

2009

## Photography's creative influence on Lewis Carroll's Alice's adventures in Wonderland and Through the looking glass and what Alice found there

Bridget Mahoney  
*University of South Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Scholar Commons Citation

Mahoney, Bridget, "Photography's creative influence on Lewis Carroll's Alice's adventures in Wonderland and Through the looking glass and what Alice found there" (2009). *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/2079>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

Photography's Creative Influence on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*  
and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

by

Bridget Mahoney

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Nancy Tyson, Ph.D.  
Gould, Marty, Ph.D.  
Sipora, Phillip, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
July 13, 2009

Keywords: portraits, creativity, incubation, preparation, insight, verification

© Copyright 2009, Bridget Mahoney

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Chapter One: Introduction, Historical and Theoretical: The Four Stages of Creativity	1
Chapter Two: Lewis Carroll, Photographer: Preparation and Incubation	7
Chapter Three: Lewis Carroll, Novelist: Insight and Verification	17
Chapter Four: Conclusion	26
Bibliography	30

Photography's Creative Influence on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*  
and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

Bridget Mahoney

ABSTRACT

Lewis Carroll's novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* share many characteristics with the author's photographs. Both Carroll's portraits and literature utilize dreamlike imagery to move beyond the present time and space into a dream world. The similar imagery demonstrates an important creative link between Carroll's novels and photographs. The creation of Carroll's masterpiece, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, creatively depended on the photographic images Carroll produced. Utilizing the four step process of creativity generally accepted by psychologists, Carroll's photographs are examined alongside his texts. In doing so, modern readers of Carroll's novels can glimpse the creative process that produced Wonderland.

To argue the creative relationship between Carroll's photography and literature, R. Keith Sawyer's 2006 text, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* is employed. Sawyer describes creativity as a four step process: preparation, incubation, insight, and verification. Using these four steps as reference points, passages from

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found*

*There* are examined alongside Carroll's photographs in order to demonstrate the creative importance of photography to the creation of the Alice novels.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction, Historical and Theoretical: The Four Stages of Creativity

Lewis Carroll realized man's highest intellectual power, creativity, when he wrote the novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. A leisurely day of boating with the Liddell children is usually credited with the creation of these masterpieces of children's literature. I believe Carroll's ability to produce these creative masterpieces resulted from a long intellectual process rather than one inspired afternoon and depended more on his fascination with photography than on his friendship with the Liddells. Like his literature, Carroll's photography utilized dreamlike imagery to move beyond the present time and space into a dream world. I believe the similar imagery demonstrates an important creative link between Carroll's novels and photographs. Based on this link, I will argue that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* creatively depended on the photographic images Carroll produced. Although Carroll took photographs from 1856 to 1880, his most prolific period occurred between 1857 and 1862 (Taylor and Wakeling xi). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published directly after this period in 1865. *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* followed in 1872. By examining both Carroll's photographs and novels, I believe a modern audience can glimpse the creative process that produced Wonderland.

In this thesis, I will examine Carroll's photography alongside his novels, arguing that his ability to create *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* was a direct result of a four step creative process commonly accepted by twenty-first century cognitive psychologists. The method applied (?) in this study comes from R. Keith Sawyer's 2006 text, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. In this text, Sawyer describes the four step process of creativity: preparation, incubation, insight, and verification. The first step in the process, preparation, is defined as "collecting data and information, searching for related ideas, listening to suggestions." In the second step, incubation, a "delay between preparation and the moment of insight" occurs. During incubation, information is organized and unconsciously developed. Insight, the third step, occurs when the individual experiences an "aha" or "eureka" moment. The final step, verification, includes "evaluating the worth of the insight, and elaboration into its complete form" (Sawyer 58-59).

The establishment of these four stages resulted from decades of failed or incomplete research on creativity (Sawyer 58). Originally, the goal of research conducted by cognitive psychologists was to determine a way to measure creativity. Prior to the 1990s, when cognitive neuroscientists developed the technology to observe brain activity, creativity was discussed by two groups: psychologists and theologians. When defining creativity, "psychologists look inward and theologians upward" (Pfenninger and Shubik xii). Discussions on creativity changed in the 1970s with the publication of Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi's study of problem finding in visual artists (Piirto 18). By studying art students and students not majoring in art, Getzels and

Csikszentmihalyi determined art students were aloof, reserved, introspective, serious, and failed to conform to contemporary social values to a much greater degree than students not studying art (Piiro 150). Their ability to positively identify and measure shared character traits of creative individuals encouraged researchers to continue their attempts to measure creativity. Cognitive psychologists wanted to establish a way to measure an individual's creativity similar to the way an IQ can be quantitatively determined (Sawyer 59). Despite their efforts, such a scientific measurement proved impossible to establish. Instead, researchers found that "Creativity takes place over time" and "creators often get ideas while working with their materials" (Sawyer 58). Cognitive psychologists abandoned the idea of measuring creativity and embraced the idea of creativity as a process rather than an aptitude. They generated the four step process as a result of their failed research attempts.

