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Cover Illustration: Frontispiece from William Blake's *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*

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*Dreaming Alice: Contemporary Stories Inspired by Lewis Carroll's Alice Books*¹

Angelika Zirker

In June 2005, the BBC broadcast a series named *Dreaming Alice: Contemporary Writers Give a Twist to Alice in Wonderland*.² Five stories were presented in the regular weekday slot for new and old stories on Radio 4 (always 15:30-15:45). The producer, Christine Hall, commissioned new work, and, since she came across the story 'Alice, Falling' by Stephen Millhauser a couple of years ago (which was too long to adapt for radio), she suggested a "week of specially-commissioned stories inspired by the original *Alice*".³ What is more, it was the 140th anniversary of the first publication of *Alice's Adventures* in 1865.⁴

The starting point was to ask the authors what *Alice's Adventures* meant to them, and "to reflect their love of the book" that has, according to the BBC, "never lost its imaginative appeal".⁵ The five authors asked were Kathy Page with her story 'Growing', Patrick Gale with 'Fourth of July, 1862', Preethi Nair with 'Looking-Glass', Philip Gross with 'Sentence First', and Sara Maitland with 'Mabel'.

They dealt with their task very differently, making use of *Alice* as an 'intertext' in diverse ways.⁶ I will focus on three stories that, in my opinion, show that inter-textuality, with reference to the *Alice* books, may mean various things and that intertextual references may lead to completely different results. The stories are 'Fourth of July, 1862' by Patrick Gale, 'Growing' by Kathy Page and 'Sentence First' by Philip Gross. They have in common that they do not only address adults but also children and

1. This paper was presented at the conference 'The Child and the Book', Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 7 - 9 April 2006.

2. First broadcast 6 to 10 June 2005 and repeated 26 to 31 December 2005.

3. See email by Christine Hall from 9 March 2006 (Appendix).

4. In the public mind, *Alice in Wonderland* seems to include both *Alice* books: *Alice's Adventures* and *Looking-Glass*. Most of the stories refer directly to *Alice's Adventures*, not *Looking-Glass*.

5. This was the introductory statement preceding the reading of the first story, Kathy Page's 'Growing'.

6. For the notions of intertext and intertextuality see, e.g. Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992; Michael Riffaterre, 'Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse', *Critical Inquiry* 11:1, September 1984, pp.141-62. For intertextuality in the context of children's literature see in particular Peter Hunt, 'What Do We Lose When We Lose Allusion? Experience and understanding stories', *Signal* 57, 1988, pp.212-22; and in the context of the *Alice* books Sandra Becket, 'Alice's Adventures in Many Lands: Alice and the Intertextual Play in French Canadian Children's Books', *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 37:3, 1999, pp.20-5.

adolescents, and, in a way, reflect upon their possible reading process of the *Alice* books.⁷ The remaining two stories are not necessarily intended for children. Nair deals with the memory of the book, read during childhood, and its eventual positive influence on adult life from the perspective of a woman who has just lost her mother.⁸ Maitland's 'Mabel' stands apart from the rest of the stories as it is mainly concerned with the phrase "How do I know who I am if I keep changing?", describing an old woman, Mabel, suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Gale's story 'Fourth of July, 1862' starts exactly like *Alice's Adventures* with the sentence: "Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do".⁹ However, the perspective changes to her sister's, who is introduced in the next sentence, beginning "Rhoda could sense...". Gale tried to stick to the history of Alice Liddell; he admits that he thought it would be "fun to use one of the book's most peripheral characters as ... [his] way in to Carroll's world". His text thus becomes a story of *could have been...* and hence is not always historically correct: Alice's older sister was, like their mother, called Lorina ('Ina'), and in 1862 she was thirteen, not eighteen like Rhoda in Gale's story. He is right in saying that the name of Alice's sister is actually never mentioned in *Alice's Adventures*¹⁰; actually, one of the sisters of the 'real' Alice Liddell was called Rhoda, but she was born in 1858. However, by shifting the focaliser, Gale introduces a completely new issue which cannot be found in the original version of the story. He focuses on an eighteen-year old girl who is "vexed and eclipsed by a prettier and younger sister",¹¹ jealous of her, and who feels neglected, both as regards her parents' affection and her future prospects, for she dreams of "marry[ing] early and well" but fears to be eclipsed by her younger sister.

