

**The *Alice* Books – an Imaginative Testimony
to a Child's Experiences of Socio-cultural
Norms of the Late Victorian Age.**

**Katherine Evans
992226544**

**Submitted to the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) in May
2004**

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Doctor Bizley for his supervision and assistance during the writing of my thesis. My family too has played an integral part in its completion, and I am grateful for their unwavering support.

Contents Page

Introduction

Chapter 1

Alice in Wonderland: Breaking Away from Conventional Children's Literature

- 1.1 A Religious Predetermination in Children's Literature..... 6-9
1.2 Three Influential Personas that Reinvented Formal Education principles... 9-11
1.3 An Introduction of Imaginative Texts..... 11-12

Chapter 2

An Insight into Lewis Carroll

- 2.1 A Brief History.....13-19
2.2 A Split Personality?.....19-23

Chapter 3

Wonderland and the Quest for Identity

- 3.1 A Child Amongst Adults.....24-28
3.2 The Quest for the Garden: A Framework to Alice's Adventures.....28-32
3.3 Undermining Received Patterns of Identity.....32-40
3.4 Metamorphosis and Extinction: the Fate of being Alice.....41-44

Chapter 4

The Alice Books: A Socio-cultural Commentary

- 4.1 Class Issues.....47-53
4.2 Destabilizing the 'Ordered' World.....53-56
4.3 Regression and 'Progress'.....56-61

Chapter 5

A Whole New World

- 5.1 Explicating Alice' 'Curious Dream'.....62-69
5.2 Playing with Conventional *Time*.....70-74

Chapter 6

'Language': A Topic of Conversation...75-84

Bibliography85-90

Introduction

Alice in Wonderland is perhaps the most renowned fantasy book for children. Over and above this though, it has relevance for adults. People too often dismiss it as purely escapist reading, a means to escape from the monotony of everyday realism by delving into the realms of fantasy. Many critics propose that it operates on more than one level, and I would have to agree – it is a pioneer of children’s literature as well as a product and critique of the Victorian age. It is a story that has captured the world’s imagination, with vivid characters and exciting adventures. The sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*, although not as well known, equally offers an insight into the late nineteenth-century.

I intend to explore the many layers found in these stories, and hope to expose them as being more than mere narratives, but as pieces of literature that thrive because they are so cleverly constructed. Perhaps also their success lies in that they deal with the universal theme (for children and adults alike) of making sense of the seemingly nonsensical aspects of life and society. The stories, as well as the strange characters and happenings, are reminiscent of the *Absurdist* genre in drama, in which the objective is to turn the world upside down, so to speak, in order to understand people and society.

My dissertation will begin by exploring the literary trends of children’s books prior to 1865, in other words, before *Alice in Wonderland* was published. I intend to present an overview of Victorian and pre-Victorian children’s fiction, tracing the development of the *story* for teaching and religious instruction, up until the time when the *story* was liberated to be simply the vehicle for pleasurable recreational purposes.

Thus my opening chapter is an exploration of the didactic children’s literature that dominated the early nineteenth century, examining the educationalists that helped expand the genre of children’s literature.

Next, I will include a brief biography of Lewis Carroll. It is important to my overall theme in that a biography sums up, in one human centre, the forces at play in Victorian sensibility. As a modern audience, we seem to seize upon the idea of his

'character', desperately attempting to understand what motivated him to write such *tour de force* stories.

The interest for me at this point is to examine how academics have portrayed Carroll's 'character'. The motive behind this section is to beg the question of whether his complex personality affects our reading of the texts, or whether they can be seen as entirely separate from a life to which some scandal has been attributed.

In the remainder of my dissertation, I shall focus on how the texts are a reflection of a typical Victorian child's experiences, and discuss how Alice 'grows' as a character, and what she reveals about her society in the process of discovering how she should define herself. Alice is the vehicle for Carroll's subversive commentary about his society, and her experiences in *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* land are often rooted in the undermining of conventional behaviour and traditions.

Lastly, I will examine Carroll's stylistic organization of the narratives, paying particular attention to his treatment of time, dreams and language in the texts. I will discuss what his intentions are in creating 'nonsense that makes sense', as well as what this 'nonsense' discloses about the society he lived in and the values he seems to object to.

Chapter 1

Alice in Wonderland: Breaking Away from Conventional Children's Literature

The decade of 1860 to 1870 is hailed as the true beginning of nineteenth-century children's fantasy, as this is the time during which Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* emerged. Whilst they are both acknowledged as having historical importance in the development of literature for children, they are at once alike and dissimilar. They both include as themes the exploration of the self, although on different levels and are set in fictional, magical worlds that are far-removed from the semblance of real life in nineteenth-century Britain. Physical metamorphosis plays a key role in the protagonists' spiritual development. These texts were intended to impress upon Victorian children's imaginations, but their content is what places them on opposite sides of the debate over whether the imagination should be stimulated for its own sake, or whether stimulating the imagination should be based on a spiritual and educational premise.

The Water-Babies, whilst being innovative in form, does not allow any sense of escapism, as there is a clear underlying theme of moral development. *Alice in Wonderland*, on the other hand, grants the child reader imaginative freedom and does not demand that there be spiritual augmentation of any kind. Rather, it encourages autonomous thinking, as opposed to the indoctrination of an adult society's religious beliefs. As Elaine Ostry observes:

The two books have much in common: they both contain journeys whereby the main characters change their physical forms, and which end with a return to the human world. Both books use fantastical growth as a means of exploring identity and growth. They use adult figures as guides for the child heroes, and these figures engage in dialogues. To a certain extent, both heroes become self-regulating. However, Alice's growth is associated with power and control rather than morality, and the other characters do not control her changes in physical form ("Magical Growth and Moral Lessons", 2003, p5).

The Water-Babies revolves around Tom, a young chimney sweep. He escapes the toil and drudgery of his miserable apprenticeship to Mr Grimes, a lowlife character who robs the wealthy while Tom clears their chimneys. Tom is accused of this criminal activity and he flees, falling into a stream. Here a magical transformation takes place. Aided by the water fairies, Tom transforms from a dirty little ragamuffin into a 'water-baby.' He is only able to become one of these magical creatures once he has learnt compassion, and he proves himself worthy by freeing an ensnared lobster. Cleansed of soot and sin, Tom ultimately finds happiness and spiritual redemption among his fellow aquatic fairies and the natural and supernatural creatures he befriends in his watery world. Peter Hunt observes that "most of the action takes place in the cleansing medium of water, and Tom's purgatorial trials are completed when he reaches St. Brendan's Isle and recovers his beloved Miss Ellie (who has also died), and is permitted to go 'home' with her on Sundays"(1995, p146).

I have offered a mere 'story-in-a-nutshell' approach to this novel, and there are many aspects that can be examined which I shall not delve into. Although it is now recognized as an international classic among children's books, modern critics point out that it is a masterpiece flawed only by Kingsley's inability to curb the urge to 'preach'. In this respect, he conforms to an older school of thought, namely that material written for children (and this includes children's fantasy stories), should have an instructional agenda, be it moral or factual. His intentions were for this book to further his political mission, namely to attack the abuse of children in the chimney-sweep trade, as well as to impress on his public his ideas that the natural world should be given a more prominent role in the educational sphere. For child readers he wished to impart wisdom of a spiritual nature – good children reap the rewards of their behaviour and bad children are punished by eternal isolation.

Two years after *The Water-Babies* was published, *Alice in Wonderland* appeared on the scene of children's literature, and to this day is considered by critics to be the first work that was composed with 'no moralistic agenda'. This text is seen as fantasy liberated from being a moral teaching device. It depicts a world of nonsense that criticizes adults' behaviour and traditions in a way that children can appreciate. Although there has been plentiful debate over whether this text is suitable for children

(as many adult issues are raised), Lewis Carroll's intention is clear. He anticipated that this book would delight a young audience, and stimulate adult readers.

