

ALICE

In a World of Wonderlands

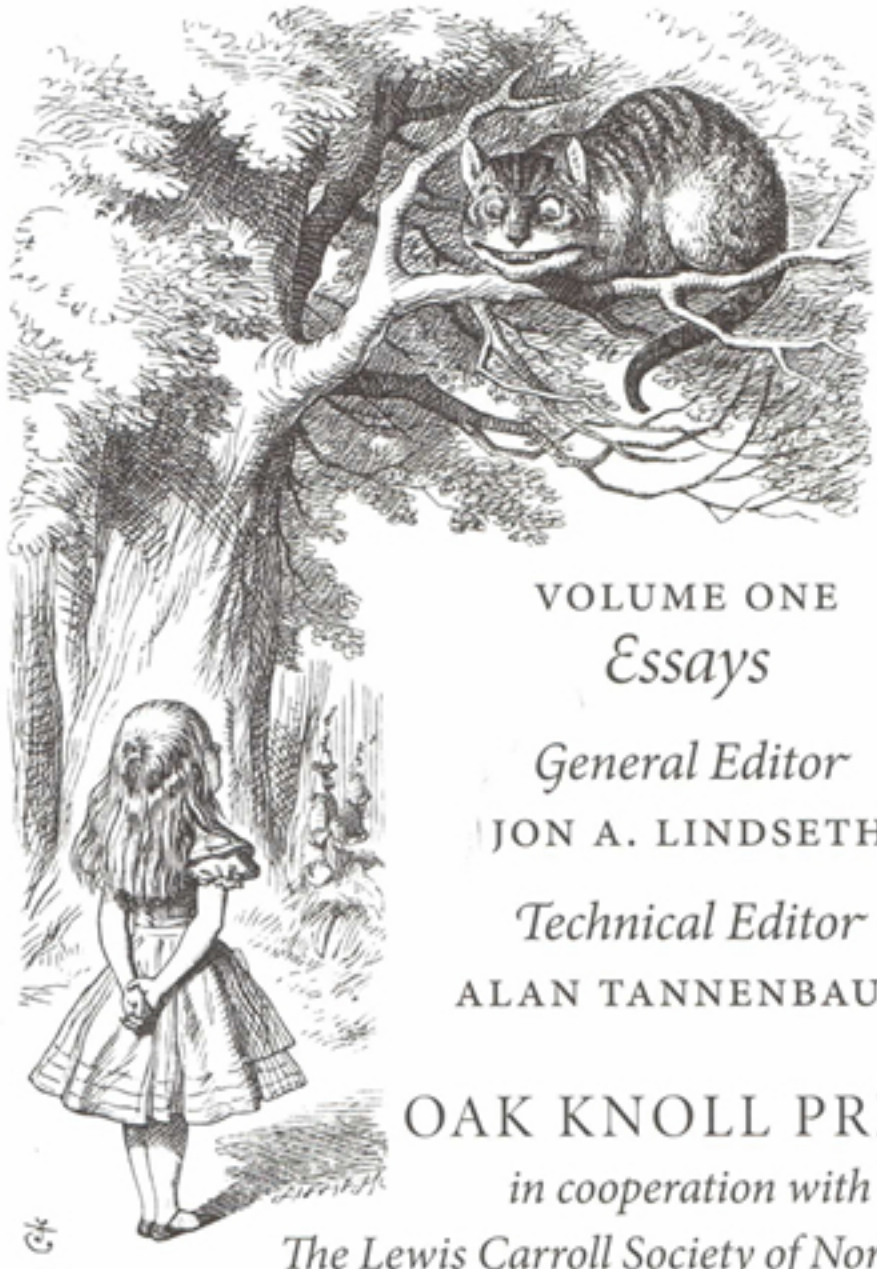
THE TRANSLATIONS OF LEWIS CARROLL'S
MASTERPIECE

Jon A. Lindseth, General Editor Alan Tannenbaum, Technical Editor

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VOLUME ONE Essays

General Editor

JON A. LINDSETH

Technical Editor

ALAN TANNENBAUM

OAK KNOLL PRESS

in cooperation with

The Lewis Carroll Society of North America

Volume One: Essays

EDITORIAL NOTE	13
Foreword · <i>David Crystal</i>	15
Introduction · <i>Jon A. Lindseth</i>	21
PRELIMINARY ESSAYS	
Warren Weaver's <i>Alice in Many Tongues: A Critical Appraisal</i> · <i>Emer O'Sullivan</i>	29
<i>Alice and Global Bibliography: Reading the Whole Book</i> · <i>Michael F. Suarez, SJ</i>	42
The Universal Child · <i>Warren Weaver</i>	47
Lewis Carroll as He Was · <i>Morton N. Cohen</i>	51
Alice Liddell as She Was · <i>Morton N. Cohen</i>	65
The <i>Alice</i> Books: English Classics · <i>Morton N. Cohen</i>	71
Translations of <i>Alice</i> during the Lifetime of Lewis Carroll · <i>Edward Wakeling</i>	80
The Real Flood of Translations · <i>Selwyn Goodacre</i>	99

