

THE DUCHESS OF WONDERLAND: A SCULPTURE IN PAPIER- MÂCHÉ AND THE DOUBLE MYSE EN ABYME OF ITS PROVENANCE



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THE DUCHESS OF WONDERLAND

Often overlooked, the Duchess is a figure critical to the symbolism of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The current composition is a sculpture in paper mâché. The sculpture was acquired by auction at Northeby's vLtd¹ (as opposed to Sotheby's; that is to say North rather than South²) in Tisingham (as opposed to Nottingham; in other words 'tis' rather than 'not') for six quid³ on the 31st of August, 2012. Its Certificate of Denyenance⁴ (as opposed to Provenance; that is to say a certificate which offers grounds for denial of the artifact's origins rather than their proof) states that Northeby's acquired the sculpture from one Mr. Edward Ellington Buttersmith on the 31st of August, 1889. It deniably confirms that Buttersmith had inherited the sculpture from his uncle Sir Arthur Billingsworth Buttersmith who had passed away on April 8th of the same year after having succumbed to a severe case of the giggles. Sir Arthur bequeathed the statue to his nephew along with the entirety of his worldly possessions, having no children of his own, and having lost his wife Lady Emma Buttersmith two years prior in a fluke accident involving a pepper shaker, a handkerchief and a boiled egg.⁵

It was later revealed that Edward Ellington Buttersmith was little more than a petty cat-burglar and a con-artist from Shadwell named Christopher Crooksly; /aka/ Mr. Dudley Burke; /aka/ Jiminy Binglethorp ;/aka/ Sir Ellesworth Wellington III; /aka/ Chris "The Crowbar Villain", who had once made his way onto the Buttersmith estate at Pringleton posing as a groundskeeper under the name of Burke. In fact, while it remains true that the Buttersmiths had no children of their own, neither Sir Buttersmith nor Lady Buttersmith had done so much as lost a hair from their heads at the time that the statue was being sold to Northeby's, and they most certainly were not deceased. Police reports state that before the *real* groundskeeper arrived, Crooksly made off with the statue and a pair of brass candle holders much to the delight of Sir Arthur, who hated the statue vehemently and displayed gross indifference to the loss of his wife's candle holders. Many say that Crooksly's theft was an inside job commissioned by Sir Arthur in an effort to rid himself of the uncomely statue, which his wife had inherited (a matter which shall be discussed presently) and which she had insisted on placing front and center beneath the bronze *mirror* on the right wall of the main house's foyer, much to her husband's dismay.

At any rate Crooksly made his way to Northeby's in Tisingham posing as Mr. Edward Ellington Buttersmith, the assumed heir of Sir Arthur Billingsworth Buttersmith, understandably

¹ vLtd is the legal status of a business organization whose members have **very limited** liability with regards to legal accountability for the actions of their firm's business practices, including but not restrained to those resulting in financial debts, criminal offenses, putative damages and social or political repercussions.

² Note. Sotheby's is a London born auction house named after one of its founders—John Sotheby. Although the name is derivative of the word south, the company is not so named because of its geographic location. The founders of Northeby's took no account of these facts in the naming their enterprise, and even in their lack of due diligence, neglected to determine whether their business would be geographically located to the north of their nominally opposed competitor, which it was not as it was located at 34 ¼ - 34 ½ Old Breach Street in the Dipacilly Circus section of Tisingham. The name Northeby's was chosen purely as a competitive device in an effort to be compared with the top auction houses in London. What is more, as irrational as the founders of Northeby's were, they had the sense to reject the name Devilie's, which someone suggested during the naming process as an opposition to Christie's.

³ The sculpture had gone to auction an unprecedented 2,756 times without a single bid despite the initial offer being dropped as low as 7 quid.

⁴ Certifying that any ownership stated therein may be at any time denied by the current proprietor and any of the proprietary or transaction parties listed prior, living or departed. Some individuals listed may in fact be wholly fabricated figments of the imagination of the furnishing agent of the document.

⁵ The Northeby's statement from the seller states that she was eating a boiled egg when she shook an excess of pepper onto her plate causing her to sneeze most ferociously. Amidst her fit of sneezing, she pulled out a signature embroidered handkerchief which she accidentally swallowed while inhaling during the "ah" portion of her "ah-choo". The "choo" never came as she gagged and suffocated on the handkerchief without eating her boiled egg. A good thing it is too, because some say that the egg that the Lady was preparing to consume was none other than Humpty Dumpty himself. There have even been rumors that Dumpty blew the pepper up the Lady's nose in defiance; that he demanded that he would have no part in the eating of the egg business, insisting that he was neither an egg to be eaten, nor had he been boiled to begin with, that he was very much fresh and uncooked. But this is all hearsay from the staff at Pringleton Estate, the home of Sir Arthur and Lady Emma Buttersmith, according to Buttersmith the younger.

wishing to rid himself of the monstrous work of art, and providing the dubious back story of the sculpture's inheritance. He fetched thirty pounds and seventy-two pence for the statue before hastily hightailing it back to Gladwick's Pub in the East End for the obligatory celebration round with a miscellaneous band of lowlifes who had the fortune of being found in Gladwicks when Crooksly walked through the door in a generous mood. Crooksly, being the scum that he was, bartered Gladwick one of the brass candleholders for the first round of ale, not realizing it would have gotten him ten times the fee of the statue at auction. He kept the other holder as a souvenir, which the London police duly used as evidence in locating him as the thief upon the request of Lady Buttersmith. Sir Buttersmith, strangely, relinquished the right to press charges and denied himself all legal proceedings for the return of the statue and both candleholders. Leaving the statue with Northeby's, one candle holder with Gladwick and the other with Crooksly, much to his delight⁶.

Now as much of a scoundrel as Crooksly was notorious for being, one thing he was not was a *rat* scoundrel. There is a dignified honor amongst thieves and he was fully prepared to adhere strictly to its codes when pressed by the Scotland Yard. At least that's what he told the boys down at Gladwick's.⁷ For its part, Northeby's, being much more of a pawn shop for the Cockney criminal class than a legitimate auction house, neglected to correct the authenticity of the statue's terms of acquisition. And so we have the certificate as presented. Having come under the 'judicious scrutiny' of the 'infamously diligent' acquisition officers of Northeby's, the auctioneers thought it best to refrain from researching further into the origins of the artifact upon receiving the ridiculous tale of Crooksly's giggles and sneezes and talking eggs and such, for fear of finding even the authenticity of the assumed origins of the statue's theft to be illegitimate. What is more, the officers at Northeby's had figured Crooksly to be as much of a thief as nearly half of the other sellers they conducted business with, not only because of his preposterous story, but because they had recognized him from coming in on three separate occasions in the prior two months under the assumption of various other false identities, as named above, each time wearing a unique assortment of false beards, wigs, side burns, rubber noses and ears, and once even stuffing his shirt with a pillow to give the false appearance of a pot belly.

Sir Arthur and Lady Emma, being a newlywed couple of the aristocracy, had sought to assert their status among the denizens of London café society by demonstrating their high connoisseurship in the collection of fine art. After moving into their townhouse at 34 ½ Albermarle Street, they purchased the Pringleton Estate in the Eightington (as opposed to Sevington) section of Ashford in Kent where they would often summer, parlaying with friends including many nobles and celebrities. Lady Emma Buttersmith (née Chadsworth) acquired the sculpture, which is alleged to be a practical joke made for the Duchess of Kent by Francesco

⁶ Crooksly actually belonged to an organization of burglars, thieves, and confidence men known as the **Society of Pumpernickel Delights**. These men deemed themselves as a more sophisticated breed of crooks and lowlifes, whom engaged in theft, fraud, and criminal activities more generally as a means of providing themselves with fine wine, meats, fruits, cheese and bread—hence the name. These crooks saw crime as somewhat of an art form to be revered for its expertise, its craftsmanship, and for the ingenuity of the criminal technician in devising the plot and escaping unknown. Crooksly's retention of the candleholder is in fact attributable to the high aesthetic sensibilities which he acquired as a member of the society. What is more, he was severely disabused by his fellow Delighters for hocking the other candleholder for a round of craft brew (mind you it was not for hocking it, but for hocking it for the brew specifically).