The first two stages of the process, preparation and incubation, serve to frame Carroll's early years, approximately between 1855 and 1865. During this time, Carroll became fascinated with and took up photography as a hobby. As his photographic skills increased, his pictures began depicting mental states and fantasy worlds rather than serving as simple reflections of reality. Eventually, props and costumes added fantastic elements to his photographs. Slowly, Wonderland emerged from Carroll's albums. Preparation and incubation served to lay the creative foundation on which Carroll produced *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Introduced to photography by his uncle, Skeffington Lutwidge, in 1852, Carroll had exhibited a fascination with photography long before he purchased his



first camera in March 1856 (Gernsheim 27). Frustrated by his failed attempts at drawing, Carroll found that photography supplied him with a way of visually creating a pretend world (Cohen, *Reflections* 17). Through the camera, Carroll controlled not just what was seen, but how it was seen. Russian film director Dziga Vertov described the camera as a “mechanical eye.” (Berger 1). Writing about his use of the camera, Vertov stated:

Freed from the boundaries of time and space I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you. (Berger 1)

The “mechanical eye” enabled Carroll to manipulate reality. Images could be flipped upside down, layered in on top of other images, and the left side could be changed to the right. A photographer could produce an image from life that represented a dream or fantasy world through such manipulations. This must have appealed to the father of Wonderland. The creation of pretend scenes through the recording of real images provided artistic possibilities unlike anything before conceived.

Not only did photography allow Carroll to create fantastic images, it also allowed him to explore the link between the human mind and photography. In 1855, before Carroll took up the hobby of photography, he used photography’s new technology to create an elaborate metaphor satirizing popular literary styles (Nickel 36). In “Photography Extraordinary” Carroll describes a photo-based process that can create novels straight from images in the writer’s brain. Lazy and stupid, the novelist in Carroll’s spoof has pictures taken of his brain activity. The photographers develop the image and discover “faint and almost illegible characters” (Nickel 16). The characters

develop further into words creating a sentimental story. The photographers add more acid to the image to increase the story's intensity. Each application of acid results in a tale that pokes fun at a specific type of writing popular in the Victorian era. Without the existence of photography, Carroll's metaphor couldn't exist.

Carroll's desire to record the activity of the brain through photography was shared by some of his contemporaries. Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond, attempted to establish a scientific link between photographic portraiture to psychology (Heyert 129). Appointed superintendent of the woman's division of Surrey County Asylum in 1848, Diamond took pictures of the women living in the facility (Heyert 129). Diamond wrote that the photographer "catches in a moment the permanent cloud, or the passing storm or sunshine of the soul, and thus enables the metaphysician to witness and trace out the connection between the visible and the invisible in one important branch of his research into the philosophy of the human mind" (Heyert 129-31). Diamond's photographs, unlike Carroll's, are disturbing. The vacant expressions on the faces of his subjects reveal, to the modern viewer, more about what isn't in the subject's mind rather than what it contains. The ability of a photograph to reveal the inner workings of someone's mind heightened its allure for Victorians. Even Elizabeth Barrett Browning commented on the relationship between photography and the mind. In a letter to her friend Mary Russell Mitford, Browning likened photography to mesmerism (Groth 1).

The third and fourth stages of the creative process, insight, and verification, frame the writing of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. During these stages, Carroll applied the lessons learned through photography to his literature. Carroll's primary moment of insight occurred

when boating with the Liddell children. When called upon to tell a story, Carroll drew on his experiences as a photographer as well as his previous literary output to relate *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to his attentive audience. Over and over again scenes from the novels mirror Carroll's photographs. The novels grew out of his photographic albums reconstructed as a narrative.

Verification, best examined in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, brings Carroll's creative process to a close. During the creation of this novel, Carroll was very aware of what he was doing and how he was doing it. Very little of his creativity occurred unconsciously at this point in time. The don had already experienced the success of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The world of Wonderland was established and now all that was needed were additional situations and scenes. Carroll's decision to continue the story of Alice and the Wonderland characters proves that he felt his creative efforts worthwhile.

By utilizing preparation, incubation, insight, and verification I will argue not only for the way in which Carroll created *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, but that new insights can be gained into the texts.

## Chapter 2

### Lewis Carroll, Photographer: Preparation and Incubation

During Carroll's lifetime, photography changed from an intricate science practiced by a privileged few to a form of technology accessible to the masses. Gone were the days of the camera obscura and images that faded into darkness in front of the frustrated photographer's eyes. By the 1850s, photography was a toddler and like any energetic child who has just discovered how to use his legs, the medium was off and running in all directions, developing in leaps and bounds. Photography's coming-out occurred at the 1851 Great Exhibition held at the Crystal Palace in London. It is probably here that Carroll first encountered photographs. A letter he writes his sister Elizabeth following his visit to the Great Exhibition marvels over the displays, calling the overall effect a "fairylane" (Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* 38). Photography enjoyed public popularity throughout England. The 1851 census for Great Britain identified 51 professional photographers (Gersheim 5). Demand for portraits swamped these professionals. One photographer managed to take ninety-seven negatives in eight hours (Gersheim 9). When Carroll purchased his first camera on March 18, 1856 he had no intentions of making a living from its use (Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* 150). Rather, Carroll desired to master the new technology. Morton Cohen states in *Reflections in a Looking Glass: A Centennial Celebration of Lewis Carroll, Photographer*, "Carroll

never had a hobby; when he grew interested in a subject, he worked hard to become a specialist, and so it was with photography” (18).