A SELECTION OF COVERS IN COLOR

LANGUAGES

Afrikaans · <i>Lelanie de Roubaix and Ilse Feinauer</i>	127
Albanian (Gheg and Tosk) · <i>Merita Bajraktari McCormack</i>	130
Arabic · <i>Nadia El Kholy</i>	134
Aragonese · <i>Antonio Chusé Gil Ereza</i>	137
Armenian (Eastern) · <i>Zoya Pirzad</i>	139
Aromanian · <i>Mariana Bara</i>	141
Assamese · <i>Pradipta Borgohain</i>	144
Asturian · <i>Xilberto Llano</i>	147
Azerbaijani · <i>Sheyda Souleymanova</i>	150
Basque · <i>Manu López Gaseni</i>	152
Belarusian · <i>Max Ščur</i>	155
Bengali · <i>Nivedita Sen</i>	159
Bosnian · <i>Sandra Novkinić</i>	164
Brazilian Portuguese · <i>Lauro Maia Amorim</i>	166
Brazilian Sign Language · <i>Clélia Regina Ramos</i>	168
Breton · <i>Hervé Le Bihan</i>	171
Bulgarian · <i>Ivan Derzhanski</i>	174
Catalan · <i>Francesc Parcerisas</i>	178
Cebuano · <i>Marina P. Hamoy</i>	181
Chinese · <i>Zongxin Feng</i>	187
Cornish · <i>Nicholas J. A. Williams</i>	199
Croatian · <i>Smiljana Narančić Kovač</i>	201

Volume One · The Essays

CONTENTS

Alice in Brazilian Sign Language

Clélia Regina Ramos

AN INDIVIDUAL born with profound deafness, or deafened before acquiring a language, generally has great difficulty in reaching a good level of proficiency in the oral language used in his or her linguistic community. One might think that this is the only consequence of sensory hearing impairment, but, as we now know, there are many practical, educational, emotional, cultural, and even psychological consequences. For centuries, scholars throughout the world have investigated the complex subject of deafness. How can we help deaf individuals talk? How can we get them to participate productively in society since, more often than not, deafness is not associated with other impairments? How do we educate them?

With the opening of the first schools for the deaf, it was recognized that the “mimic” used by many of them to communicate was something stronger, much better structured; perhaps this was a language. Some agreed. Technological developments in the nineteenth century brought euphoria to hearing educators and families of the deaf. The invention of the hearing aid had finally enabled a most difficult achievement: to help the deaf talk. However, what seemed to be the solution for some (obviously for those with moderate or severe hearing loss), was not for everybody. Many deaf individuals remained isolated in a state of silence and ignorance. The reasons for this, which we now know are strictly sensorial (the profoundly deaf individual, even using a hearing aid, does not receive feedback from his or her own voice), were wrongly blamed on the “mimic” used by the deaf, now known worldwide as the sign languages. Long prohibited or avoided in the education of the deaf, it was only in the 1960s, in the United States, that the sign language began a process of being recognized as a language. A global movement has since worked toward its official recognition in many countries, including Brazil in 2002.

The 2010 IBGE / Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics’s demographic census, using a three-category division that ranged from “some hearing difficulty” to “a lot of hearing difficulty” to “cannot hear at all,” pointed to 9.7 million Brazilians, a rate of slightly more than 5 percent of the population. Those whom we could call “deaf people,” those who have a lot of hearing difficulty or who cannot hear at all, constituted 2.1 million, or 1.1 percent of the population.

After more than twenty years of association with deaf Brazilians, we have noticed serious issues with their education. Contact with the written Portuguese language, for instance, is a critical point. Usually, a type of proficiency that can replace his or her speech difficulty is expected from the deaf individual, and the written language is basically considered as a means of communication. However, this is a false assumption—both reading comprehension and writing levels are usually low. It is appropriate to say that the majority of the Brazilian deaf community has no contact with literary production.

Today in Brazil, deaf education respects Brazilian Sign Language, also called Libras (*Língua Brasileira de Sinais*). It is part of legislation following the steps of the Convention on the Rights