⁷ According to the police captain assigned to his case, and the signed documents retrieved from the police precinct, Crooksly was fully prepared alright. Up until the dismissal of the charges, he had signed statements agreeing that he was *fully prepared* to testify in a court of law and even before the British Parliament if need be, that he had been framed by Buttersmith, that Buttersmith was the chief conspirator and mastermind of the entire affair, and that Buttersmith's next scheme possibly involved a plot on the crown jewels and a framing of the minister of the interior. None of which was true regarding the crown jewels or the minister, but Crooksly was willing to swear by it. Trying to save his own tail, he even freely disclosed information about his fellow lowlifes, for which the police had not given inquiry. He even ratted Gladwick out about his black market trading and his double book-keeping scams used to avoid taxes on ale, wine, and spirits. Luckily for Crooksly word of this treachery never reached Shadwell, Gladwick's or any of his grimy compatriots.

Alfonse Tàlvara Sforza, as a wedding present from the estate of her father, Lord Byron Edmond Chadsworth of Eightington. Lord Eightington, otherwise known simply as Chadsworth, attended Christ Church at Oxford with C.L. Dodgson. The following excerpt recounts the pages of Byron Chadsworth's diary regarding the day he acquired the Duchess' bust:

Both Dodgson and Chadsworth were premier mathematicians and in search of a break, Chadsworth—who was poorly acquainted with his classmates as an effect of being inundated with his studies—had traveled, upon the invitation of Dodgson⁸—who was thoroughly acquainted with recreational exuberance as an effect of his lackadaisical approach to his studies—to London for the weekend and the pair were making the rounds about town on the evening of Friday, July 30th, 1852 when Dodgson ran into another of their classmates with whom Chadsworth was not even vaguely familiar.

The new inductee to their little trinity of mischief was a most peculiar fellow, also a mathematics student, whom identified himself only as Lewis. Now this Lewis was a strange character indeed; as strange as Chadsworth had ever come across in all his life, and as strange has he would ever come across again, or so he mistakenly thought. Tall, lanky, and withdrawn, neat yet indescribably deranged, he was well-kept and gentlemanly in his mannerisms; however, there was a streak of something mad and uncontrollable faintly exposing itself beneath the veneer of his refined continence. At any rate Lewis tagged along and before long Dodgeson grew weary of the night and called in for retirement. Chadsworth, having not had enough, and Lewis, having only just begun, went along into the night despite the former having initial reluctance as to the credibility of the strange figure standing by his side. At some point the duo found themselves in a parlour at a cribbage table playing for high stakes. Lewis closed the game at 121, winning the match on a score of fifteen with the queen of hearts, and the five of clubs. After collecting his pay from the table he pulled out a shimmering gold pocket-watch that caught the glaring green eyes of several shady figures, known cut-throats, and notoriously sinister individuals located about the room of this particular parlour on this particular night. This in turn caught the attention of Chadsworth, who began to grow uneasy, being that Lewis had just beaten the dickens out of two of said sinister individuals in a high stakes cribbage match, taking them for what, in all likelihood, was probably their week's earnings from the underworld rackets, and their night's playing bank.

Lewis, being completely unconcerned (though not unaware) with all that was taking place about him regarding his winnings, the pocket watch, and the crowd of shady characters, leaned aside to strike a match and light a cigarette resting in a black and gold holder which he now clinched firmly between his teeth. As he began to puff, the thick white smoke billowed before his face and all around him, obscuring his actions from all onlookers as he calmly turned to Chadsworth and in a low and steady voice insisted, "You must absolutely follow me from this place right this moment." The time was eleven thirty six⁹ and Lewis had an engagement to make by midnight, for which he absolutely could not be late.¹⁰ He could have cared less for all the evil

⁸ By his own admission, Dodgson, though extremely talented, struggled with his ability to apply himself while in school.

⁹ At 11:36pm the hour hand faces slightly northwest while the minute hand faces firmly southwest. The route the pair were to take in order to arrive at Lewis' appointment required that they travel north by northeast from their current location then northwest. In other words, the clock was mysteriously serving as a map for Lewis at that exact moment.

¹⁰ We must note here that midnight would have made the date Saturday July 31st, 1852 (<http://www.hf.rim.or.jp/~kaji/cal/cal.cgi?1852>), whereupon a blue moon was scheduled to occur at 2:12 am (<http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/phase/phases1801.html>). It is no coincidence that Lewis closed the game of cribbage at 121 (which is the numerical inverse of 212), nor that the appointment was made on this particular night, and nearly missed from this particular locale. Lewis, being a highly skilled mathematician, was in the midst of a game of numbers, and so the numbers in much of this story play a critical role to its outcome and to the meaning behind its events. One would do well to take close heed to the numbers as the story devolves, for the numbers possess a truth which cannot be evidenced otherwise.

gazes plotting upon his watch and cribbage earnings. Startled, Chadsworth grew paranoid and began to look about envisioning nefarious stares of malice in the eyes of strange nameless faces buried beneath the smoke and din of the parlour. Being hesitant about the trustworthiness of Lewis as well, and uncertain how he had found himself in such a precarious predicament to begin with, Chadsworth decided to follow the lesser of two evils and politely placed his hat on his head, excusing himself from the table, before the pair vanished beneath the haze of the parlour, side-shuffling to the door.

Upon exiting the front entrance of the parlour, Lewis, suddenly without warning, broke into a full sprint as though the devil had caught fire to his hind-side. Having outpaced the frightened and confused Chadsworth, who was just standing there in a daze, by a good half-a-block, Lewis yelled back, “Well don’t just stand there! Come along old boy!” Chadsworth was startled by the sound of Lewis’ cry and was awoken from his fear induced paralysis into a state of frenetic panic and flight by the time he noticed that Lewis was already halfway up the block. So there we have, if you will a imagine, a most comical situation: Lewis charging down the street like a greyhound at a derby-race trying to make his mysterious appointment, cigarette in mouth, and Chadsworth holding tight to his hat chasing behind him like a madman by sheer impetus of the visceral fear of the unknown; having no legitimate knowledge of what danger he was allegedly running *from* nor what danger he was potentially running *into*.

Now envisioning that the two were being chased by ruthless figures from the seedy parlour, Chadsworth began to pick up pace as he raced through the streets as though the world were ending. His heart pounded in his chest. He felt his spirit flying from him and for the first time he felt the joy of touching that place of reckless abandonment discovered during youth and young manhood where fear and hope become helplessly intertwined. He followed Lewis to the stone wall gate of a large estate which Lewis promptly scaled before insisting that Chadsworth follow him over. Still reluctant, but having abandoned all ability to rationally equate his disposition at this point, Chadsworth scaled the stone wall as well. Upon hoisting himself to the wall’s landing he felt his forearm and elbow pressing hard against something round, then splat! As he pulled himself up and stood atop the wall he looked to discover the remains of a crushed egg¹¹ whose white and yolk were now firmly soaked into the fabric of his frock coat. Just then a tiny orang bird, which was literally the most beautiful and exotic species he had ever seen, fluttered about him unleashing a cacophony of squeaks and chirps in an uncontrolled frenzy. Staring in disarray he heard Lewis’ voice whispering, “Hurry, jump down, come on!” then down he went forgetting the bird, the egg, and the accident smeared about the sleeve of his coat. They came upon a hedge maze which Lewis swiftly approached, to Chadsworth’s great confusion. As they entered the maze’s west gate he spied a marble statue of a cherub angel atop a Romanesque column and capital platform, squatting with his hands clinched atop his curly hair as if hiding or ducking from something. Beneath the statue on the capital was a metal plate which simply stated, “Doo”. Upon closer examination the little angel appeared to smile and wink at him. Chadsworth was much too delusional at this point to make any sense of such random incidents of absurdity.

¹¹ Many have speculated that the egg which Chadsworth had crushed was none other than Humpty Dumpty, but I assure you it most certainly was not. Dumpty was away on holiday with the Duchess, the Chef and the fish-faced footman at the time; and the egg Chadsworth accidentally destroyed was a practice egg (meaning it was laid unfertilized) from a young Ms. Orangina Jay. Many may not be acquainted with the Orange Jay and its taxonomic designation as a species, as indeed they are extremely rare and only known to occur in the most discrete subsections of town and country, limiting their terrain to miscellaneous holes, branches, nooks and crannies, unlike their cousins the Blue Jay which have been observed migrating across great distances. Nevertheless, one might not be surprised to find that Ms. Jay was quite displeased to discover that her dormant egg, which she was using as a decoy to lead off predators from her actual nest, had been unwittingly demolished by a passer-by who was neither a predator, nor searching for prey. And indeed she threw quite a fit, humming and chirping in tongues unknown, even in the language of Jaybirds, before laying another decoy and fluttering off to her quarters in the seclusion of the hedge maze garden.

