WONDERLAND STUDY GUIDE

BY RICHELLE SUTTON, DRAMATURG

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Influence of *Alice in Wonderland* Today

It's hard to imagine that a story so prevalent as *Alice in Wonderland* could have such a simple beginning. Indeed, there is a strong likelihood that the story may never have been published if not for the strong persuasion of a friend. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, or Lewis Carroll as he styled himself in his popular writings, was a brilliant but humble deacon and teacher at Christ Church, Oxford. It was there that he befriended the dean of Christ Church, Henry Liddell, and his entire family.

"1915 poster for Alice in Wonderland featuring Viola Savoy," Nonpareil Feature Film Corp - Public Domain. Accessed November 15, 2018 from http://commons.wikimedia.org

One sunny afternoon on July 4th, 1862, Charles took the three Liddell sisters out on a rowing trip. Upon request from the three girls, he told a fantastical tale of a young girl and her adventures in a dream-like land. Later, the youngest sister, Alice, begged Charles to write down the story for her. He did just that, delivering the manuscript to her in 1864, titled *Alice's Adventures Underground*. That might have been the end of it if Dodgson's good friend George MacDonald and his family hadn't enthusiastically encouraged him to get the manuscript published. In 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published and the legacy of Alice began.

Today, Charles Dodgson's story has spread so far that it's hard to find anybody who is not at least partially familiar with the classic tale. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* have been translated into at least 97 languages and have never been out of print. Many people have taken inspiration from the original stories. Even in his day, there were so many imitations of his beloved Alice books that Dodgson himself started a collection of them. Since the first publication, there have been more than one hundred editions of the books, and the story has been adapted many times into cinema, television, comics, parodies, plays, opera, musicals, art, sculpture, and ballet. Innumerable creative works have been influenced by the stories, encompassing animation, graphic novels, music, radio, games, tourist attractions, food, clothing, design, science, and technology. Charles Dodgson had no idea that one story told to three little girls on a sunny afternoon rowing trip would have such a lasting impact on the world today. Are there small things in our own lives that may one day turn into centuries-old legacies?

Oscar Gustave Rejlander. "Lewis Carroll" (1863-1875). Accessed November 15, 2018 from http://commons.wikimedia.org

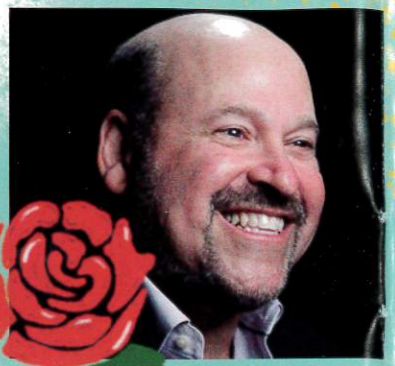
The "Carroll Myth"—Or Fact?

Charles Dodgson's stories have been picked over and analyzed for years by countless scholars. However, many scholars are more fascinated by an analysis of Dodgson's personal life than his literary works. Many people have scrutinized the author's life and habits and have found them disdainful, declaring him a pedophile. Others have argued against these accusations, calling it the "Carroll Myth." As the years pass, this controversy seems to grow even more popular in contemporary views. This is evidenced in popular media such as the immersive theatre piece *Then She Fell* by the Third Rail Projects Theatre Company, or the film *Dreamchild* by Dennis Potter. What was his relationship with the Liddell sisters and subsequent children? How does time and culture play into these views? The debate continues.

For more information on Lewis Carroll's life and the contemporary debates surrounding it, visit 4thwalldramaturgy.byu.edu.

Finding Wonderland with Frank Wildhorn and Nick Palmquist

The composer Frank Wildhorn and guest choreographer Nick Palmquist visited rehearsals to help create this unique production with us. While they were here, we interviewed them about the show and their creative process.



"Frank Wildhorn" used with permission from Frank Wildhorn.

Frank Wildhorn (Composer)

What influenced you when creating Wonderland?

My number one influence was the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*, [including the album's] art design [with] all the primary colors. It was just so colorful. So it was like Alice taking Lewis Carroll and making pop art.

You write a lot of pop rock, but in this script there are nods to many different kinds of music. It's a very eclectic design. How does that fit into the dreamscape of Alice in Wonderland?

Well, the key word is dreamscape. Once you enter into a dreamscape of anywhere, you know, the rules are different. But once you enter the world of Wonderland — I mean to me, as a composer, I said, "Okay, if I can ever do a show that's going to be as eclectic as I can possibly be, it's going to be here with these particular characters." That's a lot of selfish fun. This is a joyful piece. There's a joy in the whole adventure. It has to have a twinkle in its eye. And it gave me the opportunity to write with that kind of attitude and I hope that it comes across.

How relatable is this show to the audience?

The first little couplet of lines that Jack Murphy wrote in the song "Finding Wonderland" were, "We move too fast. We miss so much." The whole show is in that because we take life for granted. We always are moving so fast. We've got to deal with the realities we deal with in this crazy, fragile world that we live in, especially these days in this country, and we miss a lot because of that.

What is one thing you hope the audience will take away from this show?

Exactly that: slow down a little bit. Don't miss so much. Don't take so much for granted. And try to find some Wonderland in every day of your life. That's the very clear message of this show.

"Nick Palmquist" used with permission from Nick Palmquist.

Nick Palmquist (Guest Choreographer)

What does Wonderland *mean to you as a choreographer?*

It's when a story is somewhat fictional, or somewhat fantasy involved, that it's easier for a choreographer to have a license to create this world where people are joining into song and dance together, just out of nowhere. Everybody knows the same words, they're all singing and dancing together. And that, to me, is the magic of Wonderland that I'm trying to create.

How do you work with a piece that has so many layers within it?