Rhoda spends the afternoon with her smaller sister Alice and has to read about the life cycle of the lobster. Very soon, Alice gets bored and

7. This goes along with the audience for the afternoon slot of Radio 4 and, accordingly, the implied audience of the stories. The slot from 15:30 to 15:45 is reserved for parents collecting their children from school.

8. In Nair's story 'Looking-Glass' an encounter with a white rabbit actually leads to some sort of salvation for Alice, the main character, who "has no time for breakfast, no time to grieve for her mother, no time for anything"; cf. descriptions by the BBC, *Dreaming Alice*.

9. There is, unfortunately, no print version of the stories, but most of them have been made available through the internet. Patrick Gale's 'Fourth of July, 1862' can be found at: www.pulp.net/fiction/stories/35/Fourth-of-july-1862.html

10. See email by Gale from 17 March 2006: "Alice's sister is barely mentioned and not even named."

11. See email by Gale from 17 March 2006.

wants to distract her. Feeling irritated by her sister, Rhoda gives her a sedating potion that she has stolen from the nursery earlier that day. Alice falls asleep, but now the mathematician arrives, and Rhoda shares their picnic with him, quite enjoying the fact that her little sister is asleep and she can give her full attention to the attractive bachelor.

Gale engages in a sort of fictional biography that is inspired by Carroll's fictional story that is itself based on occurrences in Carroll's real life. Gale, for example, addresses a problem which existed in the Liddell family:

The family's maintenance of respectable behaviour was painfully erratic. Mama still thought nothing of sending Rhoda about town unchaperoned. She had allowed the question of whether Rhoda was 'out' or not to slide in a way that left Rhoda known among her more orthodox peers as "poor Rhoda" – and which, she was quite sure, unsettled potential suitors.

This issue is mentioned in most Carroll biographies:

In the autumn of 1862 Dodgson had commented that Ina probably would not be allowed into his company unchaperoned much longer, since she was rising fourteen.¹²

Thus, Gale fictionally turns around the dream narrative from *Alice's Adventures* and thereby 'reconstructs' reality. Allusions to *Alice's Adventures* abound in the story: Gale "tried to come up with a narrative in which a succession of conversations or actions might influence the dream Alice is having."¹³ His audience is invited to remember the different elements from Carroll's text and to playfully detect them in his new story: Rhoda reads a "dry" chapter on the "life cycle of the lobster" – alluding to the mouse's telling "the driest thing" it knows after the pool of tears and to the lobster quadrille; then Alice sees a rabbit, "a white rabbit, with pink eyes" that is supposed to "have a hole somewhere nearby" and has "a waistcoat on, and a pocket-watch." The allusion here is clear; the difference, however, is not only that Gale's Alice does not follow the rabbit but also that instead of presenting Alice's adventures as a dream, he introduces these occurrences as fancies in real life. Alice, soon after, discovers a lizard that she kicks out at, "sending out the poor innocent skittering into the long grass"¹⁴, then,

out of her boredom, asks why they had not gone to see the Dodo or walked to the garden, "the pretty one, with all the fountains"¹⁵. Furthermore, they see a woman with a "pig-like baby"¹⁶, and Rhoda thinks of Alice "clutching the dormouse she kept in a straw-lined teapot" or reciting "'Tis the voice of the Sluggard" or "Speak gently! It is better far" – both poems being parodied in *Alice's Adventures*.¹⁷ Gale builds his story around words, occurrences, encounters, thoughts in *Alice in Wonderland*, all in their original chronological order, i.e. in the order they crop up in Alice's adventure. This implies that the audience of this story has to know the original by Carroll well in order to be able to understand it at all.