So, in they went, and Lewis began the strange craft of making his way through the maze in the seemingly most nonsensical manner imaginable.

After swiftly making their way through the hedges they came upon a second statue of a cherub, this time drawing a bow and arrow. Beneath the statue the nameplate strangely read “Dinky Dink.” “What could be the meaning of this?” thought Chadsworth to himself. They followed the direction of the cherub’s arrow leading to the maze’s south exit, letting them out at the entry to a dark wood. Upon entering the woods Lewis began checking his golden pocket watch and muttering something incomprehensible. “Oh dear, oh dear, where is it?”, Chadsworth thought he heard him say as he again glanced down at the shimmering golden pocket watch, which glowed like a halo beneath the shadows of the dark forest in the full moonlight of the mid-summer night. They came to a great ancient oak tree and halted abruptly staring up; its long-reaching branches, older than time untold, clinching fast to the darkness of the night air. “It has to be here, it has to!” said Lewis. “What has to be where?” asked Chadsworth. And as he turned around he suddenly noticed a colorful sculpted bust of a most repulsive figure, appearing by its costume to be an effigy of some royal personage, lying before him in the woods. He turned to Lewis to gain his attention and then without warning, where Lewis was standing seconds prior there was nothing. He heard a scurry to the right and glanced just quick enough to see the tail end of a white rabbit, its cotton fluff and feet, scurrying down a hole amidst the mighty twisted roots of the great oak. And he could have sworn that he saw the familiar shimmering golden glow of Lewis’ pocket watch cascading against the rabbit’s side fur as he retreated, but he assured himself that such an absurdity was little more than the effects of good brew and a time had too well.

He called and called but Lewis would not answer, because he was not there. “What a splendid joke!” he said to himself. “Lead a fellow through a maze, out to the darkest woods in town and country to a hideous sculpture and leave him there in the middle of the night without sight nor sound of how to get back home...Just great!” In his inebriated state, Chadsworth lifted the sculpture, not knowing what else to do, and stumbled his way back to the garden. The night was thick with fog, and it had all happened so swiftly that in his current condition he had hardly the faintest inclination of how to make sense of any of it. “Where in god’s name was Lewis? Where did the sculpture come from? Who’s estate was he trespassing on? And how in the devil should he make his way back through the maze in order to leave?” These were just some of the ideas flowing through his mind, which was now pacing at a thousand thoughts per second, or so it felt. He sat down at the south entrance of the hedge maze staring at the white marble cupid, which now appeared to be winking at him. He lay down on the cool grass which was slightly damp with the early christenings of morning dew and he stared into the cloudy night sky slipping into a slightly intoxicated daze of bewilderment, trying to calm his nerves. Madam Orangina—seeing our incorrigible and unlikely protagonist laying there looking confused, pathetic and all too unaware—decided to offer fate a helping hand. Never reluctant to assist those in need (as orange jays are of course the sweetest variety of the jay family) nor offer tribute to the gods of revenge (one might note that they are also the most feisty), Orangina fluttered her little wings and swooped from her nest (whose location in the garden I shall not disclose under pain of meeting the same fate as Chadsworth), gliding up into the night air and over her unsuspecting target, delivering a small, wet, and ripe present just about the victim’s face which we shall do well here to simply refer to as a wake-up call. The call splattered unto Chadsworth’s forehead, slightly splashing his nose and mouth, and again he was slapped from the serenity of his dazed and confused oblivion into the harsh reality of the situation. He needed to make his way back

through the garden. He looked to the cherub angel, which had since taken to laughing at the entire exchange, and was by now sticking its tongue out and making obscene faces at him while taunting him with a slew of insults.

He told himself it was all his imagination as he entered into the hedge maze carrying the sculpture in the darkness. He tried to accomplish the reverse of what he remembered following Lewis into the maze, but it was to no avail. It felt almost as if the maze had changed. He made his way to the center of the maze where he found its grand centerpiece and a large marble fountain with a small platform column atop having a metal plate upon which was written “Wutesy”. He could see the grand castle of the estate from this point and so he took to the task of maneuvering the second half of the maze traveling north. Eventually he found his way to the maze’s northern exit where he met with a third cherub squatting with his arms crossed upon his platform. The little angel seemed to be pouting. Beneath the platform where he sat was a metal plate that said, “Skimmererrinky”.

Now it so happens that the estate they had entered, unbeknownst to Chadsworth and fully apparent to Lewis, was none other than the Castle Drakeford belonging to Count Francesco Alfonse Tàlvara Sforza . Sforza was a man of many tricks and titles¹², and had spent the greater portion of his heretofore brief yet extravagant life accumulating secrets of all sorts for a variety of uncertain purposes. Word around town was that the count was conducting scientific experiments attempting to discover stars, planet, and other distant celestial bodies. Stars and planets notwithstanding, what he was actually attempting, was to discover alternate dimensions of time and space. His most recent shenanigans, most of which amounted to little more than infliction of minor injuries and the disarray of his laboratory, led him, by happenstance, to the discovery of vulnerabilities and disruptions in the fabric of what modern men and women refer to as the space-time continuum, but what he preferred to call the cosmic glue. Sforza had exhausted the pages of Newton’s Principia and the mathematical papers of Jean le Rond d’Alembert, Joseph Lewis Lagrange and William Robert Hamilton. None of this impressed him. He was in search of answers that had yet to be discovered. Perhaps Chadsworth was the one to help him make those discoveries.

Chadsworth stumbled up the cobblestone stairway to the front door of the manor. The heavy brass doorknocker sat between the slack jaws of the strangest looking bronze figurine of a wiggled fish head, wearing a tricorn¹³. Staring at the fish he swore that he heard it saying, “well don’t just stand there, knock why don’t you.” He shook his head in amazement. But he again attributed this to the drinking, figuring his hallucinations were progressing as the night proceeded. He knocked three times and before the third swing actually hit the door, it flung open

¹² He was said to be an alchemist, a chemist proper, a metal smith, a baker, a butcher, a barber, a cobbler, a mason, a cosmologist, a cosmetologist, an astrologist, a numerologist, an anthropologist, a geologist, a biologist, a psychologist, a phrenologist, a phenomenologist, a botanist, a physicist, a physician, a psychic, a philosopher, a musician, a magician, a mathematician, a telekenetician, a historian, a comedian, an encyclopedian, a maker of small toys for children, and a theologian studying numerous eastern cultures and mystic religions in an effort to develop rare potions and amazing contraptions claimed by some to possess magic, and by others to have supernatural powers. In addition to carrying the title of Count Tàlvara of Alvor in Portugal, he also retained the title of Duke Sforza of Milan in Italy from his maternal lineage. In reality Sforza was somewhat of a Count of Monte Cristo, in that no-one actually knew where he had come from. What is more, his proclamations of nobility were highly dubious given that both the Tàlvara and Sforza lineages had become absent from noble status in their respective principalities over a century prior to the Count’s suspected time of birth. Furthermore, rumors have alleged that he used the name Francesco as it was the namesake of the ruling progenitors of both the house of Tàlvara under Francisco Tàlvara, and the house of Sforza under Francesco Sforza; that he was not a descendent of either house, and that his real name was not actually Francisco Alfonse Tàlvara Sforza, but this was the name he selected upon purchasing his noble titles from the regions of Alvaro and Milan during periods of rapid political transition and instability in the aftermath of the little Corsican tyrant (Napoleon Bonaparte) setting fire to France and running amuck upon the European Continent unchecked. Yet this is all hearsay. No-one even knew the count’s actual age and the speculations ranged from 28 to 58 years old. As stated, Count Francesco Alfonse Tàlvara Sforza was a man of many tricks indeed.

¹³ The tricorn was a three cornered hat popular during the 18th century which had fallen out of vogue by the Victorian era. The fish head is a reference to the footman who exchanged the letter from the frog valet in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

and behind it was the oddest-looking fellow. He stood about five foot, seven inches dressed neatly in black patent leather loafers with a shining golden buckle, white silk stockings, plaid knickers, a crimson velvet waistcoat, a navy blue twilled frock coat, with a black quilted silk smoking jacket on top. Atop this he wore a bright green woolen cape with gold trimming, deep yellow silk cravat, he was carrying a large wooden spoon, and on his head he wore a brown and ivory houndstooth tweed deerstalker cocked sideways with the earflaps in front tied up into a bow, and the bills resting above his right and left temple rather than his brow and the nape of his neck the way the hat is to be properly worn. He spoke in an absurd cracking voice which peeked in a slight shrill at the zenith of his conversation. To the untrained ear his slurred speech might be easily confused with that of a fellow who has spent the evening worshipping at the altar of Dionysus¹⁴, but this was no drunkard, a madman indeed, a fool perhaps, but a drunken fool, no.