I am a very musical choreographer, but also lyrically, I'm trying to interpret what they're saying in dance. So when that's changing—that has been the challenge for me. But my approach is always to give the audience who's hearing the song for the first time some kind of advantage. And to me, that's in the dancing. If I can give the rhythm a visual interpretation, then maybe they're hearing that little trill that they wouldn't have noticed if somebody weren't dancing on it. It's highlighting the musicality. Especially with "Welcome to Wonderland", it is [the ensemble's] job to set up. What is this world? How do I immediately understand the zaniness, the kind of manic energy? My approach is always highlighting the music and then making sure that that joy is coming across.

If you would like to read the full version of these interviews, please visit 4thwalldramaturgy.byu.edu.

Building a Modern Wonderland

One of the exciting and challenging aspects of *Wonderland* is bringing Victorian elements into a contemporary landscape. Frank Wildhorn's *Wonderland* centers in present day New York City. However, its roots burrow deep into the original *Alice in Wonderland* books, which center in Victorian England. How do we effectively reflect the two widely recognized time periods with vastly different visuals?

Erin Bjorn, "Wonderland Costume Design: Alice Ensemble." Used with permission from Erin Bjorn

As a dramaturg, I help create and maintain the world of the play, which means helping the actors, the audience, and the production team live in that world. Composer Frank Wildhorn was eager to workshop the musical with BYU and dive into the world of the play. This entailed researching the original Lewis Carroll stories, focusing a critical eye on modern New York City culture, and adding or changing lines to the script so that this world could encompass both of these references while also unfolding the story of Alice. What really helped us visualize these aspects was working with the idea of dreams. Costume Designer Erin Bjorn and Set Designer Doug Ellis, whose designs are pictured here, translated this modern dreamworld onto the stage.

Doug Ellis, "Wonderland Set Design: Door #5, 4th Wall Mirror Frame." Used with permission from Doug Ellis.

As mentioned in the director's note, and as Lewis Carroll himself commented, the world of Wonderland is within a dreamscape. This dreamscape bends the rules of reality and reason, and in this vein we could find points where the older and modern cultures could intersect. For example, an enormous Victorian clockface oversees the stage while a '64 Chevy rolls into the foreground. We had to explore what our dreamscape would look like, even putting together workshops with the actors to create their own dreamscapes. In these ways, we could create a Wonderland that everyone could relate to—a Wonderland that, hopefully, Lewis Carroll himself would be proud of.

Erin Bjorn, "Wonderland Costume Design: Caterpillar." Used with permission from Erin Bjorn.

Erin Bjorn, "Wonderland costume design: White rabbit." Used with permission from Erin Bjorn.

Create Your Own Dreamscape Story

DREAMSCAPE: a landscape or scene with the strangeness or mystery characteristic of dreams.

Try your hand at creating your own Carroll-esqe dreamscape. Start with a short personal story, then add each of these changes into your story.

1. Add something that is currently stressful or exciting in your life in the form of an object.
2. Change the subject of your story (or other meaningful object) into something else that rhymes (e.g. "fig" instead of "pig").
3. Drastically change the size of one object within the story.
4. Change one common word within your story into a nonsensical word (do this step again for an even more absurd story).

Now share your story with someone else and see what happens!

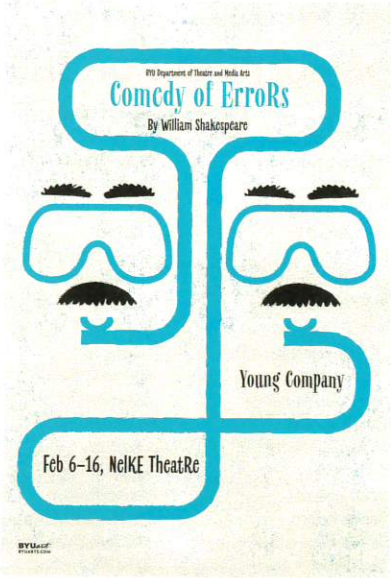
"Screenshot of the public domain live action/traditional animated fantasy anti-drug short film Curious Alice (1971)" - National Institute of Mental Health; Screenshot of the public domain video. Accessed November 15, 2018 from http://commons.wikimedia.org.

COMING SOON

COMEDY OF ERRORS

February 6–9, 13–16
Nelke Theatre

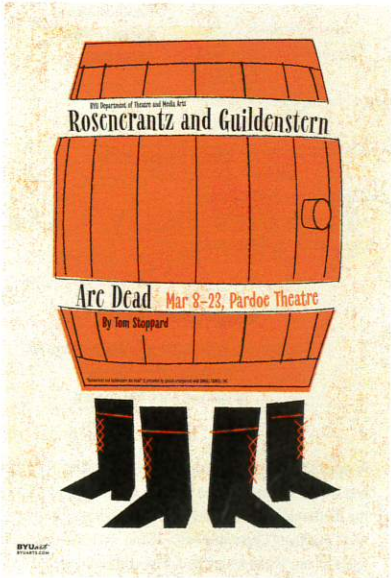
Bring your whole family to this zany adaptation of one of Shakespeare's most famous comedies! The story features two sets of twins separated at birth, two rival cities, one happy ending, and plenty of confusion along the way. This production will explore what it really means to be family while keeping you laughing from beginning to end.



ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

March 8–9, 12–16
Pardoe Theatre

This Tony Award-winning modern masterpiece follows the classic story of Hamlet as seen through the eyes of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters in Shakespeare's play. Sometimes funny, sometimes tragic, and always philosophical, Stoppard's most popular work forces us to confront the power of life and the meaning of death.



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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants, and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers, and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for invitation to the KCACTF regional festival and may also be considered for national awards recognizing outstanding achievement in production, design, direction, and performance.

Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.

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