After Alice has fallen asleep, the mathematician arrives – strikingly enough in his rowing boat, "the most prominent bachelor among her parents' friends". This is of course an allusion to Dodgson/Carroll, who also was a "most regular caller"¹⁸ at the parents' house, that is, at the Deanery of Christ Church. Gale here rewrites 'reality' in suggesting that the picnic on the fourth of July in 1862 was quite different from the version generally known from the framing poem in *Alice's Adventures*: all the well-known elements are there,¹⁹ and from these elements Carroll created a story – and so does Gale. Only that he introduces a possible relationship between Alice's older sister and the mathematician and has the latter write poetry about a dance called "The lancer's quadrille", which, of course, is the foundation of the later 'Lobster Quadrille'²⁰ inspired by Rhoda's reading of the life cycle of the lobster.

When Rhoda, in the end, wonders whether she was "no more than an unimportant fiction" and thinks that "at any instant, an impatient hand would turn the page and she ... would be gone", she becomes like one of the characters in Alice's dream, namely the Red Queen in *Looking-Glass*,

15. It is a similar garden, with fountains, that Alice in Carroll's story wants to see and that is the reason for her journey through Wonderland.

16. Moreover, Alice gets something to drink from a blue glass bottle. They talk about mushrooms, which is a toadstool called 'liberty cap', and their cat Dinah.

17. "'Tis the voice of the sluggard", a poem by Watts, is parodied in Chapter X: 'The Lobster-Quadrille'; 'Speak gently! It is better far' is turned into 'Speak roughly to your little boy' in the 'Pig and Pepper' Chapter; for further information about this poem see Martin Gardner's extensive note 4 in his *Annotated Alice*.

18. Cf. e.g. Leach 130ff., where she refers to Dodgson's use of the Deanery "as a kind of unofficial studio and storage place".

19. He even makes Rhoda and the mathematician eat jam tarts – those that are stolen at the end of *Alice's Adventures*?, has Rhoda call her sister "a trial", and the mathematician be a poet who has "been served mock-turtle soup that day". It is then no surprise that, eventually, a puppy appears.

20. *Alice's Adventures*, Chapter 10.

12. Leach 203; Leach goes on as follows: "But his was a prophecy that remained unfulfilled. Ina was still one of 'the three' by the time of her fourteenth birthday. From time to time, as the girl grew so undeniably 'tall', Lorina the mother made fitful stipulations about chaperones, but they were only sometimes enforced, and for the most part she continued to waive these social rules month after month, even while Dodgson was 'out of her good graces'."

13. See Email by Gale from 17 March 2006.

14. This certainly alludes to Alice's kicking out at the lizard, Bill, in the rabbit's house; Chapter IV: 'The Rabbit sends in a little Bill'.

who turns into a kitten upon the reader's turning the page.²¹ Out of this thought, Rhoda decides to become "a sweeter sister" – maybe more like the sister in *Alice's Adventures* who "gently brush[es] away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her [Alice's] face" instead of "shaking ... [them] onto her face from an over-hanging branch" to rouse her.

In his story, Gale deals with the issues of parental neglect and jealousy, the search and longing for a boyfriend, which, in an exaggerated manner, turns into the fear of finally becoming a spinster if the search remains unsuccessful. Although he sets the story in 1862, he intends to make it possible for children and adolescents from today to find points of identification. Yet, it seems doubtful whether teenagers see their problems reflected in Gale's story and whether the fear of becoming a spinster is such a concern in contemporary young people's lives. However, his rewriting introduces issues that may be related to the process of growing and of growing up, and he thereby adds a psychological subject to the story.

Page's is likewise a story about 'Growing' – about growing up. Alice, a girl around thirteen whose parents have split up, finds herself first in psychological, and then also in physiological, stress. Together with her six-year old sister Susanne, she is supposed to accompany her father and his girlfriend, JoAn, to a holiday in France. But she falls ill with glandular fever (mononucleosis) and stays at home with her mother to recover. On her father's return from the holiday she confronts him with the fact that she feels let down by him, and they are able to go back to a more normal relationship again, in spite of his new girlfriend.