For many years, Carroll’s photography was treated as an afterthought to the photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron. Well known critics and historians of photography often cite Carroll as an amateur photographer and admirer of Cameron’s work; his inclusion in their texts owing entirely to the fame of his literature and not his photographic skill. The attitude towards Carroll’s photography slowly began changing following the publication of *Lewis Carroll: Photographer* in 1969 by Helmut Gernsheim. Gernsheim credits his research on Julia Margaret Cameron as leading to his interest in Carroll. Gernsheim’s treatment of Carroll as a serious photographer and not just a piddling amateur caused the photographic community to pay attention to Carroll’s work. Carroll’s photographs and the process required to produce them deserve serious critical treatment, and not just from scholars of photography. Literary scholars stand to learn much about how Carroll created the novels, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, by studying Carroll’s photographs and the process he employed. I believe Carroll’s photographic images serve as the creative starting point for the eventual writing of the Alice novels.

Carroll’s substantial photographic output between 1856 and 1865 defines the stages of preparation and incubation, the first two steps of the creative process. Preparation, the first step including the gathering of information, searching for related ideas, and listening to suggestions, began as soon as Carroll purchased his first camera (Sawyer 58). In 1857, just a year after Carroll took up photography, he wrote the first version of “Hiawatha’s Photographing.” In this poem spoofing Longfellow’s “Song of

Hiawatha,” Carroll demonstrates his ability to make connections between photography and literature. The photographer, Hiawatha, attempts to take portraits of a family, but each photograph fails miserably. Surely drawing from his own experience with photographic models, Carroll describes how the father “moved a little” causing the portrait to “fail entirely” (Cohen, *Reflections* 26). Likewise, he makes fun of the eldest daughter who employed an expression she termed “passive beauty” which consisted of “a squinting of the left-eye,” a “drooping of the right-eye,” and “a smile that went up sideways/ To the corner of the nostrils” (Cohen, *Reflections* 27). Carroll probably experienced many similar situations as he learned how to take successful portraits.

In addition to learning how to work with models, Carroll had to learn how to execute the chemical process required by wet-plate photography. While several methods of photography were available, Carroll used one of the most popular, the wet-plate photographic process. Created by Frederick Scott Archer in 1849, the wet-plate or collodion process was difficult to use successfully (Hirsch 72). In a text Carroll is believed to have owned, William de Wiveleslie Abney’s 1876 *Instruction in Photography*, 50 pages offer instruction in how to take a wet-plate photograph. Interspersing the text are chemical equations for the solutions and chemical baths the photographer was required to create for his plates. The wet-plate process demanded precision, patience, and a steady hand. Throughout the process the plate had to remain damp so that the ether in the collodion didn’t evaporate and prevent the creation of an image (Hirsch 72). In order to take and develop a photograph, the photographer had to polish a glass plate, arrange his model, prepare the plate in a darkroom by evenly pouring collodion over its entire surface area, sensitize the plate in a silver nitrate bath, and take

the plate from the darkroom to the model without letting it touch anything (Cohen, *Reflections* 18-19). Once in front of the model, the process was far from over. The model sat stone still for up to forty five seconds after which time the photographer had to carry the plate back to the darkroom, place it in a developing bath and then dunk it in a solution to “fix” the image (Cohen, *Reflections* 19). At this point the photographer was still not done creating the photograph. The plate had to be heated over a fire and drenched in varnish (Cohen, *Reflections* 19). Once dried, a positive print could finally be created.

Unfortunately, the demands of the process and the public resulted in professional portrait studios producing virtually the same photograph for all customers. Employing only one or two backdrops for portraits, professional photographers created a formula of sorts for producing portraits. Models were “placed in the same position, in the same light, against the same pillar or balustrade” and, as a result, often wore the same expression (Gernsheim 9). Producing images using the difficult and complicated wet-plate process proved technical skill and efficiency, but omitted artistry. Compared with other portraits of the time period, Carroll’s portraits demonstrate not just his technical skill, but his artistic aptitude. Constantly changing the backdrop, costumes, and poses of his models, Carroll strove to record images evoking fantasy worlds.

The creation of fantasy in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* can be directly tied to the way in which wet-plate photographs develop. Carroll’s eventual mastery of wet-plate process resulted from hours of washing pyrogallic acid over portraits during development. The acid caused the image to appear slowly. The section first treated with the wash appeared first, the rest of the image appearing in the order of treatment. After

producing hundreds of portraits, Carroll was well acquainted with how disconcerting it is to see someone or something appear a part at a time. He connected this odd way of appearing on the plate with the odd way people and things can appear in dreams. Carroll applied this darkroom experience to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The Cheshire cat appears a body part at a time during the croquet match, much as an image appeared on a plate following the acid wash. At first the cat's mouth appears in order to talk to Alice and "In another minute the whole head appeared" (86). In this way, the physical process of creating a photograph influenced the novel by providing what Sawyer terms a "related idea."

I believe the entire premise of *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* is based on a similar "related idea." As Carroll developed his plates, creating negative images he later changed into positive prints, he must have marveled over the complete reversal of light that produced the life-like images. Photography allowed Carroll to create visual images similar to the mental images he later created through prose in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Roger Taylor and Edward Wakeling's text, *Lewis Carroll, Photographer*, presents the contents of Carroll's photographic albums held at the Princeton University Library. They describe the way in which the "magic" of photography appealed to Carroll:

Watching the glass plate develop offered a conundrum of reversed tones where white became black and black, white. In the world of photography, the positive became negative and the negative, positive. The transient



became permanent and the established, fugitive. Nothing was ever quite what it seemed. (ii)

Carroll used this “magic” to craft his Alice novels. While the changing of light tones into dark tones doesn’t exactly mimic the reversal of images in a mirror, the negative to positive process of producing a photograph in addition to the glass plates used to create this change must have been on Carroll’s mind as he developed the plot line for *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. In order to gain access to the Looking-glass House, Alice has to climb through the mirror. The mirror serves as the vehicle through which Alice transitions into Wonderland. Similarly, the glass plate negative is the vehicle used to create a positive portrait. In both instances, the intercession of the glass is required for the fantasy or image to exist.