“Where have you been my dear boy, the hour is late! Wait, where is Lewis? And who are you?” He glanced to Chadsworth’s side noticing the sculpture. Growing alarmed he shouted, “Why is that not on its way to the palace? O dear, O dear, you’ve done it now. Do you know what this means?”

Finally, someone was about to be some sense of this mad situation that had somehow spun far out of control.

“No, I don’t know. What does it mean? What does any of it mean?” inquired Chadsworth enthusiastically.

Sforza froze his entire body stiff, he turned his eye to his mark with a most intense stare and slowly crept within an inch of Chadsworth’s face before pointedly whispering, “Absolutely nothing.”

Being completely deranged, he moved on from this nonsense without further incident and continued on with the web of lunacy he had already begun spinning; that web for which he was quite well known, by all that knew him, for using to ensnare the minds of those who dared to entertain his company. Down they went on the path of his stark raving madness, and utterly delightful scientific genius. “Very well then you may enter” he said as he stepped beyond the threshold spying the outer walls and landscape of his estate in search of some sort of ambush.

“But where is Lewis?”

“I have no idea. He left me in the woods just beyond the hedge maze where I found this statue. There was a rabbit crawling, and next thing I know Lewis was nowhere to be found.”

The count knew that Chadsworth was not lying. And so he neglected to confirm whether or not the rabbit was white for fear of revealing too much of what he did know, or spiking his guest’s curiosity any further than it had already been spiked, sliced, torn, or mangled.

“Did he say anything before he abandoned you?”

¹⁴ Dionysus, known in Roman mythology as Bacchus, was the Greek god of wine, harvest, festivity, ritual madness, and ecstasy.

“Yes he kept saying ‘it’s got to be here’ then he disappeared.”

Fully aware of what all this meant, the count, being weary of conspiracies and plots against him, especially by his arch enemy—the identity of whom not even the count had managed to determine—he decided to offer Chadsworth one final test before allowing him to enter. And so as Chadsworth prepared to set foot into the castle, the Count caught him across the chest with the front of his right forearm.

“Ah, ah, aaah...first you must answer the riddle before you come in.”

“Riddle? Very well let’s have a go at it then”

“Very good, yes, yes, very good indeed. You accept the challenge. Now...” he said, as he cleared his throat, “Eh Hemmm.”

I am always essential
I can never sit in
I’ve forgotten beginnings
And I’ve ends without end
Who am I and Why?

Perplexed, and having no idea as to why in particular *he* should even *want* to enter the castle, Chadsworth became enticed simply by the notion of the challenge, and so he stared through Sforza into dead space thinking to himself,

“You are a madman. That is who you are. Why?
Because your dress is absurd
Your words make no sense
Your demeanor is vulgar
And your brain is quite dense, that is why!

“Well now get along with it!” Sforza demanded.

Awaking from his internal little rant Chadsworth rolled his eyes upward at the night sky as he muttered to himself in a low voice.

“Always essential, beginnings forgotten, never sit in, ends with no end...hmm”

Staring concertedly at Sforza, suddenly raising his eyebrows, he pointed his index finger up, and as he began to speak, peaking the titillation of Sforza’s enthusiasm, he quickly cut his words short.

“Wait.” he said.

Again he gazed up, scrunching his face, this time pointing back and forth into the abyss of bewilderment, he put his hand on his chin then he pointed again, while with the other hand supporting his elbow he muttered to himself in the same low and inquisitive voice.

“ends but no end, never sits in, forgot the beginning, essentially then...hmm”

Again he stared concertedly at his host, then suddenly raising his brow with a look of epiphany, pointing his finger up, he inhaled deep and began to speak, overwhelming Sforza's excitement again, but alas he cut his words short.

"O blast!" Shouted Sforza

"Alright, alright, no need to get your knickers in a fuss!" replied Chadsworth

He put his finger to his lip one last time, gazing up. Then he leaped into the air slamming his feet to the ground as he landed. He pointed to Sforza in a striking motion, shouting,

"Time!"

Startling the Count with his abrupt gesticulation, Sforza regained his composure and he reached down into his jacket pocket gazing into a golden glow. He withdrew his hand, turning his attention to his guest, replying,

"Well the time is approximately 1:46 ante meridiem, but 1:46 is most certainly not the answer, and I assure you that it has absolutely nothing to do with the price of bread in China if you're wondering that as well."

"No, no, no!" cried Chadsworth, "Time!"

"Fine" insisted Sforza taking out the shimmering golden pocket watch which looked uncannily similar to the one Lewis was carrying.

Staring at it, much to Chadsworth's confusion, he waited thirty seconds biting his tongue and making subtle squeals and grunts, even humming an abbreviated rendition of 'three blind mice' before shouting "Time in!" at the end of the duration. "Now, the answer if you will." He demanded

Completely thrown off, Chadsworth stared tilting his head, scrunching his face, and in a confused voice muttered "What?"

"The answer, the answer to the riddle!" Sforza insisted, growing impatient.

"Oh" Chadsworth replied shaking off his confusion.

"Time!"

"Oh no, there will be none of that", insisted Sforza, "You just had a 30 second time-out and you only get one per riddle. Now out with the answer good man."

"I didn't call time out, you're insane!"

"While the latter may be true, the former most certainly reeks with fallacy, I do declare, you just called for time!"

“No, no, no! I said, ‘time!’”

“Oh so *now* you admit it, well you can’t have another one and that’s that...unless you really need it.”

“No! Time! That is the answer to the riddle. You are time!”

“Well, I am most certainly not ‘*Time*’, my dear chap”

He suddenly whirled into a nobly dignified pose placing his fingertips against the fabric of his crimson velvet waistcoat, “I am Francesco Alfonse Tàlvara Sforza, Count of Alvor and Duke of Milan.” Then sweeping his right arm aside and bowing his head, he calmly uttered, “At your service.”

Why certainly such an esteemed act deserved to be repaid with a gesture of equal social eloquence. And so Chadsworth, not one to be outdone, under the continued influence of the night’s libations joined in immediately in participation of this tomfoolery. “A thousand pardons my dear sir.” He spoke as he suddenly bowed his head low, his hand to *his* chest, crossing his right leg behind his left leg and slightly bending in deference to his noble host. “I am Lord Byron Edmond Chadsworth of Eightington...at *your* service.” he insisted, also sweeping his right arm aside.¹⁵

“No, at *your* service”

“No, at *your* service”

“No, at *your* service”

“No, at *your* service”

“No, at *your* service” ...

This went on for a good two minutes until they finally agreed that they were each at the service of one another. After dispensing with the pageantry, pleasantries, platitudes and a routine of nonsensical formalities typically obliged by convention, and many of which were suggested, but not obliged, by unconviction, they got down to both the nitty and the gritty.

“On the contrary,” said Sforza, “I may not be time, but you are partially correct. Time is the answer to half of the riddle.”

And before he could request the other half Chadsworth began.

“You are time because

You are always essential and time is always of the essence

You can never sit in as time always runs out

You have forgotten beginnings which date from time immemorial

¹⁵ Notice the two gentlemen face each other while mimicking each other’s poses and actions, in reverse. Sforza was partially doing this to assure himself that Chadsworth was not, in fact, his mirror reflection, and partially because he was indeed rather mad. Because their arms swung out at opposite directions he knew Lord Eightington not to be a doppelgänger.

And you have ends without end, because although the time for all things must come to an end there is no ‘end of all time’ so to speak.”

“Bravo! Bravo!” Sforza shouted, clapping his hands. “That is correct... Why didn’t you just say so to begin with instead of insisting on all of your silly time outs?”

Chadsworth, now coming more to his senses as the night grew late, knew better than to engage Sforza again on the issue. Rather, seeing fit to agree with him for the sake of argument, he politely stated, “I beg your pardon my dear sir.”

“Very well, pardon granted.” insisted Sforza, “now come along.”