Apart from the name, Alice, this story at first glance seems to have very little in common with Carroll's. Nonetheless, there are some points where Page refers to *Alice's Adventures*. The story is very much concerned with the question of physical change and, even more so, with the sudden awareness of a change in size. Alice feels this most when she compares herself with her six-year old sister. When she collects Susanne from school one day, she finds "herself ... amidst a sea of six-year-olds, and then led by Susanne into the girl's washroom, a row of brightly painted stalls contained ludicrous knee-high toilets."²² While waiting for her sister, she has to "crouch" in

21. In the early (and still in some today) print versions of *Looking-Glass* one had indeed to turn the page between the chapters 'Shaking' and 'Waking' (chapters X and XI), thereby completing and visualising the transformation of the Red Queen into the black kitten.

22. Page, 'Growing' – www.kathypge.info/short_fiction/Growing.html

order to wash her hands, and finds it "amazing to think that once she had been this small".²³

After having fallen ill, she feels like a baby again, being fed by her mother and only able to swallow liquids. During her process of recovery, she feels as if she went through the first stages of her development again:

... Alice felt her mouth try to say the word for it. "Yoghurt." She was a baby, a soft-limbed creature, with a huge, more or less bald, head it had taken weeks to learn to support. "You'll be walking soon," her mother said. "Eat your carrots; they'll help you see in the dark." Her jaw sprouted hard little teeth. She spoke. "Dog. Yoghurt. Potato. Mama." She stood. Climbed onto the sofa-mountain, swam in the ocean-bed. "You must eat your greens," her mother told her, as her body accelerated and caught up with the size of her head. She went to school. Read. Wrote. Her teeth fell out, new ones grew. Her cast-off clothes were put aside for Susanne. Her nose started to look like Daddy's. The jeans were too short. Everyone, about everyone, kept on telling her the facts of life. She had to wear a bra.

"Some fruit?" her mother asked. "I could whiz it up with some ice cream, and make you a shake."

The short review of her life and the rapid changes she undergoes suddenly pass into her present situation, as if there were no real transitions between the several stages of her development. The rapidity of these changes leads to an inability to grasp both the passing of time and the growth of one's own identity. Alice in Page's story asks herself "Where did all the old Alices go? Were they still inside you?" – which is an issue that seems to puzzle her exceedingly. It is a bewilderment that resembles Alice's in Carroll's story when she asks the question if "I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?'" at the beginning of her journey through Wonderland.

In 'Growing', Alice's whole world picture is confused because of the new family situation which evokes her fear of not being loved. She is worried that her father might "have other children with JoAn. Suppose he liked them better". And all the while she is confronted not only with memories (e.g. the annual height-marks on the garage's doorframe – another indicator of her growing up; it is there, by the way, that she collapses because of her illness), but also with being now suddenly responsible for all the work her father formerly did in the household, e.g. cutting the grass. One might argue that her illness is eventually due to all this strain but also that it turns out to be a chance, as her father in the end realizes that he has neglected her, even admitting, somewhat priggishly, that

23. She goes on thinking that "It made you dizzy just to think of it".

he made "everyone's lives difficult this past year". At the same time, she wants him to realise that she has grown up, that "she was an entirely different person And yet, confusingly, still herself". Page makes use of the question asked by Alice that, if she's "not the same, the next question is" who is she,²⁴ by transforming it into the identity quest of a teenager who has the feeling of being someone different but still the same.

Although Page, as regards the question of growing and identity, draws on Carroll's story, i.e. a particular motif in it, she transforms this in a way that her focus shifts from there to psychological issues and also to assistance in psychological matters for a pubescent girl. In order to follow her story, the audience need not necessarily know the *Alice* books.

Gross's 'Sentence First' has yet a different approach to writing a story that is inspired by *Alice's Adventures*. His main character, Allison, a grown-up woman, is in a way haunted by the *Alice* books, just as it was foretold in Carroll's concluding poem to *Looking-Glass*: "Still she haunts me, phantomwise, / ... / Never seen by waking eyes".

Allison receives an invitation from her friend Carol, who is going to be engaged to Louie, a lecturer in cultural studies. Since their childhood, Carol has been very dominant, always leading the way in their friendship and setting the trend as to how to party, all the time making "clever joke[s]" about everything and everyone. Allison has always felt and still feels inferior towards her 'friend'. Now she receives the invitation to a fancy dress party: "On the front was the mad hatter's tea-party, with the dormouse in the teapot, and the hatter's fixed grin, looming out at me."²⁵ Thus, the topic of the party is *Alice's Adventures*.