Originally it was narrated to the children of the Reverend Liddell, during a boat trip in 1862. Carroll then wrote *Alice's Adventures Underground* between 1862 and 1863, which evolved into the ever-popular work, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. When one examines the chapters that were added to the original manuscript, it becomes clear that there are layers, if one can call them such, that are really intended for adult interpretation. Those are the layers that incorporate political and cultural critique, concepts that children do not necessarily understand or have empirical opinions about. The book is subversive in that it is intended for children, but cleverly satirizes adults. Derek Hudson writes that Carroll "wrote his most famous books primarily for children though in language that only adults can fully appreciate"(1958, p5).

Alice in Wonderland revolutionized children's literature, in that it broke away from the long-held notion that fictional work should be specifically learning-centred. Essentially, Carroll shifted the focus to another sphere. His primary objective was not to teach children through the use of a story – of higher significance, he aimed to encourage and nurture the individual child's imagination. He imparts the idea that children should be critical of their surroundings and the adult figures that guide them.

He stresses the importance of play and make-believe as being on a par with the child's formal education, and stylistically, the text reinforces this concept as Carroll repeatedly turns educational jargon into comical episodes. His masterpiece fits into the nonsense genre and incorporates games as part of the fabric of the adventure. Robert Polhemus writes about Carroll's nonsense and games that:

They are modes for temporarily changing and controlling reality, but they also become ways of reflecting and criticizing the arbitrariness and absurdities of life. Something in Carroll and in much modern comedy says that life is so absurd that only play can illuminate it or make it mean anything worthwhile (Gray, 1992, p368).

Carroll shows that play is not an activity that one should frown upon and ultimately curb, but rather it is something that should be cultivated. He suggests that it is through 'play' that children are afforded the opportunity of trying adult roles in a

completely non-threatening environment. Play is a ‘developmental tool’, and therefore should be balanced with the educational aspect of a child’s upbringing, and granted a more important status. Thus, in *Alice in Wonderland* there is a sense of blissful reckless abandonment, or ‘play’, through experimentation with form and style as well as the adventures that Alice undergoes.

Through the Looking-glass, published in 1871, proved to be less popular than its predecessor. I can only speculate that perhaps the themes in this sequel were too many and too complex for children to appreciate. Whereas *Alice in Wonderland* is specifically for children, in *Through the Looking-glass* the agenda is blurred. The fantasy is not so much about Alice’s adventures as it is about the philosophical concepts Alice has to consider while she is in her dream world. Nevertheless it is a thought-provoking text that retains the charm of Alice’s first adventure.

Thus, although *Through the Looking-glass* is not hailed as a memorable children’s fantasy, it has perplexed and captivated an adult readership. Having said this, I do not feel that this in any way detracts from the triumph of Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, or detract from it as a ground-breaking piece. It will surely be set in the history of children’s literature as the fantasy that opened up the gateway for a barrage of other great children’s classics. The fact that it was successful in its time demonstrates that there was a demand that needed to be fulfilled and in this way it can be perceived as a revolutionary text.

1.1 A religious predetermination in children’s literature

One can trace a long history in the development of children’s literature, and when one reflects upon pre-nineteenth century writing, one can see that stimulating the child’s imagination was not a top priority. Indeed, during the 1700s the imagination was perceived as something that was inherently dangerous when considered from a religious and/or spiritual perspective. Great emphasis was applied to the importance of receiving a good education, and this sentiment was strongly influenced and enforced by religious leaders. As such, there was an extremely limited supply of reading material available for children, and that which was available was scholastic

and religious in nature. Thus imaginative and creative pursuits were quashed by the overwhelming religious fervour that abounded, and in attempts to 'inspirit' children with ethereal knowledge, adult society made almost no allowance for dallying in the make-believe.

There is a gaping hole in the fabric of the fictional literary arena of the seventeenth century, in that there was no fiction available that was specifically intended for children to read. There were, during this time, two types of text that would later evolve into fiction for children. Broadly, the first was story material (that was not necessarily for children), and the second was material for children that was not story-based. The 'stories' were comprised of legend and romantic tales, such as King Arthur and Robin Hood, fables and folk-tales. The audience was universal, as these stories were aimed at the old and the young.

The seventeenth century Puritans in particular condemned these fantasy stories on moral grounds. While the reading of fantasy texts was not expressly forbidden, it was strongly discouraged, for a number of reasons. They were considered not suitable to be read by children, as they were thought to provoke mischievous and immoral behaviour. As the texts were not truthful representations of life, they were deemed damnably wicked and the reading of them was sinful and rebellious. They were also perceived to be addictive, and distracting to the young mind as they deflected thoughts away from participating in 'productive', Christian activities. Aside from this though, as they were not educational books, they were seen as a waste of time. Even as late as 1820, fantasy and fairy tales were distrusted, as is expressed by Mrs Sherwood, a nineteenth-century educationalist, who wrote:

Instruction when conveyed through the medium of some beautiful story or pleasant tale, more easily insinuates itself into the youthful mind than any thing of a drier nature; yet the greatest care is necessary that the kind of instruction thus conveyed should be perfectly agreeable to the Christian dispensation. Fairy-tales therefore are an improper medium of instruction because it would be absurd in such tales to introduce Christian principles as motives of action... On this account such tales should be very sparingly used, it being extremely difficult, if not impossible, from the reason I have specified, to render them really useful (Gray, 1992, p321).

The Puritans contributed greatly to churning out material for children, most notably their rather humourless 'Godly books'. These religious books were aimed at instilling

virtue and devotion, and were an essential item in most households. They aided parents in cultivating docile, dutiful children and achieved this end by using intimidation and fear as the motivating factors. Children were constantly reminded by 'fallen' child characters in the books of what lay in store for them should they not follow their parents' instructions. The senses were assaulted with images of impending hell, and these books instilled fear into the hearts of child readers. The Puritans had entrenched in these stories "an otherworldly focus, a (to us) morbid preoccupation with death, damnation, and hellfire, and a grim and relentlessly preachy tone" (Jackson, 1989, p18).

This surge in Godly books can be explained by the horrific episodes that gripped England. From 1640 onwards, the country experienced a series of catastrophes, including civil wars, religious oppression and the threat of plague. London was indeed hit by the plague and on top of this devastation, in 1666 the Great Fire of London broke out. With these events in mind, there was a renewed fervour for finding salvation, and parents impressed upon their children their zealous thoughts and fears.

One can understand why religion was such a prominent feature in the raising of one's children. Presumably parents and religious leaders resorted to implementing Godly books as a means of ensuring that they had fulfilled their duties and passed on their legacies. When one reflects that this was a society that was already riddled with the notion that children were 'contaminated' with original sin, one can see how it is a natural progression that it became adults' and indeed parents' God-given duty to instil morality. Thus, parents became, first and foremost, their child's primary spiritual educators (Jackson, 1989, p23).

Childhood was a time for learning, not through guided experience of the world, but by rigorous instruction. A child's education was firmly rooted in the religious sector and this in turn was rooted in their parents' fear and pessimism over the disasters that had befallen the country. They had turned their attention to their religion and refocused their sights on their children, in the hope that there would be something better waiting for the devout in the next life. In Jackson's *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic*, a text which examines the reading habits of children in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, we read: "Predictably these parents welcomed a

literature to monitor those devil-haunted 'idle hours', one that taught 'little souls' to read and that focused their sights firmly on the word of God"(Jackson, 1989, p23).

Other materials that were available for children were school-books and didactic courtesy books. These reiterated what the Godly books taught and tried to demonstrate *how* good children ought to behave and the consequences of not doing so (Hunt, 1996). Essentially, children's literature was learning-centred and was, as author Jack Zipes records, "rooted in the conditions and imperatives of the adult world and was regarded first and foremost as a tool to shape the young to the needs of that world" (Egoff, Stubbs, Ashley and Sutton, 1996, p327).

From the turbulence of the seventeenth century, England moved into a phase of relative calm. The hundred-year period between 1740 and 1840 is regarded as the time when children's literature and fiction started on the process of maturation into the type of imaginative and stimulating children's texts we know today. Many reasons for this boom in children's literature have been suggested, including that Britain had reached relative political stability and there was a spread of literacy (Hunt, 1996). Along with these societal advances, attitudes towards children were changing.