He grabbed him by the egg stain of his frock retracting his arm and gazing perplexingly at his hand to determine the nature of the sticky, crumbly substance now mashed between his fingers. He looked and sniffed and recognized it as yolk. Taking a lick from his finger, he smacked his pallet three times fast and declared “hmm, orange jay”. Again, being mad, he immediately lost interest. Moving along, Sforza led Chadsworth across the checkered¹⁶ floor of his grand hall and to his laboratory. The lab was sealed by a heavy bronze vaulted door lightly frosted in a pale green patina.

“Before you enter you must answer the riddle” said the count.

“Riddle?!” shouted Chadsworth.

Thinking to himself, he recalled how much he actually enjoyed solving the previous challenge and he realized that he was beginning to take a subtle delight in engaging the mind of this mad man.

“Very well then.” he replied.

“O wonderful! What a marvelous sport you’ve turned out to be.” said the count as he prepared to deliver the challenge. He stared at his opponent deep into the eyes and then he calmly began to speak.

“Who knows our intentions and all secrets deep
And never exposes the ones that we keep
Is a closest companion, with heart to our heart
But is always unseen when the moment is dark
Tells but one lie, disclosed by their fingers and thumbs
And cannot be spied without spying upon?”

Completely stumped, Chadsworth began to grit his teeth in frustration. He began to look around in confusion as he repeated the question back to himself again and again.

¹⁶ The checkered floor of the castle, here symbolizes the complex duality of Sforza’s genius and madness intertwined in the continuous patchwork of his twisted existence of quiet desperation or in many instances, in his case, cacophonous desperation.

Just then he spotted the full length mirror at the end of the hallway. He thought to himself as he repeated the riddle over and over, until the sticks of his brain that had been grinding together suddenly caught a spark.

And just then he uncontrollably blurted out “Our reflection.”

“What about it? Yes, yes they are quite handsome if I do say so myself.” said Sforza turning to the mirror and blushing in an effeminately vain pose as he gazed upon himself with Chadsworth standing beside him.

Remembering the previous fiasco that occurred as a result of giving entirely sensible yet abbreviated answers to the counts’ riddles, Chadsworth knew better than to match wits with Sforza’s madness again. This time he retorted in detail right from the start.

“First, our reflection knows all our intentions and deepest secrets because it is psychologically one with us.

Second, it never exposes the secrets we hold because its actions, as well, are one with our actions, so long as we do not disclose the internal truths we possess to others, it cannot disclose them either.

Third, it is our closest companion because of our psychological union. Our reflection is an essential part of our mental understanding of the world, as it serves, within the brain as a mechanism for self-verification, and when facing the reflection in the mirror the hearts remain aligned, unlike when facing actual people, the hearts lay on opposite sides of the chest.

Fourth, the reflection is purely the perception of light bouncing off of a surface, and so where there is no light there can never be any form of reflection.

Fifth, our reflection proclaims to be us, but it is a type of doppelgänger, which exists only as our imitation in form without substance. In this sense it is lying to the world every moment of its existence. The most obvious way to determine that the reflection is a pure image and not a human being is to hold the palm to the mirror, whereupon one realizes that the right hand is also the mirror images right hand, when in the real world while facing an individual palm to palm, the right hand can only align with the left hand and the left with the right. Therefore, as the right and left hands are never truly identical, by its fingers and thumbs the reflection discloses its only lie to be so, that it is not the true self but a manifestation of the extension of its likeness.

Finally, when we look upon our reflection our reflection also looks upon us. Even when spying from a series of mirrors upon the back of our reflection, the reflection is also spying upon our back. And so it cannot be spied by us without spying upon us.”

Extremely pleased with the reply of his guest, the count flung himself into an infantile ecstasy of internal delight. He celebrated the moment and turned the latch of the vaulted door, opening his laboratory to the unsuspecting eyes of Chadsworth. And with this, the young guest felt his heart

for the second time in his life, on the very same night as the first, skip a beat at the sight of what lay before him.

Now Count Sforza's lab was indeed a wonder to behold. There was a large central counter upon which rested a kaleidoscope of glass caldrons, flasks, beakers, and test tubes filled with bubbling and vapping liquid of the most rich and brilliant array of colors. There was a wall with twenty four coo-coo clocks each ticking one hour ahead of the one before it. About the room there were numerous strange-looking contraptions possessing varying combinations of springs and levers with pulleys and screws, and parts made of wood, brass, copper, and iron. Some of these were in the shape of small boxes, others were shaped as spheres, and they were moving about the room, some crawling on mechanical legs, some floating up and down with propellers. There was a white goose, which the count said he was attempting to train to lay golden eggs, but the goose only laid eggs of pewter, and there was a tiny herd of 12 zebras, about one foot high fitted with riding pants, polo shirts and jockey hats. This was the count's polo team, he explained. There were two cherub angels with marble skin about two feet in length, exactly like the ones from the garden maze. Their names were Cutesy and Wutesy according to the count, and they too were frolicking about the laboratory, flying here and there, wrestling with one another, engaging in lunatic antics amidst the chaos. Cutesy was actually the guardian of the garden's east entrance, whilst Wutesy sat atop the fountain of the maze's centerpiece. Upon spotting Chadsworth they fluttered to his sides and began tugging on his pant legs for pure entertainment. He was so delighted at the scene before him, he had no notion of taking offence at the antics of the little chubby cupids. Before long they were tugging his ears and scrubbing his hair, still to no distraction. Chadsworth just stood staring in a daze of amazement which carried him to the border of insanity and left him there to make a choice (which the reader had already been warned was bound to happen when in the company of the count, so there is no need to be surprised). The walls of the laboratory were all fixed with alternating pairs of mirrors and sheets of slate of equal size. Upon the slate boards, written in chalk, were an innumerable series of mathematical formulas. Chadsworth felt something familiar in the scent of the chalk particles floating about the room amidst the ordinary dust. It made him smile.

You are from Kent are you not?

Chadsoworth, jaw still slack, nodded his head, "Uh huh."

You recognize the dust in this room?

Chadsworth began to slowly recover from his dance with insanity and he said, "The dust? Why yes I suppose it's from the chalk, and the chalk I suppose is from..."

"The White Cliffs of Dover in Kent, near Eightington, where you are from." declared the count.

"Precisely..." said Chadsworth, shaking his head up and down, wearing a false smile as his eyes watered near the point of tearing. "Precisely" he repeated.

"But why are you crying my dear boy? Cheer up! Isn't it beautiful?" replied the count

“It is” confessed Chadsworth. “It’s just that I’m afraid I’ve gone a bit...mad.”

“Mad!?” inquired Sforza, “Oh no, no, no you are quite wrong my boy. You went mad at approximately 11:37 when you were leaving the parlor, escaping from the den of thieves.

“But how did you...” Chadsworth began, before deciding to completely abandon all reservations he had about what to expect from the world at this point.

The count continued, “You’ve gone far beyond mad at this point. No, no my boy, at this point I do believe that you’ve gone nutty.”

Just then the cherubs began grabbing Chadsworth’s ears, staring down the canals as if to examine his brain. They turned to the count and began shaking their heads ecstatically up and down saying, “Yes, yes, nutty...quite nutty indeed.”

And moving on, seamlessly as he always did, the count returned to the previous subject. And for the first time that night, the count abandoned all hints of lunacy in his continence and he spoke at length with conviction and earnestness.

“Now back to the chalk. More specifically, back to the dust.” he said.

The count was a prolific intellectual and had written innumerable volumes of scholastic literature on all manner of subjects. Of particular interest to the current conversation was his extended treatise on dust. Sforza had spent a considerable amount of time studying the nature of dust in his scientific and philosophical explorations of the world. The speech which Sforza delivered next, as part of his conversation with Chadsworth, was largely excerpted from his volume on the subject. And so he began.