Not wanting to go to the party, she puts the invitation on the mantelpiece, in front of the carriage-clock, and when she comes home from work that day, it is the first thing she sees. Allison has always suffered from Alice-related nightmares, and because of the invitation to the Alice-fancy-dress party, they come back to her:

Tick-tock, clip-clop. Four tall black horses, pulling a carriage. No, the carriage-clock. "You lucky girl", the hatter said. "The queen wants to meet you." The carriage stopped, the door swung open, and there was a dark shape in dark robes and a dark hat. All I could see was the

chain round its neck. A great Lord Mayor's chain of office. "Pray, silence," shrieked the rabbit, "for the nightmare!"

And I sat up in a cold sweat in my grown-up bed.

It is after this nightmare that she decides to do something about the fear that she has felt ever since her father read the book to her when she was little:

I wasn't on the stand for it. Wasn't that what the whole stupid book was about? Being small and surrounded by huge creatures with their too big gloves and too big faces, saying things over your head, finding faults, feeling offence? And, worst of all, bending over you too close, finding it charming, when you didn't understand?

Thus, the invitation is a chance for her, in many ways. When she goes to look for a costume, she meets a Welsh stranger with whom she can share her nightmare, someone who seems to understand her troubles about Wonderland and who feels the same anxiety about the story.²⁶ He encourages her to confront not only her nightmares but also Carol and her fiancé and to overcome her feeling of inferiority.

Allison eventually goes to the party but chooses an outsider for fancy-dress: she goes as the cook and does not follow the general fashion of being white rabbits and Alices. By acknowledging her fear of the text and its images – she always found the episode 'Pig and Pepper' most unpleasant²⁷ – she is able to deal with it in a playful way and thereby conquers it. Once Carol approaches her, thinking she does not wear a costume and treating her condescendingly, she is even able to react to Carol's presumed superiority and not to give in. When Louie wants to know what she thinks about the party immediately after her arrival, it is she who makes a "clever joke" in countering him and Carol with a quote from the trial in *Alice's Adventures*, "Sentence first – verdict afterwards", which not only extremely puzzles her hosts but also proves their behaviour to be "Stuff and Nonsense". She is no longer inferior to them but can stand up and show them that she is a person to be taken seriously – very much like Alice in the trial scene when she finally confronts the creatures by telling them that they are "nothing but a pack of cards".

Gross draws on the experience of many of the readers of *Alice* who are intimidated by the "strangeness of the Alice world", as opposed to reacting

24. "Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different"; *Alice's Adventures*.

25. This kind of invitation is linked with Carol's idea of "language creat[ing] reality", which is why Allison thinks that she has chosen her husband accordingly: "Maybe that's why he'd chosen her of all his female students, because their names demanded it: Louie Carol – Lewis Carroll. Get it?"

26. He even has his own 'theory' about the *Alice* books: "He didn't just make them up, Lewis Carroll. They are real, these things, they're sort of out there. You know that, don't you?" "I don't know," I said. "I mean, it might just be the words. They make us see things."

27. "The worst was the duchess, with the too big ugly face, and the fat cook with the pepper, and the baby that looked like a pig."

to the book like Allison finally does, namely in an active way – “empowered ... as if they were in on the joke, involved in playing it.”²⁸ Gross suggests that “Sentence first” is about the experience of “being mystified, or initiated into the mystery”.²⁹ Gross’s story thus draws on *Alice’s Adventures* by referring to its ‘darker’ aspects, its possible effect(s) on readers, namely fear. Once we are able to understand the playful qualities of the book, we are “not its victims or passive recipients”³⁰ any longer. The initiation into the mystery means that we are able to overcome fear and enjoy the book in a new way.

The authors presented were all confronted with the same task, namely to write a story inspired by Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books. This means that all of them entered into some sort of intertextual encounter or play with the text and created something new. By their attempt to address psychological problems that children and adolescents might face, they try to make use of an ‘old’ story in a contemporary context. Yet, by doing this, they seem to overlook the outstanding qualities of Carroll’s work, its humour, nonsense, and all the fun contained in the story. Hence, none of them really matches Carroll’s genius. Whatever authors try when they engage in writing a story inspired by *Alice’s Adventures*, their approach has to be reductive. Even if Carroll does not openly address problems that somehow seem relevant to contemporary children and teenagers, his qualities are more constant, stable and timeless – as shown by his history of having been read for more than 140 years.