1.2 Three influential personas that reinvented formal education principles

There are three central figures that were instrumental to the development of children's fiction. Firstly, the philosopher John Locke introduced new ideas about children's educational needs and he helped to revolutionize adults' and indeed society's perceptions towards the upcoming generations. The idea of original sin had dictated the need for intense moral instruction, and this underlying tenet facilitated heavy-handed disciplining techniques. Locke operated from a different vantage point, in that he believed children were born 'innocent', thereby possessing minds that were clean and pure and ready to absorb moral teachings. Thus, he stressed that children need not be bullied into submission, for they were eager to be guided by their elders. To the modern reader this premise seems logical, yet only when one delves into past attitudes

to the disciplining of children, one can appreciate what a drastic shift this was from the previous ideology.

Alice Miller demonstrates in her book *For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-rearing*, just what an important aspect the concept of original sin has to play in the rearing of one's children in the seventeenth century. In addition, she discusses how the prevailing attitudes condoned and even encouraged violent behaviour on the part of the child's parents. Aggressive disciplining was symbolic of the imbalance of power – parents and adults were in control and children were 'put in their place' by these methods of chastisement. A particularly frightening and thought-provoking quote from Robert Cleaver and John Dod (1621) reads:

The young child which lieth in the cradle is both wayward and full of affections; and though his body be but small, yet he hath a reat (wrong-doing) heart, and is altogether inclined to evil... If this sparkle be suffered to increase, it will rage over and burn the whole house. For we are changed and become good not by birth but by education... therefore parents must be wary and circumspect... they must correct and sharply reprove their children for saying or doing ill (Miller, 1983, p1).

Locke rebelled against the idea that children should be taught virtue and knowledge by using methods that involve fear and intimidation. Instead, he proposed that one could combine instruction and pleasure, and introduced a 'reward system', whereby children were rewarded with a fiction book for the pains of finishing their reading for school. Thus he encouraged that learning should be a more voluntary activity on the child's part, and not something that is motivated by fear of punishment.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was another extremely influential educationalist and British writers seized upon his educational theories and included them in the framework of their texts. In France, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* (1762) outlined his theory that children should be raised in an environment that will allow them to develop according to their nature and simple impulses" (Khorana, 1996, p163). Like Locke, he proposed that children should not learn using the external restraints of punishment and fear. Instead, he insisted that there should be 'inner instruction'. By this Rousseau meant that learning should be experiential and that the child learn right from wrong by observing that all actions have consequences.

John Newberry, a follower of Locke's educational theories, has been pointed to as the first writer to consciously make instructional books more appealing to children. He opened a shop in London with the express purpose of publishing and selling books to 'little masters and misses' and in 1744 published his own work, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*. This was intended to be an instructional book, as well as a pleasure book (Hunt, 1996).

Thus he was a dominant force in the creation of material for children, although he is remembered most often in tandem with the book, *Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), which was well-received in its time because of his relaxed and good-humoured writing style. The plot is rather simplistic and revolves around a poor orphan girl who learns her letters, becomes a teacher, marries well and becomes wealthy. It is, essentially, a presentation of a girl-child's prospects for the future. Although he attempted to (and to some degree did) enliven children's stories, he could not avoid an edifying, moralistic tone. In this respect though, he is not a solitary author and he merely slots into a whole genre of stories that preach to children and impress upon them adult beliefs about society (Hunt, 1996, p679). Jack Zipes states that the books of polite conduct and courtesy books "purveyed both the idea and to an extent the wherewithal for lower-middle class readers to shed habits deemed vulgar and to emulate or at least mimic the genteel manners of their social superiors, the middle and upper-middle classes" (Egoff, Stubbs, Ashley and Sutton, 1996, p372).

1.3 An introduction of imaginative texts

During the eighteenth century the adventure novel emerged. Three major works of fiction came onto the scene and although they were not specifically written for children, they are significant because they have all been adopted by and adapted for them. They are: John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1719), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). What these three works have in common is their archetypal themes, which have been repeatedly used in more modern adventure stories and allegories. They all involve the protagonist undergoing a perilous journey, arriving and being stranded on a desert island, and the

coming into contact with either a miniaturized or magnified world and imaginary society.

By the early nineteenth century, the emphasis of children's literature was still didactic and instructional. A novel that stands out from the rather leaden stories of this time is Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839). She wrote in a preface to this work,

Imagination is now carefully discouraged, and books written for young persons are generally a mere dry record of facts, unenlivened by any appeal to the heart, or any excitement to the fancy (Hunt, 1996, p680).

Yet at the same time, there had been a gradual re-introduction of folk tales, and between 1823 and 1826 the Grimm Brother's *German Popular Stories* was translated into English. Why? With the rise of Romanticism, during which time imaginative writing became something to aspire to, they were now deemed respectable. Romantic writing was "less bound by the constraints of realism and could include ghosts, magical events, and remote, exotic settings" (McCoy and Harlan, 1992, p331). This focus on the imagination held true for the mid-nineteenth century as well, but moral lessons still underlay the texts (Hunt, 1996, p679).

Thus, when looking back at how children's literature had progressed and developed, one can see the shifting focuses, firstly from didactic ethics for children to didactic stories for children. There is also a parallel between the changing form of children's reading material and the attitudes towards education. As rigorous, severe methods of instruction fell by the wayside to make way for more interactive practices, so there was an introduction of fantasy elements in stories.

I propose that *Alice in Wonderland* can be looked upon as the last phase in the development of children's fiction, wherein fantasy stands for its own sake, and is not used as a means to an end. GM Young referred to Lewis Carroll's fiction as being a "new, unpietistic handling of childhood" (Hudson, 1958, p7). Derek Hudson elaborates upon how Carroll's *Alice* books depart the Newberry genre of stories, in that "there is nothing goody-goody in the treatment of her adventures, which, it is essential to remember, were primarily intended to be told to and to give pleasure to children"(1958, p7).

Chapter 2

An insight into Lewis Carroll

2.1 A Brief History

When thinking about Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, one cannot avoid dealing with the society he lived in, namely the Victorian society. Be it through analysing the *Alice* books, or doing biographical research, it is inescapable. And so it should be, as it facilitates an understanding of Carroll's socio-cultural criticisms while filling in the blanks about Victorian politics and social customs. It was a time of great change and progress, but also one permeated with doubt and a sense of trying to find the balance between old and new ways. It was also an industrial age, but most importantly it was an age of discovery and expansion, geographically and philosophically. "The distinguishing feature about the time was 'that we are living in *an age of transition.*' This is the basic and almost universal conception of the period. And it is peculiarly Victorian. For although all ages are ages of transition, never before had men thought of their own time as an era of change *from* the past *to* the future" (Houghton, 1957, p1).

Bearing this quote in mind, the idea of Charles Dodgson as a highly conflictual (and at times confusing) personality, does not seem such a strange concept to come to terms with. In fact, one could say that Dodgson is representative of the Victorian man, at once victim of and participant in "two worlds, one dead or dying, one struggling but powerless to be born, in an age of doubt" (Houghton, 1957, p10). It is impossible to encapsulate an era in a few paragraphs or even convey the state of mind of the general public, firstly because the Victorian era spanned so many decades, and secondly because that would not make allowance for the individual in this time. At this point I would like to move away from Dodgson's world at large, and home in on his life history. That is not to say that I am weighting the nature-nurture debate in the personal sphere, but rather that his background and scholarly career impacted upon

and drastically shaped, his literary talent. I shall offer an insight into the forces that shaped him as a person and ultimately as a literary figure.

He began his scholarly pursuits at Richmond. Whereas at home he had invested a lot of time and energy in creating entertaining stories and poetry for his siblings, at Richmond his role as the 'entertainer' took on a more sinister tone. He was ridiculed by his classmates and became somewhat of a scapegoat for practical jokes. He was humiliated on several occasions, as his letters record. His stutter and the fact that he was left-handed made him a target for bullying. He was teased mercilessly while there, but took the abuse in his stride, not allowing it to dampen his spirits. He reports this in rather good-humoured taste in a letter to his two elder sisters, Fanny and Memy. He writes:

The boys have played two tricks upon me which were these – they first proposed to play at 'King of the Cobblers' and asked if I would be king, to which I agreed. Then they made me sit down and sat (on the ground) in a circle round me, and they told me to say 'Go to work' which I said, and they immediately began kicking me and knocking me on all sides (Gray, 1992, p243).