Upon Dust and Other Small Particles

“The dust my dear boy is from the microorganisms which have cluttered themselves against the surface of Dover and decomposed for ages untold. Their pale bodies have disintegrated and compressed into the layered rock you and I know as chalk. When we extract these bars from the sediment, the detritus from which they are formed might be ground against the surface of slate and other hard stones, and in this way, my boy, we teach children how to read, write and count, and we solve the secrets of the universe in our study rooms and laboratories. But it is the dust that possesses the answers to it all. Locked between the configuration of the patterns of dust, there are all of the philosophical and scientific accounts known to man, kept for the preservation of our understanding until the time when they shall be done away with and the pattern of the dust is broken and it is scattered across the earth and travels elsewhere, never to be known again, as in Alexandria. For reading and writing were sacred technologies at one point, not unlike the highly complex knowledge you pursue in mathematics at Oxford. And in this way that knowledge is preserved and disseminated to the minds of future generations, and this, my friend is how the species advances. Dust has transitive properties. It is one with the universe and travels farther than the sky is wide to reach its destination. The dust from the chalk traveled up your nose striking your olfactory, and it took you to a place of familiarity, but in actuality the place of

familiarity had come to you. You and your family were bred and have perished, for ages, on the surface of a zillion tiny creatures which have given their lives and left their remains to become one with the planet. And the fragments of those remains are embedded in the memory of your ancient heritage, and in a sense they are embedded in you. But not only does the dust of chalk keep our secrets, but dust of all variety of stone, granite, graphite, and even trees, preserves our memories. For even the tiniest rock is but a million particles of dust, bonded together by the plaster of time. If you should pulverize it with a larger stone, all that will remain will be dust. The dust of granite stone from Borrowdale¹⁷ is used to make our writing pencils, which we use to keep our secrets private on plastic¹⁸ sheets of dust from trees. And you might see this also if you so desire. For if you burn the paper, what will remain or float away from the embers but dust? Even in the form of smoke we find nothing more than dust. And in the heavens, where we see the stars and the planets, and the moons, these things are nothing more than dust. And they provide the essence of our being, for like the plankton on the Cliffs of Dover, when we depart we return, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. For dust is the origin of all design, even life. And when dust is dark and lurks in hidden corners, beneath cabinets and around the surface of ornaments; in the crevices of chase cushions, and in the padding of bed mattresses, it longs to accumulate, for in its cumulative form it imitates foul creatures that creep upon the earth, and this gives it the sensation of life. Even as it carries the tick, the flea, and the tiny mite into the abyss, dust longs to be alive. It dances in the ray of sunlight and spews from the mouths of tropic volcanoes. Shimmering across the night sky on the tails of comets and shooting stars, dust is the matter which gives visible form to all that is in the universe. And so, the bright band of the Milky Way is no more than a giant cloud of dust. This earth, apart from its sky and oceans is a ball of swirling dust. And forget not that even the ocean is but a melted heap of snow dust. And you and I, the polo team, Cutesy, Wutesy, Skimmererinky, Dinky Dink, and Doo, are all walking breathing compilations of dust. When the dust is done with us it returns us to the swirling ball and casts away our secrets.”

Chadsworth stood now perplexed, intrigued, mentally stimulated and dumbfounded all at once; perplexed by the conversation, intrigued by the truth of it all, mentally stimulated by the magic in the room in general, and dumbfounded by his noble host's sudden turn from lunatic to sophisticate.

Sforza continued, “Now speaking of secrets, you must first promise to keep all that you have seen and heard here a secret before we go any further. You may write it down, but the secret must remain with the dust. Do you swear?”

“I swear, I swear!” replied Chadsworth.

Then the count began, “Very well then, I have summoned you here...”

“Summoned me here? How on earth did you summon me here when I have no idea who you are, where I am, how I got here or why, and I came on my own two feet?” inquired Chadsworth.

¹⁷ In the early 1500's the only large scale deposit of solid graphite known on earth was discovered in Borrowdale parish, Cumbria, England, which became a major source of pencil 'lead' worldwide for the next several centuries.

¹⁸ Bendable

“That is a matter of technicality” retorted Sforza. “I have summoned you here to solve the equation.”

“What equation?”

“The one you’re holding in your hands right now.”

“You mean this hideous statue.”

“Yes. It was supposed to be solved and on its way to the palace for safe keeping, but Lewis was running late and left it behind for you to solve alone. I’m assuming he didn’t explain any of this to you before he left.”

“Equation, map, palace? What in the devil are you going on about? Lewis didn’t explain anything.”

“Look at the sculpture” Sforza demanded.

Chadsworth looked at the bust and became more clueless than he was before.

“Look closely” the count insisted.

Upon closer examination Chadsworth noticed numbers and characters etched into the design of the statue ever so subtly. “Wait, what does it say?” he asked. “Is that what I think it is?”

“That is the equation you must solve” replied the count.

“I knew it. I saw the same problem on your board here” said Chadsworth as he walked to one of the slate tablets upon which was written the formula sitting above an empty Cartesian Coordinate System in three dimensions. The formula read as follows:

$$ds^2 = -c^2 dt^2 + dl^2?$$

Only on the board, unlike the statue, the characters and signs were in order.

“But what is it?” inquired Chadsworth.

“It is the equation for the rabbit hole¹⁹ that Lewis traveled down along with the white rabbit on their way to Wonderland. The hole is a warp in the cosmic glue of time and space which I created as a door. But right now it is unstable, and it lets you out in all different places, and in all different sizes and you have to take to drinking potions and eating tea cakes to get everything to normal and the whole thing is a mess right now. It really is rather unsafe because you begin by falling a great distance. The only other way to get to Wonderland is ‘through an ordinary looking

¹⁹ In essence Sforza’s rabbit hole was a worm hole, which is an obstruction in the space-time continuum which bridges disparate planes of space-time through a shortcut in the fabric of the universe, theoretically allowing inter-stellar travel over great distances through short spaces, or inter-dimensional, or inter-universal travel. No-one is quite sure whether Wonderland actually exists on another planet, in another dimension of this universe, or in another universe altogether.

glass' like the ones around this room, but you see this also has complications because right becomes left and left becomes right, and everything is written backwards, and faster is slower, and higher is lower, and this also gets out of hand. So I wrote the equation into the design of the statue for you to complete. But first can you solve it here on the board then take the sculpture with you for safekeeping?"

"I have no idea where Wonderland is, nor why anyone should travel down rabbit holes to get there, let alone why Lewis would abandon me to go there with a rabbit. But Lewis was a suspicious fellow, and this herd of zebras is standing on two legs dressed as jockeys waiting for me to solve a mathematical equation, so I suppose I can give it a shot, given the nonsense of it all" muttered Chadsworth.

Sforza replied, "The zebras ride the lions, the impala ride the crocs."

Chadsworth scrunched his face at Sforza in greater confusion then shook his head. He picked up the chalk from the counter and began writing.

$$ds^2 = -c^2 dt^2 + dl^2 + (k^2 + l^2)(d\theta^2 + \sin^2\theta d\phi^2)$$

Then the equation was complete. The work was done, and the dust had found the proper pattern of the secret of the rabbit hole through Chadsworth.

Chadsworth then took to the graph and plotted the coordinates for the equation drawing lines to connect the data points along the three axes.

"Now can you explain all this to me?" requested Chadsworth

The count, not heeding Chadsworth's request was busy celebrating with Cutesy and Wutesy and the polo team when he again became aware of his guest, replying, "Explanation? Of course my dear boy, you've earned it. But first let us celebrate." By now the coo-coo clocks were all sounding off in a frenzy of noise. Then the cherubs grabbed Chadsworth by each hand, and the three of them joined the count and began dancing in a circle of victory while holding hands much like in a game of 'Ring Around the Roses'²⁰. Chadsworth was very much beginning to enjoy the absurdity of the count's company, and somewhere between here and there he found that he had slipped undetected across the border of sanity, and was indeed mentally treading on the grounds of the bona fide lunatic. But he no-longer cared. He had found a freedom in the madness of Count Sforza which he had never known before, and he was prepared to finally revel in its shower of serenity. And so the crazed party eventually calmed down. Count Sforza sat at the counter before a miniature scale diorama of the hedge maze garden. He began to speak of his life relating to the events of the night starting with rabbit hole.

The following recounts the story of Count Sforza as related by Lord Chadsworth in his diary:

The count had spent years of his life studying mathematics and science. He had studied at the University of Bologna before attending Christ Church as Oxford as well. He had achieved many great scientific feats after earning his degrees and honors from school, the most important

²⁰ Ring Around the Roses contains the lyrics "Ashes, Ashes" again alluding to the concept of dust.

of which was his learning the secret to the ability to slow down time around him. In fact, it was this ability which made all of his other achievements humanly possible, it was the answer to his ability to amass such great fortune, the secret of the great youthfulness of his appearance, and key to his ascertainment of noble titles from houses now vacant in their respective regions.

