The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland. By Robert Douglas-Fairhurst. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015.

Lewis Carroll: The Man and His Circle. By Edward Wakeling. London: I. B. Tauris, 2015.

Reviewed by Jan Susina

Since 2015 marked the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, publishers celebrated that year with the release of

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works on Lewis Carroll and the Alice books. Neither of the two volumes reviewed here is strictly a biography, although they both provide rich insights into Carroll's life and his social context. Unfortunately, Douglas-Fairhurst's book seems to be a bit of rush job intended to capitalize on the increased interest in Carroll as a result of the *Wonderland* anniversary. In contrast, Wakeling's book is an encyclopedic volume of Carroll's various colleagues and friends, who encompassed a wide spectrum of Victorian society, carefully researched by a long-time and respected Carroll scholar.

Douglas-Fairhust is the author of the well-received *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (2011), which was published to coincide with the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens's birth. In that study, he chose to limit himself to examining Dickens's life and career up until 1839 and the completion of his second novel, *Oliver Twist*. In *The Story of Alice*, Douglas-Fairhurst attempts a more ambitious and complicated task in presenting the intertwined lives of Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell. In addition, he explores the continued appeal of the fictional Alice in the cultural sphere and examines the various ways that this literary figure has been reimagined in the popular imagination. He astutely notes that the Alice books have proved better at adapting themselves to the modern world than has the life of their creator. As a scholar at Oxford University, Douglas-Fairhurst observes that while Oxford is full of traces of Carroll, the Alice books could never be written today. He views them as a modern myth along the lines of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

It is a missed opportunity that Douglas-Fairhurst doesn't spend more time contemplating the similarities between Dickens and Carroll, since both were popular novelists whose works focus on the lives of children. He does contrast the public funeral of the former, who was buried in Westminster Abbey, with the private family funeral of the latter. Carroll, like many Victorians, was an avid reader of Dickens and owned a substantial collection of his works, which were quickly dispersed at auction along with his other possessions shortly after the younger writer's death.

Douglas-Fairhurst considers his study of Carroll a story rather than a biography, although he acknowledges that it contains important biographical strands. It is a story about storytelling and how the tale that Charles Lutwidge Dodgson told to Alice Liddell, which became the basis for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, took on a powerful life of its own and gradually became better known than the lives of either one of them. This is a clever decision, since the story of Lewis Carroll and the creation of the Alice books is worth retelling, but Douglas-Fairhurst provides little new information in his entertaining version. Both he and Wakeling stand in the shadows of Morton Cohen's *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (1995), which remains the standard work. The life of Alice Liddell has also been more effectively presented in Anne Clark's *The Real Alice* (1981) and

Colin Gordon's *Beyond the Looking-Glass: Reflections of Alice and Her Family* (1982). Readers seeking analysis of how the Alice books have been adapted and reimagined in popular culture will find Will Brooker's *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture* (2004) a more detailed and wide-ranging study. In many ways, *The Story of Alice* is a more sophisticated and scholarly updating of Roger Lancelyn Green's *The Story of Lewis Carroll* (1949), which was intended for younger readers, in that it provides a good introduction to Carroll and his writing for the general reader rather than for an academic audience.

In his epilogue, Douglas-Fairhurst compares the work of a Carroll biographer to the dodo on display at Oxford's Museum of Natural History. The original skeleton, which was collected in the seventeenth century, gradually deteriorated and fell into disrepair. When it was displayed in 1860 in the new museum, which Carroll often visited, not much remained of the original bird beyond the bones of the left foot and a mummified head. Now the museum features a composite skeleton that combines the few remaining bits of the original dodo with additional bones discovered in Mauritius, carefully reassembled by a taxidermist in 1998. Next to the skeleton stands a contemporary model of the bird. Douglas-Fairhurst argues that like the dodo, the life of Lewis Carroll has too many missing pieces, so that a complete understanding is no longer possible; at best, the biographer must speculate and provide the missing or lost pieces. For Douglas-Fairhurst, Carroll is unusually clever at escaping the grasp of the biographer, and "the more that has been written about him, the more elusive he has become" (14). It appears that Carroll has become a Snark for biographers. Nevertheless, the contemporary model of the dodo, rather than the reassembled skeleton, garners most of the interest of museum visitors. Perhaps readers also prefer the more imaginative and speculative representations of Carroll over the actual bones of his biography.

Wakeling, in contrast, has been diligently working for forty years to carefully locate and reassemble Carroll's biographical bones in order to provide a more accurate portrait. While Green published and annotated the two-volume edition of *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll* (1953) under the careful supervision of the author's relatives, Wakeling has transcribed and annotated a ten-volume *Lewis Carroll's Diaries* (1993–2008) for the Lewis Carroll Society. He is also the author of *The Photographs of Lewis Carroll: A Catalogue Raisonné* (2015) and assisted Morton Cohen in editing the letters that appear in *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators* (2003). Wakeling knows where the bones are buried and provides extensive biographical information about Carroll and the key members of his various social and professional circles. While Douglas-Fairhurst focuses primarily on Carroll's relationship with Alice—both Liddell and the character—Wakeling situates Carroll within a much greater web of relationships.

As a mathematician, Carroll was familiar with the work of John Venn, best known for his Venn diagrams. Carroll found Venn's interlocking circles limiting and developed his own logic diagram based on squares. Carroll's squares could be divided into four regions, allowing for more complicated series of overlapping. Similarly, Wakeling's *Lewis Carroll: The Man and His Circle* is not so much a biography as it is an encyclopedia of the many groups who knew him: members of the Dodgson family, Oxford associates, publishers and printers, illustrators, actors and dramatists, artists and musicians, friends and children, photographers, and famous acquaintances. It is a reference book rather than a biography. The format somewhat resembles that used in Jo Elwyn Jones and J. Francis Gladstone's *The Alice Companion: A Guide to Lewis Carroll's* Alice *Books* (1998) since it consists of separate entries based on specific groupings of individuals rather than being an overall study of the author. Most readers won't read the text straight through, and, like Venn diagrams, some of the groupings overlap and are repetitive. Wakeling's *Lewis Carroll* serves as an excellent companion volume when one is seeking specific, additional information about individuals whom Carroll mentions in a letter or his diary. Much of this research appears to have been developed as Wakeling was gradually publishing and annotating the Carroll diaries.

One of the intentions of Wakeling's *Lewis Carroll* is to confront what he considers myths about the author. His study is intended to serve as a corrective to "the more outrageous biographies that have been published in the last half-century, where the writers have not availed themselves of the primary sources that survive and have indulged in all manner of speculation and myth making" (363). Wakeling feels that contemporary values and attitudes make it difficult to understand a Victorian mindset and that contemporary readers ought to consider the context and standards by which Carroll lived. Rather than speculation, Wakeling prefers to rely on quotations from letters and diaries that allow Carroll and those who knew him to speak for themselves.

Like the Oxford dodo that Douglas-Fairhurst uses as a metaphor, these two volumes feature different representations of Carroll and the Alice books. Wakeling's is a meticulously constructed study of Carroll's world based on historical resources. It resembles the original but incomplete skeleton of the dodo. Douglas-Fairhurst's is a much more elegant, fleshed-out version of Carroll's life with plenty of stuffing, which gives the illusion of the complete dodo. While both versions have their virtues, my preference is for the model constructed of the actual bones.

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