



# Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll

*Gillian Beer*

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In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll created fantastic worlds that continue to delight and trouble readers of all ages today. Few consider, however, that Carroll conceived his Alice books during the 1860s, a moment of intense intellectual upheaval, as new scientific, linguistic, educational, and mathematical ideas flourished around him and far beyond. *Alice in Space* reveals the contexts within which the Alice books first lived, bringing back the zest to jokes lost over time and poignancy to hidden references.

Gillian Beer explores Carroll's work through the speculative gaze of Alice, for whom no authority is unquestioned and everything can speak. Parody and *Punch*, evolutionary debates, philosophical dialogues, educational works for children, math and logic, manners and rituals, dream theory and childhood studies—all fueled the fireworks. While much has been written about Carroll's biography and his influence on children's literature, Beer convincingly shows him at play in the spaces of Victorian cultural and intellectual life, drawing on then-current controversies, reading prodigiously across many fields, and writing on multiple levels to please both children and adults in different ways.

With a welcome combination of learning and lightness, Beer reminds us that Carroll's books are essentially about curiosity, its risks and pleasures. Along the way, *Alice in Space* shares Alice's exceptional ability to spark curiosity in us, too.

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