

## 'Alice in Wonderland' Turns 150

**For the anniversary of 'Alice in Wonderland,' translations into Pashto, Esperanto, Emoji and Blissymbols**

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"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," Lewis Carroll's 1865 classic about a pert girl in a pinafore who falls down a rabbit hole into a magical and menacing underground world, is marking its 150th anniversary with new translations. She is Alis (in Yiddish), or Alisi (in Tongan) or Anya (in Russian), and, despite her advanced age, to readers everywhere she remains a curious youngster whose adventures have never gone out of print.

Two Yale professors are translating "Alice" into Late Egyptian hieroglyphs. A language consultant in California is putting the finishing touches on a Kazakh translation. There is an emoji version. An edition in Scouse, the dialect of Liverpool, is with the publisher; so are ones in Cockney rhyming slang and in two Afghan languages, Dari and Pashto. The Gothic translation came out just last week.

Carroll -- the pen name of Oxford math teacher Charles Lutwidge Dodgson -- constructed his tale as intricately as a proof, with subtle layers for readers young and old. He speckled his universe with puns and parodies of songs, such as the Hatter's rendition of "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat." That wordplay makes "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" a devilish -- and irresistible -- challenge for translators.

The book, with illustrations by "Punch" artist John Tenniel, was a watershed in children's literature. Instead of the often-saccharine and moralizing tales of the Victorian era, it featured an inquisitive heroine who was neither meek nor obedient. Wonderland's puzzling tea party, fretful rabbit, lugubrious Mock Turtle and murderous playing-card royalty satirized Victorian politics and mores.

But capturing Carroll's wit and use of homophones -- such as "tale" and "tail" - - in another tongue isn't for the faint of heart. English "is very rich in homophones and not all other languages are, so it can be very difficult to reproduce that kind of a joke," said Emer O'Sullivan, a professor at Leuphana University of Luneberg in Germany. In German alone, she said, there are over 40 different complete translations.

The book's timeless appeal in any language lies in Alice's game efforts "to make sense out of nonsense," said Carolyn Vega, assistant curator of literary and historical manuscripts at the Morgan Library and Museum, where Carroll's

original manuscript, on loan from the British Library, will be part of an Alice exhibit opening June 26.

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, author of "The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland," said that a few months after "Alice" came out, Carroll suggested to his publisher that they pursue translations. Carroll conceded in a subsequent letter, "the book is untranslatable into either French or German: the puns and songs being the chief obstacle."

Those hurdles haven't fazed Carroll enthusiasts, including Vladimir Nabokov, who translated "Alice" into Russian while he was a college student.

Indeed, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," is probably second only to the 17th-century allegory, "The Pilgrim's Progress," as the most translated English novel, said Jon A. Lindseth, general editor of "Alice in a World of Wonderlands: The Translations of Lewis Carroll's Masterpiece." The three-volume work, to be published in August, documents more than 170 translations, from Afrikaans to Zulu.

Mr. Lindseth is organizing a two-day conference on "Alice" translations in October at the Grolier Club in New York along with a companion exhibit, opening in September. At the conference, scholars will take up topics such as the popularity of "Alice" in China as well as translations of the work into five Pacific Island languages and 11 Indian languages.

Mr. Lindseth's book includes explanations of how different translators handled the varsity-level challenges of Chapter VII's "A Mad Tea-Party," including puns, parodies, non sequiturs and a riddle with no answer. At the table, Alice clashes with the officious March Hare and Mad Hatter. She struggles to engage the Dormouse who, between nodding off, makes baffling asides such as: "You know you say things are 'much of a muchness' -- did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?"

Joe Hale, author of the 26,000-character emoji "Wonderland," says that while the poems and songs were no cakewalk, Carroll's prose flowed relatively smoothly into emoji because many motifs, such as top hats and teapots, already exist in the font. To translate the Mock Turtle's "reeling and writhing" school curriculum, Mr. Hale enlisted a fishing-pole and fish emoji, followed by a cyclone one.

"Alice" can now be read in Esperanto, Nepali, Slovak and the South African language Xhosa. There are editions in Braille, Shorthand and Brazilian Sign Language. The Latin translation "does real well," said Michael Everson, a linguist and alphabetician whose Ireland-based publishing house, Everttype, has published "Alice" in at least 50 languages and a handful of alphabets. Around the year-end holidays, the Latin 'Alice' will sell 20 or more copies a month, he said, possibly because "grandmothers are looking for something for

their grandkids who study Latin." Schools also are customers, he said, picking up editions of "Alice" in Hawaiian and Icelandic.

Mr. Everson himself is translating "Alice" into Blissymbols, an international writing system composed by engineer Charles Bliss in the 1940s. The system relies on about 900 individual characters, which can be combined, such as a heart symbol and an arrow to mean "happy," Mr. Everson said. He has completed about two chapters and concedes it is "rough going."

Some translators adjust their texts to a particular time and audience. For example, Mr. Everson said, "Alice" in the Appalachian dialect is a folk tale, where the heroine joins a surreal game of baseball, not croquet. The Middle English "Alice" is set in 1350, with the White Rabbit consulting an astrolabe, not a pocket watch.

Colleen Manassa Darnell and John Coleman Darnell, the two professors putting "Alice" into hieroglyphs, said Late Egyptian, which had its heyday between 1500 and 1000 B.C., is a flexible language well-suited to a Wonderland translation. For the Mad Hatter, Mr. Darnell said, "we cannot yet decide which of the numerous wigs and headdresses he may have."

And as far as the White Rabbit's pocket watch, "I'm not sure how we're going to handle that one yet," Ms. Darnell said. "There are hares in Ancient Egyptian that we could refer to. He could possibly be carrying a small water clock."