The appearance of the glass plate during the photographic process also influenced the way Carroll described Alice’s movement from her home to the looking-glass house. Alice describes the glass as turning into a “sort of mist” as she climbs through the mirror (Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* 143). The chemical washes over glass photographic plates produce what can be likened to a mist over the image. After washing hundreds of plates, the misty appearance of the glass certainly influenced the way in which Carroll chose to describe the changing mirror.

Photography was also necessary for the second step of the process, incubation. During this second step information is organized and unconsciously developed (Sawyer 58). The unconscious nature of incubation makes it difficult to examine. Psychologist William James used the metaphor of a cooking cauldron to explain incubation:

Instead of thoughts of concrete things patiently following one another... we have the most abrupt cross-cuts and transitions from one idea to another... the most unheard-of combinations of elements, the subtlest associations of analogy; in a word, we seem suddenly introduced into a seething cauldron of ideas, where everything is fizzling and bobbing about in a state of bewildering activity. (qtd. in Sawyer 60-61)

Carroll's cauldron overflowed with his experiences with and knowledge of photography and writing. The procedures used to take, develop, and print photographs were ingredients in the cauldron as were his early attempts at writing. Family magazines he created as a young student, *Photography Extraordinary* (1855), *Hiawatha's Photographing* (1857), and *Photographer's Day Out* (1860) made up the literary ingredients of the cauldron. Early portraits of family and friends along with the poses and scenes he created were also important influences.

*Photographer's Day Out*, Carroll's last text explicitly dealing with photography was published in 1860. Despite four years of photographic experience under his belt, the text is very similar to *Hiawatha's Photographing*. In this prose piece, Carroll continues to explore the ways in which people attempt to pose for the camera. In *Photographer's Day Out*, like *Hiawatha's Photographing*, Carroll's main character attempts to take portraits of a family. The photographer Brassai points out the similarity in topic and tone in his essay, "Carroll the Photographer." In addition to using the "same biting humor," both ridicule the expressions and costumes of the people sitting for photographs (Brassai 50). As the narrator, Tubbs, photographs the family he describes the costume assumed by the mother, who trying to assume the persona of a Shakespearean character, wore "a

blue silk gown, with a Highland scarf over one shoulder, a ruffle of Queen Elizabeth's time round the throat, and a hunting-whip" (Cohen, *Reflections* 23). Brassai also makes note of the ways in which Carroll's photography relates to the Alice novels, "there was a natural affinity between his world of strange devices, magic mirrors and changes of size with the world of photography" (56-57). He even suggests that through photography Carroll "learned about the extinction of the subject and its resurrection beyond reality: he knew all the paradoxes of photography, how to stop or extend time, how to evoke the presence of what is not there, and remove what is there" (57).

Writing a prose piece so similar to one already created is evidence that Carroll used this time period to experiment with related ideas and further explore previous connections. By revisiting a previously used situation, a family sitting for their portraits, Carroll was able to further organize his thoughts on photography and how photographic images distort reality. Distortions occurred in two different ways. First, the physical reality of the situation was made to appear altered in order to invoke a different time or place. For example, the mother wasn't really a Shakespearean character. The clothing she wore and props she employed gave the impression she was from a different era. Photography allowed the photographer to produce an artificial reality. If the viewer was able to see beyond the photograph, they would recognize the ruse. In many of Carroll's photographs, he dressed models in costumes to produce this make-believe effect. A famous example, "Alice Liddell as The Beggar Maid," proves how Carroll could alter reality through his photography. In the photograph, Alice Liddell is dressed in rags, a fist jauntily on her hip with a sober expression on her face (Taylor and Wakeling 62). A

viewer would easily fall for the trick, believing Alice to be a poor little beggar when in reality she led a very comfortable life.

The second distortion occurred when people or objects changed shape or size. In *Photographer's Day Out*, as in *Hiawatha's Photographing*, Carroll complains of his subjects' inability to keep still for the photograph. In *Photographer's Day Out*, Tubbs laments inaccuracies of a photograph of a quaint cottage produced due to movements during the long exposure. Once developed, the cow appears to have three heads and the farmer has too many arms and legs (Carroll, *Complete Works* 985). Tubbs suggests the farmer be called "a spider, a centipede" (Carroll, *Complete Works* 985). Although the cottage appears as it should, the farmer and cow are significantly altered.

These two types of distortions are seen time and again in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. In both novels, Alice experiences an altered reality in which chess pieces, playing cards, and animals assume human abilities and characteristics. This altered state exists within the framework of a dream much as Carroll's photographs exist within the boundaries of a camera lens. If the audience could see beyond the dream or photograph, their understanding of what is represented would be very different. In the novels Alice continually changes in both shape and size, alternately shrinking small as a mouse and growing gigantic. Similar to the farmer with the appearance of a spider or centipede in *Photographer's Day Out*, she is mistaken for a snake in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll 55). Carroll's use of these distortions can be attributed to incubation. The time and effort spent organizing and linking photography and literature

resulted in the fantastic images and situations in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*.

