It's time to respond – to take Lewis Carroll's words and ideas and to play with them. Some of our best contemporary poets and storytellers have taken Carroll's poems from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass* and from the lesser-known work *Sylvie and Bruno* and spring-boarded from them into poems of their own.

This is of course what Lewis Carroll did. He took poems he knew and he put his own original spin on them.

Victorian literature for children was meant to be 'improving'. It was forever teaching the child readers 'important lessons' – how to be obedient, polite, hard-working, quiet, sensible: How To Be Grown-Up. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson changed his name to Lewis Carroll, took the poems that children of his time had been made to learn and recite, and turned them all topsy-turvy. So here are Lewis Carroll's playful responses to the poems that Victorian children read, and here are modern poets' responses to Lewis Carroll's poems. You might like to continue the chain by writing your own poem. Or maybe you just want to read this collection – for pleasure, for delight, for fun.

This is a varied collection like a Christmas chocolate selection box – so tumble in and Read Me.

Michaela Morgan



This is how Lewis Carroll chose to introduce us to Alice in 1865.

All in the golden afternoon
Full leisurely we glide;
For both our oars, with little skill,
By little arms are plied,
While little hands make vain pretence
Our wanderings to guide.

Ah, cruel Three! In such an hour,
Beneath such dreamy weather,
To beg a tale of breath too weak
To stir the tiniest feather!
Yet what can one poor voice avail
Against three tongues together?

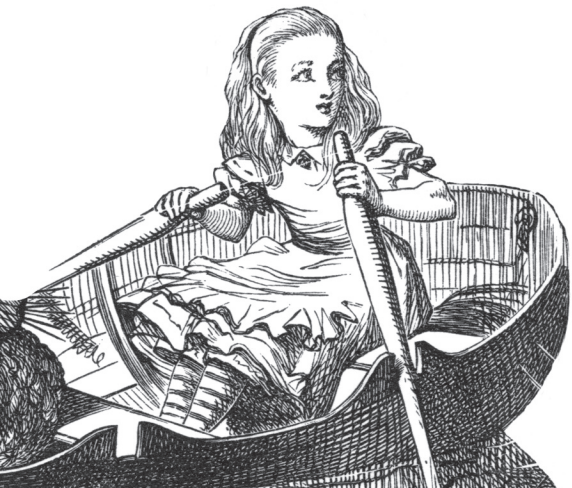
Imperious Prima flashes forth
Her edict 'to begin it' –
In gentler tone Secunda hopes
'There will be nonsense in it!' –
While Tertia interrupts the tale
Not *more* than once a minute.

Anon, to sudden silence won,
In fancy they pursue
The dream-child moving through a land
Of wonders wild and new,
In friendly chat with bird or beast –
And half believe it true.

And ever, as the story drained
The wells of fancy dry,
And faintly strove that weary one
To put the subject by,
'The rest next time –' 'It *is* next time!'
The happy voices cry.

Thus grew the tale of Wonderland:
Thus slowly, one by one,
Its quaint events were hammered out –
And now the tale is done,
And home we steer, a merry crew,
Beneath the setting sun.

Alice! a childish story take,
And with gentle hand
Lay it where Childhood's dreams are twined
In Memory's mystic band,
Like pilgrim's wither'd wreath of flowers
Pluck'd in a far-off land.



Lewis Carroll
from his Preface to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

In the beginning a little Alice was born,
full of possibilities and impossibilities . . .

Wonderland

There's a wonderland in Alice. It lies in her sleepy eyes.
May she dream about a queen, turtle soup so rich
and green,
and an ever changing size.

And the wonderland in Alice gives her an itch to explore.
She'll discover poetry and a little golden key
to unlock each waiting door.

All the wonderland in Alice brims with her hopes
and fears.
Let her stop to have a chat with a grinning Cheshire cat
and be carried along by her tears.

There's a wonderland in Alice – a quick wit,
heart and soul
when she takes a sneaky look
deep down inside a book
or deep down a rabbit-hole.

Rachel Rooney



Uses

'What is the use of a book,' thought Alice
'without pictures or conversation?'

They prop open windows; let butterflies in
and stop doors from slamming in sudden, cold wind.

They help with your balance and make you walk tall,
they'll increase your height on a chair, if you're small.

You can use them to lean on when tables aren't free.
and they're handy for dinners while watching TV.

They can flatten a rose to a paper keepsake
or hide the right answers in tests that you take.

Pile them like pillows at the foot of your bed.
(Conversation and pictures held inside your head.)

Rachel Rooney

In Chapter 4 of Alice in Wonderland *Alice encounters labels with instructions (such as 'Drink Me'). Each instruction Alice follows leads to an adventure . . .*



I am a poem.
Read me
and you'll shrink.
You'll notice
your own
insignificance
as you marvel
at the majesty
of the macrocosm.
The sky will
swallow you
with its infinite cloak;
You'll lose
your footing
on the tumbling ground,
and the moon
will turn
its face.

I am a poem.
Read me
and you'll grow.
You'll expand
beyond the horizons
of everything
you've known.
Mountains
will turn to atoms
and you'll eat six planets
before breakfast.
You'll sit at the centre
of your own solar system;
The cosmos
will bathe
in your light.

I am a poem.
Read me
and you'll never
be the same again.

I am a poem.

Read me.

Joshua Seigal



When Alice attempts to recite the classic 'How doth the little busy bee . . .' with all its good sense and good advice, it 'all came different'. Literature for children like Alice was often full of advice. Lewis Carroll played with that tradition.

Against Idleness and Mischief

How doth the little busy bee
    Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
    From every opening flower!

How skillfully she builds her cell!
    How neat she spreads the wax!
And labours hard to store it well
    With the sweet food she makes.

In works of labour or of skill,
    I would be busy too;
For Satan finds some mischief still
    For idle hands to do.

In books, or work, or healthful play,
    Let my first years be passed,
That I may give for every day
    Some good account at last

Isaac Watts

How Doth The Little Crocodile . . .

How doth the little crocodile
    Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
    On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin
    How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws!

Lewis Carroll

How Doth the Scary Centipede

How doth the scary centipede
Relax, each shining hour?
Why, he loves a game of hopscotch
And then he takes a shower.

What does the wasp do on his break,
the cheeky little fellow?
He watches Arsenal play away
In their shirts of black and yellow.

How doth the venomous toad chill out
Whilst waiting for a bug?
He dreams of playing leap-frog
Or a princess he might hug.

And what about the funnel web,
That mean and loathsome spider?
He likes to run a marathon
In the Hadron Collider.

These things that sting, poison or bite
Their relaxation's ample.
So, gentle reader, I'd advise
You follow their example.

Roger Stevens