Despite not flourishing on any given social level, academically he soared above the rest of his classmates. Thus, while he did not endear himself to the boys, his teachers enjoyed the fact that they had a student in their midst who was enthusiastic about his work as well as capable of original thought. His academic excellence was maintained throughout his schooling, and when he moved to Rugby for his high school education in 1846, the same standard of excellence was observed. He was there for four years before matriculating at Christ Church, Oxford. Whilst he had been at Rugby, the headmaster of the time wrote to Charles's parents, praising him for his academic achievements, and reiterating what Dodgson is now remembered for – his genius. He wrote:

I do not hesitate to express my opinion that he possesses, along with other and natural endowments, a very uncommon share of genius. Gentle and cheerful in his intercourse with others, playful and ready in conversation, he is capable of acquirements and knowledge far beyond his years, while his reason is so clear and so jealous of error, that he will not rest satisfied without a most exact solution of whatever appears to him obscure... You must not entrust your son with a full knowledge of his superiority over other boys. Let him discover this as he proceeds. The love of excellence is far beyond the love of excelling; and if he should once be bewitched into a mere ambition to surpass others I need not urge that the very quality of his knowledge would be materially injured, and that his character would receive a stain of a more serious description still (Gray, 1992, p244).

He was to start working at Christchurch directly after his matriculation, in the capacity of lecturer. At the same time, he was devoted to studying further and training private students in geometry. At last he had found his niche. In the world of academics he excelled and was happiest, able to escape the social expectations of a young man. He was a

withdrawn, shy, obsessively neat man, a man who felt alienated from society in general, a man who apparently had very few close friends and no lovers, a man who was afraid of intense emotional relationships. His sense of his own inability to cope with the world – and of the necessity therefore to learn methods of controlling his environment – had probably been acutely intensified by his excruciating years at the Rugby school (Mellor, 1980, p165-6).

The qualities Mellor describes hardly seem a positive appraisal of the man, but looking at them one can see why it is that Dodgson would gravitate towards the scholastic. In this world he was able to function at his peak, was allowed the freedom to do what he was good at (mathematics) as well as what he enjoyed (creating fantastical stories). In fact, despite his many duties, he found the time to write for newspapers and magazines. He wrote under a pseudonym, and this is in keeping with the anonymity he craved. The world of academics, the only one in which he felt at ease, was to be his home. He remained there all his life, eventually becoming the Curator of the Common Room.

I think that young Charles' school years are extremely important in the forging of his mindset. On the one hand, he excelled and in another sphere he failed dismally. By this I mean that on the social side he was something of a misfit, unable to relate well to his contemporaries and not particularly well liked by them either. On the other hand, this was a time when he discovered his talents, mathematically speaking and excelled at a number of other subjects. In the realm of the academics he was superior to his peers, and somewhat alienated from a typical boyhood of sports and mischief. I think that because he was an 'outsider' he learned something of the objectivity of his later works, the quality that allowed him to create imaginary worlds, perhaps as an escape from the social exclusion he felt in his everyday life. It is interesting also that his *Alice* books offer a critique of socio-cultural norms, and perhaps his exclusion from them gave him an opportunity to be impartial and appraise the values embedded and exposed by apparently arbitrary traditions and customs.

Although I have dealt rather extensively on the fact that Dodgson did not do well in the social sphere, this is not to say that he was a complete recluse, for, if that were the case, he would never have come into intimate contact with the Liddell family. “His closest friendships, as we know, were with prepubescent girls who could threaten him neither intellectually nor sexually”(Mellor, 1980, p166). Thus, an important date in Dodgson’s literary career is June 1855, as a new Dean was appointed. He was the Reverend Liddell, father to Alice Liddell. Dodgson formed a particularly close friendship with Alice Liddell and her sisters, Enid and Lorina. It is through this friendship that *Alice in Wonderland* was born, so to speak. On the 4th of July, 1862, Dodgson told the first version of the story to the girls on a boat ride. He immediately began writing, and it was published in 1865. Dodgson collaborated with John Tenniel, who illustrated the text.

The sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass* was published in 1871, and was also illustrated by Tenniel. It was inspired by the fact that Alice was learning the game of chess, and Carroll wanted to provide an interesting means of making the game more relevant for a young child. The actual idea for the book is reported to have resulted from another acquaintance, Alice Raikes. Carroll gave her an orange and then told her to stand in front of the mirror and tell him what she saw. He asked her which hand the orange was in. She surprised him with an unusual answer. She said that if she were standing on the other side of the glass, then the orange would still be in the same hand.

Although it was the *Alice* books that catapulted Dodgson into literary history, he in fact has an extensive repertoire in written pursuits. He started his writing career early, experimenting with poetry in his own family magazine that he created. Even then he attempted to create new words and invented language to suit his needs. He wrote a poem called ‘Rules and Regulations’, which would have a great bearing on his later works, as it is a commentary on his own typical Victorian childhood. This appeared in his manual *Useful and Instructive Poetry*. It deals with the maxims and things that were expected of a child, such as learning their grammar, only speaking when spoken to and so forth. Another poem, which seems more pertinent, is *My Fairy*. It reads:

I have a fairy by my side,
Which says I must not sleep.
When once in pain I loudly cried
It said 'You must not weep'.

If, full of mirth, I smile and grin,
It says 'You must not laugh';
When once I wished to drink some gin
It said 'You must not quaff'.

When once a meal I wished to taste
It said 'You must not bite';
When to the wars I went in haste
It said 'You must not fight'.

'What may I do?' at length I cried,
Tired of the painful task.
The fairy quietly replied,
And said 'You must not ask'.

Moral: 'You musn't'(Gray, 1992, p241).

We know that his father encouraged Charles in his writing endeavours; in fact, it would be true to say that Charles gained his imaginative streak from his father. In a letter that his father wrote to Dodgson, when he was around eight years old, we see that the tendency towards nonsense is explicitly a family trait. Charles had asked that his father make a few purchases while he was on a trip to Leeds. The letter is as follows:

I will not forget your commission. As soon as I get to Leeds I shall scream out in the middle of the street, *Ironmongers – Iron-mongers* – Six hundred men will rush out of their shops in a moment – fly, fly, in all directions – ring the bells, call the constables – set the town on fire. I *will* have a file & screwdriver, & a ring, & if they are not brought directly, in forty seconds I will leave nothing but one small cat alive in the whole town of Leeds, & I shall only leave that, because I am afraid I shall not have time to kill it.

Then what a brawling & a tearing of hair there will be! Pigs & babies, camels & butterflies, rolling in the gutter together – old women rushing up the chimneys & cows after them – ducks hiding themselves in coffee cups, & fat geese trying to squeeze themselves into pencil cases – at last the Mayor of Leeds will be found in a soup plate covered up with custard & stuck full of almonds to make him look like a sponge cake that he may escape the dreadful destruction of the town...

At last when they bring the things which I ordered & then I spare the Town & send off in fifty wagons & under the protection of ten thousand soldiers, a file & a screwdriver & a ring as a present to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson from his affectionate Papa (Gray, 1992, p237-8).

Between the *Alice* books, Dodgson wrote mathematical works as well. He also published *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems* in 1869, which is a collection of comic and serious poetry. In the vein of nonsense poetry, he wrote *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), in eight parts. It is reported that while visiting a friend, a random line echoed in his head, and it was ‘for the Snark was a Boojum, you see’, which was the final line of the poem. This work intrigued many readers who sought out the meaning behind the nonsense. In his diary Carroll writes “I have received courteous letters from strangers, begging to know whether ‘The Hunting of the Snark’ is an allegory, or contains some hidden moral, or is a political satire: and for all such questions I have but one answer, ‘I don’t know!’” (Gray, 1992, p281). This is perhaps indicative of people’s desire to give to text a concrete meaning.

