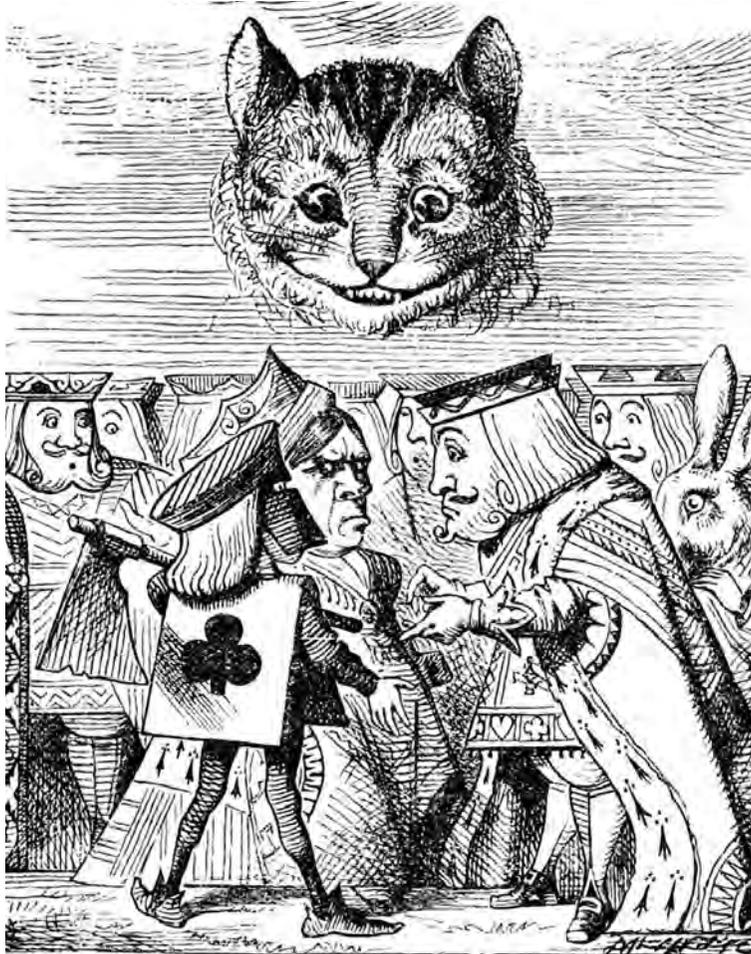


The Cheshire Cat

The Cheshire Cat is treated as an authority figure overseeing the action of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as described in the chapters where it appears and disappears.

Alice



The Cheshire Cat. John Tenniel (1865).

Lewis Carroll was born and spent his formative early years in the county of Cheshire and had a particular interest in history.

The Cheshire Cat

Lewis Carroll may have derived the Cheshire Cat character of the narrator from the mediaeval historian Ranulf Higden from Cheshire, the birthplace of Lewis Carroll.

Eleanor



Mediaeval carving resembling a cat in the 12th century church of Croft-on-Tees.

Ranulf Higden, the narrator of the story of Eleanor at Woodstock, was a Benedictine monk of the monastery of St. Werburgh in Chester (in Cheshire), which was expanded to become Chester Cathedral. His

“The only things in the kitchen that did not sneeze were the cook, and a large cat that was sitting on the hearth and grinning from ear to ear. ‘Please would you tell me,’ said Alice, a little timidly, for she was not quite sure whether it was good manners for her to speak first, ‘why your cat grins like that?’ ‘It’s a Cheshire cat,’ said the Duchess, ‘and that’s why.’

...

The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought: still it had very long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt that it ought to be treated with respect.

‘Cheshire Puss,’ she began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider.

‘Come, it’s pleased so far,’ thought Alice, and she went on. ‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.

‘I don’t much care where — ’ said Alice.

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat.

‘— so long as I get somewhere,’ Alice added as an explanation.

‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ said the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough.’”

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Chapter 6.

“ ‘Grinning like a Cheshire Cat’ was a common phrase at the time the book was written, apparently derived from the custom of selling Cheshire cheeses molded in the shape of a grinning cat.”

Martin Gardner, The Annotated Alice, Chapter 6, note 2.

Polychronicon, originally written in Latin, was published under his Latin name that was, accordingly, Ranulphi Castrensis. One story it featured was that of the jealous Queen and Fair Rosamund.

Lewis Carroll’s pseudonym was a Latin play on his real name, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Lewis is the anglicised form of Ludovicus, which was the Latin for his middle name, Lutwidge, and Carroll is an Irish surname similar to the Latin name Carolus, from which the name Charles derives. The choice of an Irish surname may possibly relate to the fact that his great-grandfather, also named Charles Dodgson, was a bishop in Ireland with the evocative name of the Bishop of Elphin (a title one could imagine Lewis Carroll bestowing on himself).

Carroll himself grew up in Cheshire until age 11, so the Cheshire Cat reference may be to something in his own past. On the other hand, being the son of a minister of a church, not far from where Higden was buried in Chester Cathedral, may have given him more of an opportunity to be aware of Higden’s work, particularly as he was a voracious reader of history at a young age.

The Rev. Dodgson’s church in Cheshire was under the jurisdiction of Christ Church College, Oxford, which has a manuscript of the *Polychronicon* that came to the College from Samuel Burton in 1595, so it was available when Carroll came to Christ Church in 1851 to follow his father in studying mathematics there, spending the rest of his time at the College as a student and teacher.

After age 11, Carroll moved with his family to Croft-on-Tees, Yorkshire, where Archdeacon Dodgson was Rector for 25 years and young Charles went to church every Sunday. For many centuries, Croft-on-Tees was the family seat of the Clairvaux family, knights of the Plantagenet dynasty originating in France. Alban Clevaux and his son Hamon de Clervaux are likely traceable as originating from the castle of Clairvaux, in the county of Anjou, which was held in 1185 by Richard the Lionheart, son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, in his role as the Count of Poitou. (*Magn. Rotul. Scaccarii Normanniae*).