What these contemporary writers have in common is the fact that, through their reference to Alice, they “encourage contemporary children to (re)discover a classic of children’s literature”.³¹ Most children today know the story, either from an abridged (audio) version or because of the Disney film version. Yet, many of them do not seem actually to read the books. With programmes such as the one commissioned by the BBC, the interest in the ‘original’ text may be awakened. Maybe it is thus possible for contemporary children to become curious as to the text behind these stories, and eventually discover Carroll’s *Alice* books. The rediscovery may also work for adults to whom most of the stories of *Dreaming Alice* are

28. Cf. Email by Philip Gross from 7 March 2006; Appendix.

29. Email by Gross.

30. Email by Gross.

31. Beckett 25.

addressed, but very much in the Carrollian sense of the framing poems: namely that the *Alice* books serve as a means for the adult to return and to become a child again by reading them.

I want to thank Christine Hall, as well as Preethi Nair, Kathy Page, and particularly Patrick Gale and Philip Gross for their responses to my enquiries as well as for giving me details about their ideas and the writing process of their respective stories and for giving me the authorisation to print their responses. I am also grateful to Prof. Dr Matthias Bauer for many suggestions that followed his critical reading of this essay.

APPENDIX

My Enquiry:

I am a PhD student and research assistant at Tuebingen University in Germany, working basically on children’s literature and in particular on Lewis Carroll. In April, I will present a paper on the *Alice* books, ‘From the Past to the Present’, dealing mainly with the BBC series from last year, *Dreaming Alice: Contemporary writers give a twist to Alice in Wonderland*. As you are one of the writers I will talk about I would be very much interested in some comments on your story, particularly about how you came to write this story (were you actually asked by the BBC – by the way: the BBC have not responded to my enquiries as regards *Dreaming Alice*)? Did you read *Alice* as a child? Did you like it? ...

I would be grateful for an answer and until remain
sincerely yours,
Angelika Zirker

Responses:

By Philip Gross, 5 March 2006

Dear Angelika,

What an interesting enquiry – an unexpected pleasure to know that those radio stories have had a longer life than the few minutes of broadcast. That’s always what a writer hopes for, but rarely do you find out if it has been so.

If you haven’t received a reply from the BBC, that’s probably because your request has landed on some anonymous desk in Broadcasting House.

My guess is that the producer, Christine Hall, might well be interested in answering a few informed questions on the project. I'll copy this mail to her, and if she's willing, she can let you know. The concept of the week of five short stories was hers, and as far as I know she approached a number of experienced writers she knew and had worked with before. As a writer, I was touched and rather impressed with her sound instinct in knowing whom to approach, and her trust in giving her writers a very open-ended brief: really, just to respond to *Alice* in our own ways, in the very disciplined slot of the Radio 4 afternoon short story. The fact that the deadline was quite short was, paradoxically, quite a liberating force. As a teacher of Creative Writing, I often notice how the sudden and unexpected assignment can release things in writers, which they might not have accessed had they had time to think and plan ahead. (The reasons for that would be a subject for another PhD!)

Maybe for the same reason, I'm finding it quite hard to recall the details of my story. This might be because I've been immersed in final drafts of a new book of poetry and a children's novel since then, but I suspect it's also because of the 'flash flood' effect of the sudden challenge and spontaneous response. I might need you to ask me some specific questions to prompt some recollections of the thought I know went into writing it. For the questions you've asked... Yes, I did come upon *Alice* as a child – picking it up myself, not having it read to me. Like many children, I suspect, my strongest impression was the unsettling emotional tone imparted by the Tenniel illustrations.