## Chapter 3

### Lewis Carroll, Novelist: Insight and Verification

As Carroll organized his ideas about photography and literature he began making connections between the two, moving into the third step of the creative process, insight. This third step is often referred to as the “Aha!” or “Eureka!” moment (Sawyer 59). Psychologist and author, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, claims insight “occurs when a subconscious connection between ideas fits so well that it is forced to pop out into awareness like a cork held underwater breaking out into the air after it is released” (104). More recent research suggests that this breakthrough occurs not in one moment, but in a “chain reaction of many tiny sparks while executing an idea” (Russo). It is likely that as Carroll told the Liddell children the story of Alice he experienced a series of these “sparks.” Drawing on his experiences with photography, Carroll crafted the scenes and situations in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and later *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Although it is impossible to accurately reconstruct the series of “Eureka!” moments Carroll experienced, his experience with photography played a large role in their occurrence.

While all of Carroll’s photographs contributed to the generation of his “Eureka!” moments, I feel some photographs were more influential than others. Douglas Nickel in his text, *Dreaming in Pictures*, suggests that Carroll’s photographs exist on a continuum: “At one end of the scale was the celebrity portrait, where the photographer answered the

viewer's expectations with a map of the subject's outer appearance (and corresponding character); at the other end was the emblematic portrayal of abstract ideas, where the proper name of the sitter is irrelevant to the picture's meaning" (41-42). I propose that the photographs that eventually generated Carroll's "Eureka!" moments were located at the "emblematic portrayal of abstract ideas" end of the spectrum. In these photographs, Carroll's focus was not the model, but the state of mind they were posed to represent. In *The Dream*, taken in 1860, Carroll photographed three children acting out the Nativity (Nickel 47). Carroll exposed the plate twice in order to create an image that depicts a sleeping girl, representing the virgin, and a little girl and boy, representing the Magi. While the sleeping girl, slumped in a straight back chair is solidly in focus, the girl and boy representing the Magi are semi-transparent. The design on the carpet shows through the girl's foot and a painting depicting the Flight into Egypt can be seen through the boy's arm, head, and upper torso (Nickel 46-47). In this photograph, the children's identities are irrelevant. The importance of the photograph rests in their representation of a little girl's dream of the Nativity.

Another photograph representing a dream and utilizing a double exposure was taken by Carroll in 1863. The photograph features a young girl, Mary McDonald, asleep in bed. Her body is slightly turned to the camera. As in *The Dream*, the sleeping child is solid and in focus. At the foot of her bed, the little girl's father and brother sit watching her sleep. They appear to float, disappearing into the sheets. Their gaze is protective despite their spectral appearance (Nickel 47). The photograph aims to represent the little girl's dream of her father and brother, positioning it solidly as an "emblematic portrayal of abstract ideas."

As Carroll narrated the story of Alice to the Liddell children, Carroll's subconscious connected his photographs representing dreaming states to the story he was creating. The resulting "Eureka!" moments informed his narration. One of Carroll's biggest "Eureka!" moments occurred when he realized that the narrative form allowed him to elaborate on the dream states he attempted to represent in photographs. By narrating a story, he could animate his photographs, showing and not just suggesting a dream world to his audience. This connection generated the premise of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Through his narrative, Carroll placed Alice in a dreaming state like the subjects of his photographs. Unlike his photographs, Carroll was free to make Alice interact with her surroundings while dreaming. She didn't have to lie still and silent to represent slumber. She was able to occupy a conscious and active state in Wonderland. In the narrative, the sleeping Alice moves out of passive sleep and interacts with the world of her dreams. The narrative form also opened up possibilities for producing fantastic situations and creatures Carroll could not create through photography. Alice wasn't restricted to dreaming about real people, she could see and interact with imaginary creatures such as a talking rabbit who wore a waistcoat. The stories of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* build upon Carroll's photographs with the inclusion of fantasy Carroll could not produce through photography.

The production of a narrative also allowed Carroll more control over his audience's interpretation of his work. In his review of an exhibit of Carroll's photographs, "Photography Review: In an Unsullied Wonderland," Michael Kimmelman states:



But photography is a notoriously ambiguous medium. Untethered from their context, photographs tell us precious little about what we see in them. They are malleable artifacts, their meanings changing with time, depending on who is looking at them and when.

By producing a narrative, Carroll took the guesswork out of his audience's interpretations. A narrative gives the audience clearer interpretational direction than a photograph. This can be demonstrated through the examination of a scene from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* alongside one of Carroll's photographs. The photograph for this examination is typical of Carroll's portraits. A young Nelly MacDonald sits at a small round table with a thick book open in front of her. She is in profile, gazing upward with her hands folded as if in prayer over the pages of the book (Taylor and Wakelin 181). The audience has to make several assumptions about this image. First, and most obviously, they would assume Nelly is praying based on her hands and upward gaze. The book on the table is probably the Bible. After these basic assumptions, the audience's interpretation of the photograph is based more on individual opinions and experiences than the photographer's intentions. One viewer might think Nelly is saying daily prayers while another might assume she is experiencing a personal crisis requiring spiritual strength. Yet another viewer could determine Nelly is praying for intervention on behalf of a friend or family member. The photograph shows the audience Nelly in a prayerful pose, but cannot express anything further to assist with interpretation. Carroll's intentions are lost to viewers who must construct their own meaning.