The story itself revolves around the quest of eight seamen and their captain, called Bellman. They are obsessed with hunting ‘the Snark, a mythic creature. Sightings are rare and also dangerous because some of these creatures are Boojums, which can cause its victims to vanish. They press on until the Baker wanders off alone one day and sights a Snark. He shouts out to warn the others, but vanishes. The reader is left to wonder about the last line: “For the Snark was a Boojum, you see” (Khorana, 1996, p163).

Dodgson experimented with his creative writing, delving into nonsense with the *Alice* books and *The Hunting of the Snark*. He also though, while not conforming to the realist novel, published two pieces that do not fit into his particular nonsense genre. They are *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and the sequel, *Sylvie and Bruno Continued* (1893). These proved to be unsuccessful, commercially and imaginatively. It becomes apparent when one looks at the themes and structure of these two texts that the imaginative freedom that he advocates in his other works is lacking, as they contain a fusion of incompatible philosophical and theological ideas and fantasy within the context of the fairy story. As in the *Alice* books, he wanted to introduce children to real life issues that adults face, but the format was not nearly as stimulating. The result was that it ended up being didactic and laboured. The narrator fails as the literary device to address the issues perhaps because of the blatant nature in which he discusses (literally) issues of fatalism, free will, politics and morality. Using humour

to subvert reality was the key element in raising adult issues in the *Alice* books, and this aspect is clearly overlooked in the *Sylvie and Bruno* books.

2.2 A Split Personality?

Critics and biographers have universally portrayed Carroll as being akin to a symbol of the late-Victorian man, that is, highly conflicted. The personality schism is between the ordered practical life as an Oxford academic, and the raging ‘lunacy’ of his fantastical life. As a modern audience, we seem to seize upon the idea of his ‘character’, desperately attempting to understand what motivated him to write such *tour de force* stories. Yet when it comes to the excavation of Dodgson’s personal affairs, it seems impossible to categorize him as a man torn between logic and fantasy, as these are perhaps only contrasting aspects of this complex individual. As Derek Hudson (1958) writes: “One of many far-fetched theories about Lewis Carroll which must finally be abandoned is that he was a split-personality, a sort of Jeckyll and Hyde, divided between the prim and pedantic mathematician named C. L. Dodgson and a delightful writer of children’s stories called Lewis Carroll”(p7).

Carroll exhibited all the traits of an eccentric, and was socially awkward to the last, always an outsider to the drawing room circle, so to speak. Perhaps his oddities are in part to blame for his subtle exclusion in the social environment, or perhaps he chose to remain an onlooker. Whatever the case, many strange habits and fetishes have been attached to his name. As temperamental as English weather can be, Carroll was not to be deterred from his habit of wearing an overcoat and a tall hat. Another peculiar habit he practiced was to write while standing, and he is reputed to have written much of his work in this fashion. He was also paranoid about his health, and he subjected himself to rigorous diet and exercise. Miss Isa Bowman and her sister, Nellie were staying as his guests in his cottage at Eastborne, when they heard that their youngest sister had caught scarlet fever. From that time on Dodgson insisted that all letters from her would be read to him from the opposite side of the room, lest infection should somehow strike. Peter Coveny goes as far as to write that “Everything for Carroll pointed to disaster in his personal life. He was almost the case-book maladjusted neurotic” (Gray, 1992, p329). There are many other strange habits and obsessions that are associated with Dodgson, which I shall not go into.

Aside from his eccentric practices and modes of thought, or perhaps it is merely one more of them, are his friendships with children, particularly little girls. His keen interest in photography has sparked much controversy as to the nature of these 'child friendships'. He would photograph his little models in costumes, dressing them up in sometimes exotic and amusing attire. He also occasionally took pictures of them in the nude. Perhaps this is one of the contributing factors to the underlying accusation of paedophilia. Although, he is acknowledged as somewhat of an esteemed portrait photographer, as Helmut Gernsheim records, "his photographic achievements are truly astonishing: he must not only rank as a pioneer of British amateur photography, but I would also unhesitatingly acclaim him as the most outstanding photographer of children in the nineteenth century" (Gray, 1992, p285).

There is a shadow or slur to his name and this has led to the development of two trains of thought regarding his 'character'. There are those who defend his innocent intentions, and those who hint at the unnaturalness of these relationships. Even those who defend him, serve only to further the ongoing debate. For instance, Derek Hudson, although not making any explicit reference to accusations of paedophilia, makes a statement that can only make the reader ponder how he (amongst others) arrives at such conclusions. He writes that "Children were an escape from sex rather than any sort of conscious satisfaction of it, but they gave him the affection he needed and helped him fulfil the Platonic and protective love which was characteristic of his nature"(Hudson, 1958, p15). The note of pleading here only confirms that there is no resolution to the scandal and controversy when it comes to Carroll.

Dodgson's diary entries and correspondence with children are largely used by biographers in the context of creating what I would call a 'character sketch.' On the other hand, it becomes apparent that these are incorporated into the biographer's arguments that already have an underlying pre-supposed conclusion about the status of the child friendships. For instance, when one compares the same document in different publications one can see how the biographer's views about Dodgson's sexuality are made explicit. The document I am referring to is 'Alice's Recollections of Carrollian Days.' In the Donald Gray publication (1992) and Lennon's (1947), one can see how Alice Liddell's 'memories' of posing for Dodgson are selected in order

to reflect the biographer's own slant. A slight differentiation in the wording is all one needs to cast Carroll's character either in the shadow of ill repute or as an irreproachable lover of photography. Gray includes more positive excerpts, such as: "being photographed was therefore a joy to us and not a penance as it is to most children. We looked forward to the happy hours in the mathematical tutor's rooms"(1992, p275). Lennon, on the other hand, includes: "Being photographed was a sobering and frightening experience. The reward was to be invited into his awesome and mysterious dark room..."(Lennon, 1947, p146).

The truth is, Dodgson can be presented as either a monster or a saint. One has the ability to choose what information one uses. To labour my point, here is another example. Take Carroll's own words: "I confess I do not admire naked boys. They always seem to me to need clothes – whereas one hardly sees why the lovely forms of girls should ever be covered up"(Gray, 1992, p284). His diary entries casually concede that Mrs Liddell did not approve of his photographing her children, and that he was aware of this fact. Dodgson had wished to photograph Ina and Harry Liddell, but was met with strong opposition from their mother. He writes, "I found Mrs Liddell had said they were not to be taken till all can be taken in a group. This may be meant as a hint that I have intruded on this premises long enough: I am quite of the same opinion myself"(Gray, 1992, p262).

When one looks at these two extracts jointly, it is possible to jump to the conclusion that there is a kernel of truth in these accusations. One could infer that there is something sinister in his relationships with these children. When surveying the available data, one must not neglect looking at Carroll's own reflections upon his photography. His diary entries, if they are to be believed, reveal a man with impeccable manners and conduct. He wrote that "if I had the loveliest child in the whole world, to draw or photograph, and I found she had a modest shrinking (however slight, and however easily overcome) from being taken nude, I should feel it was a solemn duty owed to God to drop the request *altogether*"(Gray, 1992, p284). In this instance, his innocent intentions and solely artistic ambitions remain convincing.

We live in an age where nothing is taken at face value, and we are encouraged to try to think critically. Post-Freudian concepts of the subconscious, dreams and the

interpreting of symbols form part of the fabric of society. In this light, some critics view the *Alice* books as a direct extension of Dodgson's 'character'. For instance, M.L Rosenthal demonstrates this idea with, "Fear – both of life's challenges and of death, and also of the violently competitive Victorian world beyond the protected realm of his Oxford chambers – seems to pervade the tale Dodgson has to tell. The marvellous wit and comic turns try to hold all the terror at bay, but who that gives the book any thought can help see it?"(Egoff, Ashley and Stubbs, 1996, p88).