Sforza had learned to manipulate the one thing we can neither produce nor eradicate, and he did it with the golden pocket watch he carried in his waistcoat. While discussing this he revealed to Chadsworth that he had produced several of these watches, one of which he gave to Lewis, another he gave to the white rabbit, and he reached into his drawer, and handed a matching pocket watch made of shimmering gold to Chadsworth telling him that that particular watch had been reserved for him. When Chadsworth looked at it he saw several equations engraved in the surface of its hinged cover, which he assumed were used for the manipulation of time.

Chadsworth tucked the watch away safely and Sforza continued with his story. He related to him the secret of time manipulation and the dangers involved, telling him that to set the watch's stop watch for 60 seconds could compress 60 years into the 60 seconds or could make sixty seconds take 60 years to complete. Time was a sensitive subject, and depending how it was feeling that day one could wind up in the past if they were not careful. And so through his manipulation of time, the count was given an extension on life which allowed him to advance all his intellectual pursuits over durations of years in matters of real-time minutes. One of these pursuits which he had taken in his 'spare time' was the understanding of the space-time continuum, which he insisted on calling the cosmic glue. Within this glue Sforza was able to use his understanding of time manipulation to produce aberrations in the continuity of space-time. For days, which would have otherwise amounted to over a hundred years, he tried and tried until he finally produced an opening which could be traversed. Upon the discovery of this opening, his life changed forever.

He discovered two means by which the opening could be made stable enough to travel, both of which involved complications which have already been discussed. The first was the production of a door in the physical world, and so through this method he produced the rabbit hole which he hid betwixt the roots of the great oak tree in his forest grounds, just beyond the southern gate of his hedge maze. The second involved the use of a mirror as a door, which involved the metaphysical process of transferring the psyche of the individual from the physical form into the form of the reflection through deep meditation. He informed Chadsworth that Lewis had been such a reflection of his friend Dodgson, who then came from the world of reflections to the real world through a rabbit hole, as a doppelgänger, and a quite mad one at that. Sforza had created the riddles for entry into his castle and laboratory around these two subjects for the obvious reason that the reflection and time were the two keys to travel through anomalies in the cosmic glue. However, the interesting thing was not the doors found in the mirror and the rabbit hole themselves, but what was on the other side of the aberration.

Sforza traveled through the mirror first, and found himself getting younger, as time was flowing backwards. He stayed for nearly a year, which amounted to ten seconds in ordinary time, but because time was moving in reverse one year across the anomaly in ten seconds ordinary time amounted to ten years gone backwards in age. So he crossed back through the looking glass and entered through the rabbit hole, which took him to the same destination, only time remained in forward motion. That destination was the strangest place in the world, in fact Sforza had inclinations that that place was not in this world at all. It was called Wonderland, and it was a place as if every dream that had ever been dreamed in the imagination came to life. Animals spoke, creatures of fantasy were real, physics were inconsistent and without rules. The cherubs and the polo jockeys had come from Wonderland with the count. But who ever saw miniature

zebras that stood up-right, wore human clothes and spoke proper English (Not that anyone had ever seen a zebra that spoke improper English)? Now imagine a zebra riding a lion and playing polo against a gazelle riding atop a crocodile. Wonderland was indeed a place of many absurdities. The cherub angels and the goose that laid the pewter eggs, which the count was currently working on making gold, were also friends from that mad place. That place was mad indeed, and everyone in it was mad. What is more, it had driven the count mad. And by process of osmosis the counts madness as a result of being in Wonderland was now spreading to Chadsworth. But Sforza continued to relate his story.

Upon taking up residence in Wonderland the count found himself in the employment of a noble lady, whom everyone knew only as the Duchess. Being a man of many trades the Duchess patronized the count's pursuit of the fine arts and commissioned him to produce a sculpted bust in her own likeness. The count pursued the arts because he had long realized that all that he had known of mathematics and physics had no value whatsoever in Wonderland. The place was completely zany. Even simple arithmetic, when it did make sense, was rejected by any and every one he came across. Things as simple as two and two were no longer as simple as four. Why, there was the rhinoceros who insisted that two and two made 'more as opposed to four'. Then there was Jack be Nimble, who swore that the answer was twenty-two. Finally, the cherubs insisted that two and two, although having the same title and form were completely separate numbers who didn't make anything together. As a matter of fact according to the cupids, two and two didn't even like each other. One must note that the five little angels were very sensitive to the topic of identity, as they were all identical to one another and were always being mistaken. At this point Chadsworth looked at Cutesy and Wutesy as they shook their heads fervently in confirmation.

At any rate the count took up residence in the palace of the Duchess of Wonderland as a commissioned artist of the Royal Crown. While there, he made friends with many, many characters who were so absurd and twisted that he could hardly recall them all, let alone their idiosyncrasies. There were playing cards, and hedgehogs, flamingos, and frog faced footmen, and there were flying pink elephants, and pantomimes with arms and legs like rubber. Sforza had written all of this in a book, but he kept the book in his quarters at the Duchess' palace. No-one ever disturbed his belongings in his quarters except for Maid, who was the cleaning servant and the older sister of Chef. Even she had no interest in his possessions or his work. She only moved things because she hated dust, and she insisted on removing the dust from every spot in every room in the entire palace. This was actually the inspiration for the counts treatise on dust, because she came in one day and erased all of the writing in his dossier, insisting that the pencil was nothing more than dust and it had no place in the palace. The two almost had it out, if not for the intervention of the Duchess, who declared that they should play a game of spikes to determine who was right and who was wrong. Spikes was a game where players stab spikes into the ground by throwing them between the 'u' of a horseshoe. Being that Maid was rather uncoordinated, the count won the match easily, and as a result, much to her dismay, Maid was forced to rewrite all of the counts notes in his dossier. She didn't so much mind the actual labor, but was appalled by the notion that Sforza was allowed to keep his dust in the palace. In turn, much to the dissatisfaction of the count, not only were Maid's notes completely incoherent, but what was coherent was hardly close to what had originally been written in the dossier. To make peace Sforza erased the dossier beneath the carriage portico where she could see him as she was washing windows. He went to his room and rewrote his notes in private, placing them inside a satchel where they would no longer be disturbed. The frog faced valet saw what Sforza was

doing as he worked on the Duchess' carriage and he smiled irresistibly when he saw him erasing the gibberish that Maid had written. Either he was amused by Sforza's kindness or he couldn't help but find humor in the things that Maid had written; probably both.

Upon completing the statue which he was commissioned to design and construct, the count presented it to Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Wonderland on April 1st, 1844. The Duchess in her madness, asserted that the statue looked nothing like her because she did not recognize herself other than in the form of her reflection, and considered the work to be an April fool's joke, keeping it only as a mark of her good sense of humor. Of course Sforza being from the other side of the rabbit hole and having not come through the mirror was only able to produce the image in its proper configuration and could not render the mirror image because his right side faced the right of everyone else when standing face to face in Wonderland, as opposed to facing their left side as it does on this side of the rabbit hole. And so the Duchess which Sforza sculpted was what would have essentially been her mirror image on this side of the rabbit hole. But the Duchess wanted to see her mirror image from Wonderland, which would have been her true likeness from this side of the rabbit. In any event, she complained that her face was backwards, and that she hated the sculpture because it made her look ugly. However, being insane, she forgot her anger and placed the statue on the mantle in her grand hall. Given that Sforza was known to have a highly ironic sense of humor, many have speculated that he did indeed mean it as an April Fool's joke because he was very particular about numbers, and it is highly improbable that he would do something on the 1st of April which was suspected to be a joke that was in fact not a joke. Part of the count's joke may have been that no-one knew whether or not it was meant to be a joke or not. Most notably, Sforza left the Duchess' face without eye lashes, leading many to conclude that the statue was indeed a joke.