Carroll is better able to control his audience's interpretation in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. An example of this improved control can be found in chapter 6, "Pig and

Pepper.” At the beginning of this chapter, Alice approaches and knocks on the Duchess’s door. Alice waits without an answer as the Frog-Footman muses on how she cannot enter the house because there is no one to open the door inside. Standing on the doorstep, Alice becomes frustrated and annoyed with the Frog-Footman who offers no assistance. If Carroll had tried to create this scene with a photograph, he would not have been able to use a frog as a footman. This fantastic element of the scene could not have existed. Alice’s frustration and annoyance with the situation would also be missing from a photograph. In a photograph, Alice’s expression would be the only clue to her mental state and could be easily misinterpreted. Through narration, her frustration and annoyance is obvious: “He (the Frog-Footman) was looking up into the sky all the time he was speaking, and this Alice thought decidedly uncivil” (Carroll 59). Carroll further reveals her thoughts to the reader as Alice states, “It’s really dreadful [...] the way all the creatures here argue. It’s enough to drive one crazy!” (Carroll 59). Carroll’s narration takes the guesswork out of interpretation. While the Frog-Footman scene exemplifies the result of “Eureka!” moments, it could also be used as an example of the final stage of the creative process, verification. Verification, “evaluating the worth of the insight, and elaboration into its complete form,” takes place consciously in the creator’s mind (Sawyer 59). In this step, Carroll carefully crafted both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. While creating the novels, Carroll drew heavily on images and ideas represented in his photographs. The conclusion of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is an example of a photographic image Carroll transformed into a scene for the novel. At the end of the story, the Queen of Hearts orders the pack of cards to attack Alice:

At this the whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her; she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face. (Carroll 124)

The image of an older child cradling a younger sleeping or daydreaming child appears in six of Carroll's photographs taken before the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Three of the six are photographs of the Brodie girls. In each, the younger sisters crowd the eldest, Lilian. They lay their heads in her lap or against her shoulder. In the photographs they appear to be sleeping or lost in daydreams, their eyes half closed or focused on something in the distance. The photograph that most suggests the ending of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* depicts Lilian and a younger sister, Ethel. Taken in June 1861, the sisters sit outside on a shag carpet. Lilian sits upright and grins happily at the camera. A book is open on her lap and she clutches a flower in her hand. Ethel lies against her sister's shoulder. Her eyes are closed and her body appears relaxed and sleeping. The similarities between the photograph and scene in the novel are numerous. Both depict an older sister reading. The first scene of the novel states that "once or twice she (Alice) had peeped into the book her sister was reading" (Carroll 11). At the end of the novel, the reader assumes the book is still in the sister's lap as shown in the photograph of Lilian. In both the photograph and novel, the younger sister falls asleep while supported by the older sister. In the novel, Alice's sister brushes leaves from Alice's face while in the photograph Lilian holds a flower, perhaps a bloom that fell onto the girls? The photograph and novel scene even share the same outdoor setting. So

numerous are the similarities between the photograph and scene in the novel that I believe Carroll used this photograph as his template for the novel's conclusion.

With the exception of the previous example, I believe verification in Carroll's novels is best examined in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Following the success of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* brought the heights of Carroll's creative powers to a close. During the creation of this novel, Carroll was very aware of what he was doing and how he was doing it. The world of Wonderland was established and now all that was needed were additional situations and scenes. Carroll's decision to continue the story of Alice and the Wonderland characters proves that he felt his creative efforts worthwhile.

A notable connection between Carroll's photography and the novel *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* is the use of chess. In a photograph taken in 1858 titled, "The Misses Lutwidge Playing Chess," Carroll created an image manipulating light and position in order to create a social metaphor. Nickel suggests that by taking photographs of people playing chess, Carroll "metaphorically suggests the strategy and drama inherent in a simulated social existence dictated by rules, hierarchies, and conventions" (50). In the photograph, Carroll's aunts sit across from one another leaning slightly over a chessboard. Very similar in appearance, the women mirror each other's posture and gaze. The aunt playing with the dark chess pieces wears a dark colored dress in front of a dark background. The aunt playing with the light colored chess pieces wears a light colored plaid dress. The cloth behind the women turns dramatically from dark, behind the aunt dressed in dark colors, to light behind the woman

in the light colored dress. The change in color produces a line down the fabric and divides the photograph in two (Nickel 49).

Carroll took other photographs of people playing chess, but I believe this photograph, with its binary set-up and focus on the chess game, treating it not as an accessory to the photograph, but the subject, is the likely prototype of *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Nickel claims that chess is the “perfect motif for the story” (49). Building on Nickel’s statement, I believe chess provided the entire platform for the creation of a story in which Alice can travel back to Wonderland and experience the dream world in terms of changes in power rather than changes in size as in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

In the novel, Alice plays an elaborate game of chess with the other creatures of Wonderland. The game begins when Alice stumbles upon the Red Queen in the second chapter. Below Alice and the Red Queen, the countryside stretches out in a checkerboard pattern. Alice tells the Red Queen; “It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played--all over the world,” adding “I wouldn’t mind being a Pawn, if only I might join--though of course I should like to be a Queen best” (Carroll 163). Alice then embarks on a journey through the chessboard below. Carroll applies the rules of a chess game to the story of Wonderland. These rules allow for changes in power and social mobility not available in real Victorian society. During the game, Alice gets her wish and becomes a queen. The conclusions of the chess game and dream occur when Alice captures the Red Queen. The capture results in a checkmate of the Red King and ends the game. Drawing on the photograph of his aunts, Carroll expanded the idea of a chess game into a motif for the novel.

