



The Lewis Carroll Writing Competition 2021

A Quantum Alice By Jerome Malenfant

This chapter replaces 'Chapter VI - Pig and Pepper' in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, providing a different spin on Alice meeting the Cheshire Cat, and, as that chapter does, precedes 'A Mad Tea Party'. Illustration courtesy of the Jerome Malenfant. It begins with the first half of the last paragraph in 'Chapter V - Advice from a Caterpillar':

It was so long since Alice had been anything near the right size, that it felt quite strange at first, but she got used to it in a few minutes, and began talking to herself, as usual, "Come, there's half my plan done now! How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another! However, I've got back to my right size: the next thing is, to get into that beautiful garden—how is that to be done, I wonder?"

And so Alice sat down beneath a big tree to think.

Remembering her lessons in logic, she began. "Proposition 1," she said, "a path goes from point A to point B. Proposition 2: I am at point A. Proposition 3: I wish to get to point B. Conclusion: I must find a path from A to B."

Feeling very satisfied with herself, she stood and looked about her. But then she sighed. "There *are* no paths in this forest!" she said and sat down again.

But now, when she looked at her feet, she saw a path that began there and meandered away until it was lost among the trees.

"I'm certain *that* wasn't there before!" she thought.

But, under the axiom that a path must invariably lead somewhere, she decided to follow it.



Jerome Malenfant - Alice and the Cat

This particular path however seemed to have never heard of that axiom, and showed no inclination to go anywhere at all! It simply looped around, and tied itself into knots, and went every which way, and pretty soon Alice found herself right back at the very same tree she had started from.

Only now there was a large gray cat sitting in it.

Approaching the tree, she began, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on what you mean by the words 'way', 'go', and 'here'," said the Cat.

Unperturbed, Alice tried another question: "What sort of people live around here?" and followed that with philosophically precise definitions of 'here', 'people', 'live' and, just to be sure, 'what', 'sort' and 'around'.

Satisfied, the Cat replied, "In *that* direction," waving a paw, "lives a Hatter, and in *that* direction," waving the other paw, "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like; they're both postmodern philosophers."

Alice looked in both directions while thinking "But I don't want to go among postmodernists!"

When she turned back towards the tree however, she was surprised to see a scruffy orange cat where the gray cat had been sitting.

"Please, sir, could you tell me where the gray cat went that was just now sitting there?" Alice politely asked it.

The Cat sniffed at her and replied, "I have no idea. I have been sitting here, by myself, all day and, as you can see, I am an *orange* cat! I have always *been* an orange cat! And always *will be* an orange cat!"

Then, just as he was about to start into his familiar recitation of how his ancestors had all come over with William of Orange, which he regularly bores his friends to death with, he changed into a white Persian cat, and then into a Norwegian Forest cat, and then into a black-and-tan Tabby.

Alice, feeling proud of herself (for they had just covered the new theories coming from the Continent in her lessons the previous week), realized then that he was actually a *Schrödinger* cat. "Your wave function," she explained, as much as to herself as to the Cat, "consists of a superposition of different eigenstates of, I suppose, a 'Catness' operator." Although she *did* wonder why his wave function, after collapsing to an eigenstate, didn't stay collapsed like a proper wave function.

"Perhaps it's artistic license," she thought.

Then, to show off her new knowledge, she launched into a long discourse on wave-particle duality, entanglement, and both the Copenhagen *and* the many-worlds interpretations.

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied the Cat. Being a cat, *and* a 19th-century one at that, he was of course a firm believer in Newtonian determinism and would have none of this new-fangled Germanic uncertainty. Just thinking about it, he said, made him quite giddy!

Alice then noticed a large steel box with an open trap door at the top lying on the ground behind the tree.

"I see you're admiring my box," said the Cat, smiling. "It *is* a lovely box, isn't it? A gift from a human pet of mine. Although I'm not entirely certain what all that stuff inside is for."

Moving closer to the box, Alice could see a complicated apparatus inside, with a Geiger counter and a broken glass vial. She thought it best though not to look any further, for fear of what else might be in there.

"But when I first saw you," asked the Siamese cat who now sat in the tree, "and you inquired about a 'Mr. Dodgson', didn't you have rather short dark hair?"

Alice thought this question very curious indeed. Perturbed, she started to wonder if she might, likewise, be a Schrödinger Alice! ". . . and consist of a superposition of Tenniel-Alice and Liddell-Alice states!" Alice was certain she would not care for that at all, "for it would cause all sorts of confusion!"

These deep metaphysical waters were beginning to make poor Alice's head quite dizzy. She sighed and thought it was time to say goodbye to the Schrödinger Cat. She had seen hatters before, so she decided to pay a visit to the March Hare, even if he *was* a postmodernist.

She thanked the Cat for the directions and started down the path. But after a bit she wondered, "Did he say this goes to the March Hare's or to the Hatter's house?" and turned around to ask him. In the distance, she could just make out the Cat in his tree. Only now he was rapidly disappearing and reappearing in a quite curious, shimmering sort of fashion.

Then she remembered what her tutor had taught her about double-slit experiments and quantum interference. She decided not to disturb the Cat further and continued to propagate down the path. As she did, she tried to recall what Derrida had written on the deconstruction of mid-19th-century Victorian literature.

"For it is almost certain to come up," she said to herself.