Nevertheless, one day the fish faced footman went on an errand for the Duchess to the bank to pick up some money. On his way back he decided to stop by a river to have a swim, because he was a fish of course. Well, just as he was beginning swim, why, who comes along but Nematode Jake, who steals the Duchess' carriage and makes off with the money. Now it just so happens that that day was payday at the Duchess' palace, and the money that jack made off with was to be used to pay the servants in the Duchess' employment. When the footman made his way back soaking wet, he alerted the Duchess of Jake's treachery, and she sent the three of diamonds and nine of clubs after him. Meanwhile Chef, who was busy in the kitchen cooking while throwing all manner of projectile at the Duchess' head and the head of everyone else who walked in the room, insisted on receiving her pay immediately or there would be no supper in the palace that evening. The Duchess, already growing hungry, began to panic and offered the statue to chef in exchange for her night's services until the soldiers caught up with Jake. Chef threw a frying pan at the Duchess, which the Duchess oddly took as a symbol of agreement since Chef continued cooking. In reality Chef only continued to cook because it was the only thing she knew how to do; after all, her name was Chef. Nevertheless that evening the soldiers arrived at the palace with Nematode Jake in shackles. Chef, being utterly delighted at receiving her pay and utterly disgusted at the image of the statue, visited Sforza's quarters that night with the bust in her arms. Having a general distrust of the significance of the hideous figure, she decided to return it to its maker in hopes that he would remove it from the palace in general. When Sforza opened the door she shoved the sculpture into his hands saying, "Here!" Then she turned and walked away never bringing up the subject again.

Sforza eventually brought the statue back with him through the rabbit hole and used it as a means to conceal the unfinished formula he was working on. One night while playing cribbage

at the same seedy parlour in London, which Chadsworth had been playing at that very night, he made friends with a young mathematician named Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. They went back to the Castle and Dodgson was able to answer a set of the count's riddles as easily as Chadsworth; though he actually asked for three timeouts instead of two²¹. Dodgson and Sforza would spend many hours trying to devise an equation for a sensible passageway to Wonderland, but the closest they came was the half of the equation which Chadsworth had just completed. Dodgson agreed to work full time with the count on these and other matters, however he was tightly pressed to make a name for himself at Christ Church. So he committed an extremely dangerous act which it is highly recommended that no-one ever attempt. He traveled to Wonderland through the looking glass and allowed himself to return through the rabbit hole as a doppelgänger whom he named Lewis Carroll. Essentially this meant there were two Dodgsons. He changed the copy's appearance so that their identities would not be mistaken and he returned to school while Lewis continued working with the Count on a variety of problems, going back and forth to wonderland. This would explain his inability to apply himself at school despite demonstrating himself as highly prodigious in mathematics; primarily because half of his mind was always off in another dimension fraternizing with speaking animals and madmen. Nevertheless, on that particular night it was a blue moon, and the count was preparing to give the statue to Lewis because it can only change ownership on a blue moon save for the day of its creation and its final day of ownership transfer, because of something about the pull of the earth and the tides and the dust which Chadsworth did not quite understand as he was growing sleepy, so he did not record it correctly. Lewis was to take the statue back to the Duchess palace for safekeeping, but instead after meeting with Chadsworth and Dodgson, he decided to give the former a crack at the equation in hopes that he could solve it and give it to the count.²² Lewis met with the white rabbit beneath the great oak tree because he had other business to attend to in Wonderland, and away they went. As the count continued to relate his story he noticed that his guest was beginning to tire from the long night, and as he reached the end he had fallen asleep. From what Chadsworth was able to deduce, he wrote in his diary that the count must have called the other three cherubs to the castle and they carried him to his hotel room by the quarters of his wardrobe high in the night sky.

The next thing he knew he woke up in his room, in his own bed. It was the next morning. Chadsworth assumed that the ale had gotten the best of him as he did not recall making his way home from the castle. Yet he still had the stain of egg yolk on the sleeve of his frock coat, he still had the pocket watch in his waistcoat and when he sat up, there was the statue of the disfigured duchess sitting on the floor of his hotel room. As he looked in the mirror he could see the tiny handprints of cherub angels about the hem of his pant legs and the wrists of his coat. When he met with Dodgson for breakfast that morning, the two had a solemn understanding between one which they had not known another prior. As they sat to be served Dodgson grinned and nodded at his companion with the knowledge that they shared a secret to be kept. This was the conclusion of the section of Lord Chadsworth's diary concerning Count Sforza and the sculpture of the Duchess. It is important to note that it is unknown how Northeby's acquired the diary of Lord Byron Chadsworth to begin with, and some have speculated the entire account to be a hoax. There has also been skepticism by some about the very existence of Count Sforza, Lord Chadsworth, Sir and Lady Buttersmith, Mr. Crookslly and even Northeby's vLtd, with some

²¹ No-one ever actually asked the count for a timeout. He was just an ignoramus when it came to confirming the answers to his own riddles.

²² It should be noted that although Lewis did devise a stable equation for the rabbit hole this did not actually do away with all of the difficulties of traversing the hole into Wonderland. This is evidenced by the fact that Alice also encountered the difficulties of falling and size changes after her arrival.

suggesting that the statue itself was not brought from Wonderland, but is the work of some mischievous college student in California, in the United States of America. Public records and the disclaimer of the auction house certificate have done little to support opposition to these accusations, but the price of producing such a hideous work of art could hardly be worth a shot at winning a library contest. Such a student would indeed have to be mad.

Artist Statement

While disfigurement may take multiple modes, one of the most apparent occurs with the obstruction of the human body's natural bilateral symmetry. Such disordering of the line and form of the subject produces overtly explicit declarations of malevolence and dysfunction; often suggesting violence or the ill-driven hand of fate. These conditions are uncommon and unnatural, yet they are among us at all times, and even the most perfect among men, in reality, contain a significant degree of imbalance and imperfection between the mirror image duality which consists of the body's left and the right sides. Furthermore, in keeping with the theme of Carroll's notion of reflection, which is titular to the second *Alice* tale and equally represented within the first, it has been more appropriate to leave the symmetrical balance of the figure's natural reflection (i.e. its left and right sides) intact, opting on the contrary to produce the grotesque form of the Duchess' hideous face through the somewhat more subvert and ironically less common mode of disfigurement which is achieved through the relative disproportion of features. From Matsys' original portrait of *The Ugly Duchess* and Tenniel's derivative stylization of the Duchess of Wonderland, we find that both adhered to symmetrical modes of disfigurement, although Matsys' appealed more to surface level disfigurement of the subject's skin texture and tone and deviations from both Western European and universal standards of feminine beauty in facial line shape and the form and relative positioning of features (i.e. cheekbones, eyes, ears, nose, lips, chin).²³ Tenniel, by contrast also deviates from the same feminine aesthetic paradigms, but does so in congruence with the comical nature of Carroll's narrative by exaggerating the size of the head more generally in addition to the proportional balance of the features and somewhat less distinct wrinkling of the skin. In this way, Tenniel has produced an excellent visual complement to Carroll's literary caricature given his literary composition of the Duchess as having a highly nonsensical, unstable and exaggerated emotional temperament and a perplexingly distorted worldview. The head is swollen as one would imagine that of someone who has been severely battered to or near the point of death. The traditional royal headdress of the Duchess from both Matsys and Tenniel was used as a model for this work. As the Duchess of Wonderland is strongly insinuated to be a woman of unattractive appearance one might note that the character is in some ways an iteration of the Greek Medusa archetype.²⁴

I became interested in participating in Wonderland Awards after discovering a flier for the event. My work here was inspired by the subject of the Vulgar and the Aesthetic, and so I decided to work on the Duchess who is often called ugly as a commentary on physical appearance. Research for the short story benefited greatly from access to the Lewis Carroll collection, and from the retention of additional resources concerning Carroll and his work. The story within a story within a story was a plot device used to add a sense of intricacy to the riddles, word play and number play that takes place in the story, which were also directly inspired by the multiple layers of meaning found in the work of Carroll. The sculpture and short story are companion pieces meant to be consumed together.

²³ Matsys' painting appears to essentially be the face of an old man on the body of an old woman. What is more the face is almost monstrous in its contour, possessing severely lopped ears, ghoulish eyes, an inordinately elongated philtrum between the nose and upper lip, and a turned-up nose emulative of the exposed nasal cavity of the human skeleton.

²⁴ While the ancient Greek tradition states that Medusa and her sisters were vile creatures born of hideous monsters, the Ovidian tradition (Metamorphosis) of Rome tells us that Medusa was once fair and beautiful, and that the goddess Minerva (Athena) transformed her into the snake haired creature with a face so hideous it would turn onlookers to stone as a punishment for being raped by Poseidon in her temple. Later artists and writers began to treat considerations of Medusa as a paradox of terror and beauty, offering her a face of grace and charm with locks of living venomous serpent bodies. The current work is a commentary on all three traditions producing the Ugly Duchess with exaggerated features and an upturned expression. The character is mad and without reason and kind and compassionate bearing a conviction of sullen grace represented in *Alice* by Tenniel's sketch, and duplicitously in Carroll's narrative, respectively.