As a critically-thinking audience we need to be careful what we allow to become immortalized as fact. We need to evaluate when biographers are drawing their own conclusions and writing slanderous material that is unchallenged. It is true that Dodgson's nude photography of little girls was unprecedented, but biographers' sceptical treatment of his hobby may easily be grounded in the prim Victorian times that he lived in. Is it not possible to have an absorbing fascination for the female (child) form, without there being a sexual connotation? Our fascination with proving or disproving the claims about Carroll perhaps suggest something about ourselves – that we are driven by the all-consuming desire to know whether there was something sinister behind the *Alice* books, that we are not wrong in supposing that there is sexual symbolism and imagery in the stories. What difference would it make to our appreciation of the two books? As Derek Hudson aptly points out: "Carroll has been the victim of misplaced ingenuity from critics who have taken not only themselves but the *Alice* books far too seriously"(1958, p31).

Over the decades and indeed the past century, Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) has been hailed as a quasi-cult hero of the fantasy genre, and he remains an icon of children's literature to this day. The *Alice* books have received worldwide recognition and impressed upon popular imagination to such an extent that they form almost part of a typical childhood bedtime reading. Behind these richly textured stories is the equally enigmatic author, of whom relatively little is known. As is the case with many other writers, it is only posthumously that information has become readily available to the general public. In death, one is remembered, or so the popular saying goes, and if this is true then I am sure that Dodgson would appreciate the sentiments expressed in his eulogy. In it, one of his colleagues at Christchurch said of him: "The brilliant, venturesome imagination, defying forecast with ever fresh surprise; the sense of

humour in its finest and most naïve form; the power to touch with lightest hand the undercurrent pathos in the midst of fun, the audacity of creative fancy, and the delicacy of insight – these are rare gifts; and surely they were his” (Khorana, 1996, p163). These words seem to encapsulate the creative force of the author.

Chapter 3 Wonderland and the quest for identity

3.1 A Child Amongst adults

When examining the texts, one has to analyse the protagonist Alice, and what an intriguing character she is. She has been dissected into component parts by literary psychoanalysts and the more conventionally based scholars, and perceived from many varying angles by different schools of thought. The speculation about the apparent *relationship* between Alice Liddell and her author Lewis Carroll has fuelled investigations and interrogations of the texts, in an attempt to find correlating fictional proof to support such ideas. What is irrefutable though is that the narratives revolve around Alice's (the heroine's) personal struggle to come to terms with her identity. It is through Alice's engagement with bizarre characters and events that the reader is alerted to the underlying themes embedded in the narratives.

It is significant that Carroll chose a seven year-old girl to be the voice behind the texts, because children, on the whole, bring an entirely different approach to problem-solving. They lack the experiences that adults have to reflect upon and do not have a concrete definition of 'self'. Resolving conflicts is a formative part of childhood experience and through this process of learning how to deal with problems effectively, and the resolving of them, the child solidifies a sense of 'self'.

As Alice journeys through Wonderland and Looking-Glass land, we untangle a multi-dimensional voyage of discovery. Her adventures are at once an introspective discovery about who she is, as well as a reflection of the socio-cultural customs she would come into contact with during her Victorian upbringing. In this way, Carroll uses Alice's battle to figure out who and what she is in the world, to highlight his concerns about his society. Alice thus illustrates Victorian attitudes toward children as well as their education as Carroll allows her the creative space to resolve her personal issues. She brings to light her own (and Carroll's) problems with these

concepts as she is thrust into uncomfortable situations that challenge her sense of identity.

In her attempts to resolve these existential questions, a 'backdrop' is set for Carroll's socio-cultural critique of their society. She overcomes obstacles, most of which are conventional modes of behaviour and speech that have been moulded and exaggerated by Carroll to seem nonsensical to both Alice and the reader, and she highlights, through her honest approach to these problems, the inane and unfounded values that Carroll objects to. Thus, she contemplates the magnified 'real' issues of the world and reveals in her naivety the things she has been conditioned to.

Alice is an individual, unlike the characters that she interacts with. Her counterpart characters are more archetypal in nature and they are at once strange, wonderful, vivid and cruel. These creatures are characterized by a dominant mannerism and are not allowed the liberty of expressing themselves as multi-faceted individuals. We therefore consider them in terms of being representations of, on the whole, negative character traits. They represent stereotypes that Alice would come into contact with in the adult sphere.

For instance, the White Rabbit is the epitome of the eternal worrier. He obsesses over lost gloves, missing housemaids and fans, as well as over being late. He is undeniably irritating and extremely self-absorbed. He is a social climber, if you will, and as such possesses a nervous disposition, as he is always aware of the need to curry favour with those higher up the social scale. His behaviour is that of a social parasite. At the Queen of Hearts' garden, we read: "Next came the guests, mostly kings and Queens, and among them Alice noticed the White Rabbit: it was talking in a hurried nervous manner, smiling at everything that was said, and went by without noticing her" (1982, p63). He is, essentially, a courtier.

The Mock Turtle and the Gnat represent the cynics of this world, and typical of their disposition they exhibit a voice of doom. We do not vehemently dislike them as personalities, because they are pitiable and appear fated to eternal sadness. We never fully understand what it is that ails them, but we sympathize and are intrigued by their seemingly infinite sadness. The Mock turtle is the pessimist, filled with nostalgia. He

is characterized by bouts of inexplicable weeping. He is condemned by his own mindset, lamenting that he once was a 'real turtle':

They had not gone far before they saw the Mock Turtle in the distance, sitting sad and lonely on a little ledge of rock, and, as they came nearer, Alice could hear him sighing as if his heart would break. She pitied him deeply. 'What is his sorrow?' she asked the Gryphon. And the Gryphon answered, very nearly in the same words as before, 'It's all his fancy, that: he hasn't got no sorrow, you know' (1982, p74).

Similarly, the Gnat is a character we sympathize with, although he is less laughable. His misery does seem to be founded; at least his lot in life as an insect does pose real perils to his livelihood, as he candidly explains that the bread-and-butterfly always dies because it cannot find its particular sustenance, weak tea with cream. He is also less belligerent than the Mock Turtle, who seems to turn his frustration onto Alice. He is attentive, and treats her as his equal. He gives her an insight into his world, showing her other insects, offering her another perspective without ever imposing it. He doesn't treat Alice as the uninvited guest, or the uneducated stranger, as she is so often regarded. Rather, she is an eager learner.

Unlike the Mock Turtle episode, there is no comic relief, only strangely funny and disconcerting descriptions of insects made from food scraps. Lennon writes that "The refinement, sharpening, and concentration of the next seven years produce a different emotional tone – the creatures in *Through the Looking-Glass* are less sad, and more pedantic and querulous; for instance, the weeping Mock Turtle and the belligerent, snivelling, contrary twins, the Tweedles"(p120). I agree with his general observation, but on the other hand I think perhaps the Gnat fails to confirm his point. The Gnat is equally if not more melancholy than the Mock Turtle, or is at least presented as such because it even sighs itself out of existence. Yet I do not wish to argue which is the saddest character.

Having looked at these few characters, one sees that they are indeed stereotypes or at least represent a character trait. Throughout Alice's exchanges with the characters of Wonderland and Looking-Glass, we witness that she finds "herself surrounded by strange and often childish atavistic creatures"(Hunt,1995, p141). The outcome of this is that Alice is coerced into being the adult figure. They are generally hostile or unpleasant, although the humour resulting from their ridiculously exaggerated

behaviour causes the reader to come away with an optimistic impression of them. Derek Hudson writes about Carroll's characters that they are "part of national folklore and mythology. The Mad Hatter and the Ugly Duchess are as well known and indispensable to Englishmen as Falstaff or Sherlock Holmes" (1958, p6).

She is frustrated constantly by the immaturity of her audience's behaviour and is baffled by their illogic. She has to assume adult responsibility and maturity in order to deal civilly with these antagonizing creatures. As Little observes, they "have a dominant motif of either bad temper, an argumentative disposition or bumbling foolishness"(1984, p43). Thus, it is up to Alice to assert the voice of reason in the narratives.