Maybe more potent an encounter was reading the books out loud with my own children when they were quite young (and again when they were somewhat older). The stories and in particular the powerful Nonsense logic of the books became part of our shared family culture. I can't speak for my (now adult) children, but my impression is that they were not intimidated by the strangeness of the Alice world, as I (and the character in my story) had been. Their grasp on it was more active – empowered, you might say, as if they were in on the joke, involved in playing it... not its victims or passive recipients. I do think it's a two-edged sword: are we being mystified, or initiated into the mystery? (As I write this, it occurs to me that this might have been what my story was about! So maybe I'd better stop there, while I'm agreeing with myself.)

... You'll notice from my website that I'm in the academic business too – though from the angle of teaching writing for young people, rather than the literary criticism.

Good wishes,
Philip Gross

By Kathy Page, 7 March 2006

Hello, Angelika. The story 'Growing' was commissioned by the BBC specifically for that series/sequence. But yes, I had enjoyed *Alice* as a child, and again, as student. In writing this story I wanted to take a sideways look at some of the things Alice goes through, such as growing and shrinking. It struck me that a girl's adolescence is in fact full of such transformations, as well as encounters with facets of adult life and sexuality which are in their way easily as bizarre at the things that happen in the *Alice* books.

Best wishes for your project,
Kathy Page.

By Patrick Gale, 17 March 2006

Dear Angelika,

Thank you for your enquiry which has just been passed to me from Fourth Estate publishers.

To answer your questions in brief: I was asked to write the story by the BBC but it was an easy commission as I have loved the *Alice* books since I was a small boy and suspect they have been a big influence on me as a writer both in their language and in their mischievous tone. The BBC producer who approached me, Christine Hall I think it was, said they wanted stories inspired by our reading of *Alice in Wonderland*, that the stories could be as closely or as loosely inspired by the original as we liked. I therefore decided it would be fun to use one of the book's most peripheral characters as my way in to Carroll's world. Alice's sister is barely mentioned and not even named so it was easy to picture her as somebody vexed and eclipsed by a prettier and noisier younger sister. On one level, after all, Carroll's book is a satire of the monstrous egotism of small children. What I tried to do was come up with a narrative in which a succession of conversations or actions might influence the dream that Alice is having. Elements like the small dog or the discussion of lobsters thus occur in the same order in which they crop up in Alice's adventure. I certainly did read both the books as a child, repeatedly. I remain loyal to the Tenniel illustrations, taken though I have been by some of the later ones, notably Mervyn Peake's, because I find they're inseparable from my first understanding of Carroll's prose.

I hope this helps you with your essay.
All good wishes
Patrick Gale

By Christine Hall, 7 March 2006

Dear Angelika,

BBC Radio 4 here in the UK has a regular 15:30-15:45 weekday slot for new and old stories. It's fun to find published work and commission an abridgement (or abridge it ourselves), but it's very good to be able to commission new work. A couple of years ago I came across a wonderful story by the American writer Stephen Milhauser, from one of his collections of short stories. It was called 'Alice, Falling', and was a prolonged meditation by Alice on what she could see as she fell down the rabbit hole. Unfortunately, it wasn't short enough for our broadcast time so there was no way I could adapt it for radio, but it started me thinking and I suggested a week of specially-commissioned stories inspired by the original Alice – I remember now that it was an anniversary (140 years?) since *Alice in Wonderland* was written, so it was that rather than *Through the Looking Glass* I wanted to respond to.

I spoke to quite a few writers, as research suggested to me that many had been inspired by the text. I was extremely lucky in the writers I approached. I had worked with many of them before but of course it was vital that Alice meant something special to them.

I think this covers most of your questions, except that about the availability of the stories in written form. I'm afraid that won't be possible, as we commission new work on a very tightly-focused contract and it covers only broadcast versions.

With very best wishes
Christine

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Angelika Zirker works as a lecturer of English literature at Tuebingen University in Germany and is editorial assistant of *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate*. She is about to finish her PhD thesis on *Lewis Carroll, The Pilgrim as a Child: Consciousness, Language and Ideas of Salvation in the Alice Books*. A study of *Drama and Cultural Change: Turning around Shakespeare*, co-edited by her and Prof. Matthias Bauer (also Tuebingen), will be published in autumn. An earlier version of this talk was presented at the conference *The Child and His Book* in Newcastle (April 2006).