Along with chess, dreaming played an important role in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. During the step of verification, Carroll evaluated the many photographs he'd taken of sleeping children in his early phase. He expanded on their preoccupation with the unconscious mind by incorporating dreams into his narrative. *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* takes place within the confines of a dream similar to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The novel begins with Alice "sitting curled up in a corner of the great arm-chair, half talking to herself and half asleep" (Carroll 137-38). Carroll often took pictures of little girls resting or pretending to sleep on a chair or sofa. One such example is a portrait of Annie Rogers taken in 1861. In the photograph, Annie pretends to be asleep on a lounge chair. Her head has fallen towards the camera, her legs are bare and crossed, and her hands are clasped across her stomach (Taylor and Wakeling 182). The audience of the photograph has no idea of what Annie may be dreaming. Restricted by the technology of his time, Carroll was very limited in how he could transmit the content of dreams to his audience. Photographs utilizing double exposures allowed for some explanation of dreams, but, as previously discussed, limited Carroll to the role of a passive dreamer. I propose that Carroll's interest in dreams caused him to craft his novels in order to fully reveal the content of dreams. Drawing on photographs like the image of Annie, Carroll elaborated on still scenes, crafting a story that brought dreams to life.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* are universally accepted as Carroll's masterpieces. Although Carroll published some later works, they are not on a par with the Alice novels.

The completion of his major works loosely coincided with the cessation of Carroll's photographic pursuits. Carroll gave up photography in 1880 (Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* 171-72). His last known photograph was taken in June of Evelyn Hatch (Taylor and Wakeling 128). Carroll left no clues as to why he gave up the hobby. In his biography of Carroll, Cohen identifies several factors that likely contributed to Carroll's abandonment of the hobby: rumors about Carroll's nude photography of children circulated in Oxford, the dry plate process became the preferred photographic process, and Carroll wanted to devote more time to his literature (Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* 172). Of these three reasons, I think the increase in popularity of the dry plate process was the most influential in Carroll's decision to stop taking photographs. Carroll rejected the results of the dry plate process as "artistically inferior" (Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* 172). Carroll's snobbery may also have been invoked in the decision; the dry plate process made it easier to take photographs and opened up the hobby to less skilled individuals. A debate raged over whether a photograph was a piece of art or just a mirror image of reality requiring little artistic skill (Taylor and Wakeling

110). The increased simplicity of creating a photographic image suggested artistic skill was secondary to the camera's abilities. It is likely that, for Carroll, this increased simplicity diminished his interest in the hobby. What use was a simplistic process doable by anyone to a man who thrived on mastering difficult procedures? The switch to the dry plate process lessened the photographic process in Carroll's eyes and hastened his abandonment of the hobby.

Once he abandoned photography, Carroll stopped producing material that would support the four steps of the creative process. In addition to quitting photography, Carroll gave up his mathematical lectureship (Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* 171). Without the images and ideas generated through his photographs and, to a lesser degree, his lectures, Carroll crippled his creative process and produced literature considered second rate when compared to the Alice novels.

Using photographs in order to examine Carroll's four step creative process offers valuable insights into the crafting of the novels, but is not without problems. These problems qualify but do not invalidate the present study. They arise from the difficulty of accurately interpreting photographs, the looping nature of the creative process, and the difficulty of reconstructing the creative thought process.

Modern viewers of Carroll's photographs face interpretative challenges not faced by Carroll's fellow Victorians: "Having lost most of the literary equipment and imaginative discipline the Victorians brought to these pictures, we must accept that our critical perception of them, even with a sincere effort at bridging the historical gap, must end in partial failure" (Nickel 44). Due to this inevitable "partial failure," we cannot possibly generate a completely correct interpretation of any of Carroll's photographs.



Photography resists interpretation. Our incomplete understanding of Carroll's photographs could result in a gross misinterpretation of any particular image. Such a failure would prevent us from properly applying the photograph to the four step creative process.

The second problem with using the four step creative process is the nature of the process itself. Although I have presented the creative process in a chronological way, it often spirals back on itself. In addition, a person may find that they are working in more than one step of the process at once. When examining the Carroll novels, I determined that Carroll was predominantly working in the third step of the process, insight, during the crafting of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the fourth step, verification, while writing *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Despite my neat division, it is probable that Carroll experienced all the steps at various times during the crafting of the novels. Stories within each novel such as the song of the walrus and the carpenter may have required Carroll to move through the creative process separately from the process that produced the rest of the novel. A certain scene or chapter may have required that he loop back to the first step, preparation, to generate a premise or character.

The third problem arises from the four step process itself. Since the earlier steps include a multitude of influences, as described in Chapter 2, the author often hardly knows from where exactly his ideas come. Tracing influences is exponentially more difficult for a person living in a different time and place than that of the creator whose works they are examining. In isolating and privileging photography, I have surely overlooked other important personal or cultural influences. Attempts at reconstructing creative processes are so riddled with uncertainty that some have questioned the validity

of such an examination: “Is it reasonable for humans to try to comprehend creativity, the most advanced product of their minds? [ ... ] it might be beyond the capability of the brain to understand the full range of its own functions” (Pfeninger and Shubik xi).