Alice's assuming of an 'adult' role is extremely significant when considering that the texts conjunctively serve as an allegory for a child's maturing. In this sense she is afforded the opportunity to be in a more dominant position than she would typically be allocated. She therefore is allowed to be a 'grown-up'. In addition, these antagonistic characters serve another function. Their hostility and arbitrary behaviour alienate Alice from a clear definition of herself, as she has to modify her responses, and also cannot relate to them (with the possible exception of the White Knight) on a personal level. Thus she is totally alone and can look only to herself when resolving conflicts and overcoming obstacles.

In fact, Carroll does not allow the reader to identify with the other characters. When examining their names one sees that they are designated by very impersonal labels (for instance, the White Rabbit and the Gnat), as opposed to more common and identifiable (I venture to suggest 'human') names. I propose that Carroll employs this 'non-naming' literary device in an attempt to keep the reader objective as well as alienated from any kind of identifying with them. The exceptions to this 'rule' are the White Rabbit's housemaid, Mary-Ann, his gardener, Pat, and another servant in his employ, the lizard called Bill. These are minor characters, and are not in specific contact with the protagonist, Alice. Therefore they have not the creative space to develop as fully-rounded characters despite their human names.

Other characters are called by titles, by function or occupation, or else their names are descriptive and describe what species of animal or plant they belong to. In any event, we are never on an intimate 'first-name' basis, and therefore do not identify with them as characters that need to be interpreted from a humanistic perspective. These characters serve to frustrate, vex and confuse Alice. As I discussed earlier, each character is composed of a specific trait and in their exaggerated expression of themselves, we see how they represent personality types that Alice would come into contact with during her waking life (Little, 1984, p43).

3.2 The Quest for a Garden: A Framework to Alice's Adventures

In both narratives there is a goal-orientated objective on Alice's part, and in her seeking out of these goals, she reveals a larger theme – that the journey towards her goals is a journey towards understanding her identity. In Wonderland Alice sets her sight on reaching the beautiful garden that she has spied through a keyhole in the hallway. She endures many unpleasant and uncomfortable situations along the way and she finds that her efforts do not bring the sense of fulfilment that she thought they would. From the outset, she is plagued by problems of reaching the garden, as she is too large to fit through the door that leads to it and when she does have the means of shrinking herself to the appropriate size, she foolishly forgets to take the key off the table.

Aside from this though, Alice's journey to the garden in Wonderland is motivated by a desire to surround herself with beauty. It is easy to understand that she would naturally gravitate towards something that offers peaceful enjoyment. Lennon suggests that Alice has other motives for reaching the garden and that they are of mythical proportions. He likens her adventures to the search for the Golden Fleece or apples, the fountain of youth or even the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. At this point I would concur with Lennon's position. The Wonderland tale is clearly an allegory for Alice growing up and therefore it would make perfect sense that the narrative is a 'quest' of some sort. Lennon does acknowledge that finding what you are looking for does not necessarily bring about the projected satisfaction. He writes, "finding the treasure does not bring happiness"(1947, p128).

I think the text confirms this idea, because Alice is horrified to discover that the tranquillity and magnificence of the garden is not to be enjoyed. Her elation at having finally succeeded in entering the garden is dampened by the sordidness of the inhabitants. Her first impression of the garden is spoilt by the Queen of Hearts' barbarism and the fear she inspires.

I agree with Lennon's likening of Alice's quest to the previously mentioned 'treasures', but would extend the comparison further. Alice's quest is more in keeping with the search for the Holy Grail. I say this because Alice's quest is, once past the superficiality of a childish desire for attaining something new and better, in the larger scheme of things concerned with finding out the meaning of life, with all its imperfections and discontentedness.

The garden operates as a symbol - it is the stage for the unfolding drama of life, a place where Alice arrives at the conclusion that life is full of disappointments, and that hopes and dreams are denied existence by reality's cold displacement of them. Just as in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve learn good from evil, so Alice has to come to terms with the idea that good and evil co-exist. She discovers that behind the surface beauty of the garden (and life in general), lies corruption.

On the theme of good and evil, Alice too is a symbolic representation. Little maintains that Alice is a symbol of beauty and innocence that stands in contrast with the 'moral' ugliness of this land. The characters that Alice meets in Wonderland, whilst one can't necessarily call them evil, are far removed from being classified as virtuous or moral beings. Only Alice displays a set of values and good manners that are constant despite the trying circumstances she undergoes. In fact, pictorially speaking, Alice is shown to be a beautiful child, while the Wonderland inhabitants, in contrast, are a strange and grotesque bunch of characters. Their physical appearance coupled with their antagonistic temperaments create an atmosphere in which Alice is elevated as that symbol of perfection and purity. As Little points out, the Wonderland creatures possess a "physical ugliness as Tenniel's drawings indicate: heads and legs out of proportion to bodies, scowling and tearful faces, strange shapes and expressions. The Ugly Duchess is not unique in her lack of physical charm." (1984, p47)

In Looking-glass land Alice's objective is to become Queen. The Red Queen informs her rather early on in the text that when she reaches the Eighth Square she will be Queen. This adventure is also goal-centred, in fact more so than in Wonderland, because in this tale Alice is following specific chess moves. Whereas in her first adventure she is perhaps driven by a more subconscious longing to reach the garden, in *Looking-Glass* she is going through the motions of a game. Thus, her path is pre-determined, as the Red Queen tells her how to proceed in order to win the game and become Queen.

She naively thinks that being a Queen will be somewhat of a 'prize' for her efforts. She smugly expects that she will be afforded the respect and friendship of her fellow Queens, and eagerly looks forward to the banquet they will throw in her honour.

'Well, this is grand!' said Alice. 'I never expected I should be a Queen so soon – and I'll tell you what it is, your Majesty,' she went on, in a severe tone (she was always rather fond of scolding herself), 'it'll never do for you to be lolling about on the grass like that! Queens have to be dignified, you know!'(1982, p192)

We see that Alice has pre-conceived ideas about the outcome of the chess game and is smitten with the novelty of becoming Queen. Again Alice discovers that having fulfilled her objective does not automatically confirm her expectations. Once at the banquet Alice realizes that it is not 'all feasting and fun' (p128) as the Red Queen implied it would be. Instead, the banquet is anything but a dignified, pleasant social event, and Alice is made to feel ill at ease with the bizarre rituals and company.

If life is a game, as *Looking -Glass* implies, then Alice is only a winner in the sense that she has finished the game. In another sense, she has lost something of herself. She has lost the wide-eyed innocence of *Wonderland* because she realizes that the arbitrariness of this land mirrors reality's mundaneness, and that we are all being 'played.' The predeterministic impulses and hints in the text reflect the idea that we are all puppets in the game of life and that our pathways and/or choices are limited, if not determined by someone or something else.

In the two texts, Alice's anticipation of attaining something better is negated. In the garden she faces the Royal entourage, a thoroughly unpleasant and frightening introduction to the Royal family (as three gardeners are bullied and intimidated by the Queen of Hearts). The Queen of Hearts' ordering their executions also sets the tone

for the ensuing croquet game. When she becomes Queen of Looking-Glass land there is no significant change in Alice's position. She is treated in the same manner as before, and her title is just that, an empty name. Although the Looking-Glass Queens throw a banquet in her honour, she is not superior to them, and is still treated as a foreigner in their land. There is no dramatic triumph and the whole experience is somewhat of a let-down. Thus, Alice is still a Pawn, at least in the eyes of her fellow Queens, and she has no authority over events. The Looking-Glass Queens bully her, as we see:

'You ought to return thanks in a neat speech,' the Red Queen said, frowning at Alice as she spoke. 'We must support you, you know,' the White Queen whispered, as Alice got up to do it, very obediently, but a little frightened. 'Thank you very much,' she whispered in reply, 'but I can do quite well without.' 'That wouldn't be at all the thing,' the Red Queen said very decidedly: so Alice tried to submit to it with good grace (1982, p202).