Despite these qualifications and objections, I believe this study worthwhile. By examining Carroll’s photographs alongside *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* a plausible reconstruction of Carroll’s creative process is generated. This reconstruction provides insight in three different areas. First, it allows a modern reader entrance into the creative process of a long deceased writer. Although Carroll kept journals and wrote many letters, he neglected to discuss his creative influences. Until the establishment of the four step creative process, scholars could only guess at his creative influences. Guesswork certainly factors into this study; however, with the application of the four step process, Carroll’s creativity is given a more structured framework in which guesses must conform to a particular step and place within the creative process’s structure. The application of a structured process to creativity makes analysis of the creative process much easier for the modern reader.

Although some guesswork is still necessary, the four step creative process positively shows the interconnectedness of creative disciplines and the holistic nature of inspiration. While this study has striven to prove the importance of photography to Carroll’s novels, the four step creative process could also be applied in an attempt to prove the importance of Carroll’s mathematical lectures to the riddles embedded within the novels. Such a study could be equally valid and expand *still further* the identifiable sources of Carroll’s creativity.

## Bibliography

- Abney, William de Wiveleslie. *Instruction in Photography*. London: Piper, 1882. 15  
June 2008 <<http://books.google.com/>>.
- Badger, Gerry, and Martin Parr. *The Photobook: A History*. Vol. 1. New York: Phaidon,  
2007.
- Bell, Clive. *Art*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1947.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Literary  
Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell,  
1998. 1235-41.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Brassaï. "Carroll the Photographer." *Literature and Photography Interactions 1840-  
1990: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Jane M. Rabb. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico  
P, 1995.
- Burton, William Kinninmond. *The ABC of Modern Photography*. London: Piper  
and Carter, 1884. 15 June 2008 <<http://books.google.com/>>.
- Campos, Alfredo, and María José Pérez-Fabello. "Influence of Training in Artistic Skills  
on Mental Imaging Capacity." *Creativity Research Journal* 19 (2007): 227-32.  
*EBSCOhost*. 19 June 2008 <<http://www.ebscohost.com>>.
- Carroll, Lewis. *The Annotated Alice*. Ed. Martin Gardner. New York: Norton, 2000.
- Carroll, Lewis. *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*. New York: Barnes and Noble,

1994.

Christ, Carol, and John Jordan, eds. *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Cohen, Morton. *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

Cohen, Morton, ed. *Lewis Carroll and the Kitchins*. New York: The Lewis Carroll Society of North America, 1980.

Cohen, Morton. *Reflections in a Looking Glass*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 1998.

Elkins, James. *Photography Theory*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, 2007.

Fuller, John. "An Un-Victorian Photograph of the 1860s." *Art Journal* 29 (1970): 303-400.

Gamboni, Dario. "Independent of Time and Place: On the Rise and Decline of a Modernist Ideal." *Time and Place: The Geohistory of Art*. Ed. Thomas Kaufmann and Elizabeth Pilliod. Burlington: Ashgate P Co., 2005.

Gernsheim, Helmut. *Lewis Carroll, Photographer*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969.

Groth, Helen. *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Heyert, Elizabeth. *The Glass-House Years: Victorian Portrait Photography 1839-1870*. Montclair: Allanheld, Osmun and Co., 1979.

Hirsch, Robert. *Seizing the Light: A History of Photography*. Boston: McGraw Hill Co., Inc., 2000.

Howarth-Loomes, B.E.C. *Victorian Photography: An Introduction for Collectors and Connoisseurs*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974.

Kemp, Martin, ed. *The Oxford History of Western Art*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.

- Kimmelman, Michael. "Photography Review: In an Unsullied Wonderland." *New York Times Online* 6 June 2003. 28 Oct. 2007 <[www.nytimes.com/](http://www.nytimes.com/)>.
- Linkman, Audrey. *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*. New York: Tauris Parke Books, 1993.
- Lovett, Charlie. *Lewis Carroll Among His Books*. North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2005.
- Lucio-Meyer, J.J. de. *Visual Aesthetics*. London: Lund Humphries, 1973.
- Lui, Hesheng, Paul Schimpf, and Larry Vandervert. "How Working Memory and the Cerebellum Collaborate to Produce Creativity and Innovation." *Creativity Research Journal* 19 (2007): 1-18. EBSCOhost. 19 June 2008 <<http://www.ebscohost.com>>.
- Marien, Mary Warner. *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839-1900*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Nickel, Douglas. *Dreaming in Pictures: The Photography of Lewis Carroll*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002.
- Pink, Daniel. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers will Rule the Future*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2006.
- Russo, Francine. Interview with R. Keith Sawyer. "The Hidden Secrets of the Creative Mind." *Time* 8 Jan. 2006. *Time Online* 19 June 2008 <<http://www.time.com>>.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. NetLibrary. U of South Florida Lib. 19 June 2008 <<http://www.netlibrary.com.proxy.usf.edu/>>.
- Seiberling, Grace. *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*. Chicago:

U of Chicago P, 1986.

Smith, Lindsay. *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century*

*Photography*. New York: Manchester UP, 1998.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977.

Taylor, Roger and Edward Wakeling. *Lewis Carroll, Photographer*. Princeton: Princeton

UP, 2002.

Warner, Marina. *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*.

New York: Oxford UP, 2002.