A type of 'shallow desire' prompts Alice's quests, in that what she wants is immediate gratification and material superiority. Over and above this and perhaps unknown to Alice, is that she has embarked on a quest for the meaning of life. Carroll lets us in on the secret that Alice's adventures are in fact mankind's continual search for meaning and, ultimately, knowledge. He does this by allowing Alice to arrive at 'revolutionary' knowledge about the fantasy worlds she has been visiting. Namely, the 'knowledge' is that Alice is embroiled in these nonsense worlds. In Wonderland she realizes that the Queen is merely an animated playing card and that she is therefore inferior to Alice. In Looking-Glass Land, she exclaims that the poetry that has been recited to her has always been about fish:

'Do you know, I've had such a quantity of poetry repeated to me to-day,' Alice began, a little frightened at finding that, the moment she opened her lips, there was dead silence, and all eyes were fixed upon her; 'and it's a very curious thing, I think – every poem was about fishes in some way. Do you know why they're so fond of fishes all about here?' She spoke to the Red queen, whose answer was a little wide of the mark. 'As to fishes,' she said, very slowly and solemnly, putting her mouth close to Alice's ear, 'her White Majesty knows a lovely riddle – all in poetry – all about fishes. Shall she repeat it?'(1982, p201).

In both instances the fantasy worlds begin to disintegrate shortly after the verbalization of these realizations. Once Alice has expressed her contempt for the Queen of Hearts, and exclaimed that she is merely a card, the Wonderland courtroom reverts to the riverbank setting. Similarly, after Alice raises the issue of *Looking-*

Glass poetry being about fish, the banquet hall transforms into her living-room again. Thus, it is when Alice realizes that she cannot rationalize nonsensical worlds into easily explainable phenomena, that she is liberated to return to her real world.

3.3 Undermining received patterns of identity

In *Wonderland*, Alice battles with identity problems because she changes size so often and the characters she meets serve to ridicule and belittle her. In *Looking-glass*, she faces a similar problem of identity, as she loses her name, is labelled a 'fabulous monster' by the Unicorn and the Lion, and is also informed by the Tweedle brothers that she is not real. Thus one can understand why it is that Alice feels displaced and why she attempts to resolve her feelings of confusion, and comes to terms with the many challenging situations and concepts.

One of the key components of growing up is to figure out who we are, as individuals and also as members of society. In *Wonderland* Alice puzzles over her changes in size, and how her size affects who she is in any given situation. She has to adapt in order to overcome obstacles and ultimately to achieve her objective, namely, to get to the lovely garden. Along the way, she endures and resolves many difficulties, which results in her considering things from a more mature perspective.

At the beginning of the story we are presented with Alice as a victim of cruel misfortune. We see how Alice finds herself out of her league, and she handles things in an irrational manner. Quite understandably, instead of retaining a self-assuredness, she is baffled and upset by her metamorphoses. She expresses a child's detached fascination at first, which turns into despondency and despair. At first she was amused by the situation she finds herself in, thinking her size changes something to laugh about. But it is no laughing matter, as she discovers when she lands in the pool of tears.

In this scenario she has to help herself; she will receive no adult assistance at this stage of her journey. She has cried so much when she was large that she is actually placed in peril once she has shrunk. Thus, her emotions have got the better of her, and she admits that it will be a justifiable punishment should she drown in her own tears. In a broader sense, Alice's inability to cope with the new situation is the reason she is in a potentially dangerous position.

In another moment splash! She was up to her chin in salt-water. Her first idea was that she had somehow fallen into the sea, 'and in that case I can go back by railway,' she said to herself. (Alice had been to the seaside once in her life, and had come to the general conclusion that wherever you go to the English coast, you find a number of bathing-machines in the sea, some children digging in the sand with wooden spades, then a row of lodging-houses, and behind them a railway station.) However, she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high. 'I wish I hadn't cried so much!' said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out. 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears!'(1982, p17)

It is interesting to note that while she flounders about in the water she has time to reflect on a trip to the sea-side, as well as to ponder the relationship between railways and the English coast. Surely Alice's contemplation of the English coastal resort suggests an identifying with something stable. This is not an isolated incident wherein Alice daydreams of the familiar instead of devising ways to extricate herself from danger, but is rather part of a series of naïve and fanciful thoughts that she exhibits when she first arrives in Wonderland. For example, when she shrinks she imagines sending herself a Christmas present of boots (1982, p14).

She also sees her change of physical form as an exchange of identity. She innocently thinks that she must have become some-one else, as she no longer recognizes herself as 'Alice' because she is different from before. An extract reveals this:

'How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the World am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them (1982, p15).

Our last *Wonderland* impression of Alice is decidedly different and she stands in contrast to her former Wonderland self. She is in control of her emotions and she asserts her will over the Wonderland creatures. Symbolically, she grows without an external stimulus and this is indicative of her intuitive rebellion against the arbitrary cruelty of the Queen of Hearts and the unfairness of the judicial system she is exposed to. Throughout the text she has been scorned and not taken seriously by the others, but in this penultimate scene she is a force to be reckoned with. The fact that not one of the Queen's subjects makes a move to carry out her execution plan for Alice demonstrates the authority she now wields.

'No, no!' said the Queen. 'Sentence first – verdict afterwards.' 'Stuff and nonsense!' said Alice loudly. 'The idea of having the sentence first!' 'Hold your tongue!' said the Queen,

turning purple. "I won't!" said Alice. "Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved. "Who cares for *you*?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time)(1982, p96-7).

There is a maturity that was not evident at the beginning of the story, and her confidence and self-knowledge have increased. She is secure in her upbringing and beliefs and acts as an independent and autonomous thinking individual. We note a marked evolution in her character. At the commencement of her adventures we see a whimpering girl who cries constantly and is overwhelmed and defeated by the new world. Previously she allowed her unfamiliarity with situations to inhibit her intelligence and she lets her emotions dominate. Finally, at the trial we are witness to a reconciling of her emotion (in this case, outrage) and her reasoning power. She is no longer a passive but active participant in the events, going so far as to verbally challenge the Queen. Roger Henkle reinforces this idea. He writes that "Alice's entry to Wonderland had been balked by problems of identity, she had to shed some false notions relating to size, rote-knowledge, and rules of behavior before she could participate in the dream world"(Gray, 1992, p362).

Before Alice meets the abominable Ugly Duchess, she has two experiences wherein she has to accommodate her new size, and these are when she comes into contact with the puppy and the pigeon. When Alice comes across the puppy she is diminutive in comparison. As such, she realizes that the traditional roles have been reversed and now she is the play object. She also comprehends that at her present size, it is no longer a question of fun and games, and that the puppy's exuberant play threatens her livelihood. She still associates it with a sweet domesticated pet, calling it a 'poor little thing', but realizes the necessity to escape the hazardous situation. She achieves this by throwing a stick for it to fetch, and she retreats in the interim.

When Alice meets the Pigeon she has grown extremely tall, and cannot even find her body beneath the cover of the trees. The Pigeon subsequently accuses her of being a serpent, making the plausible argument that if little girls eat eggs and so do serpents then it follows that Alice is a serpent. The text reads:

This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two, which gave the Pigeon the opportunity of adding 'You're looking for eggs, I know *that* well enough; and what does it matter to me whether you're a little girl or a serpent?' 'It matters a good deal to *me*,' said Alice hastily (1982, p43).

Alice is upset by the pigeon's accusation for a number of reasons. It is one thing if it is a case of mistaken identity, but that the Pigeon has a logical argument to support its claims is upsetting. Alice revolts against the idea of being labelled a serpent – she is conveniently not called a snake – the serpent having a Biblical association with Eve's tempter in Eden. Alice is stunned into silence and as Nina Auerbach writes, this silence is “charged with significance, reminding us again that an important technique in learning to read Carroll is our ability to interpret his private system of symbols and signals and to appreciate the many meanings of silence” (Gray, 1992, p342). Alice feels that the Pigeon is casting a shadow over her own views of herself, blighting her perceptions of herself as an essentially good person. A serpent is certainly not something one would want to be called, or even thought of as being.

The encounter is relatively brief, leaving the reader to ponder the significance of the symbolism. If Alice is a serpent, then despite her innocent appearance, we can deduce that Carroll is attaching imminent sinful impulses to her, or at least suggesting that she will lose her innocence when she grows up. Yet Alice does not dwell too long on the idea, possibly because it is disturbing to see herself as an evil creature. Nevertheless, she has to face the fact that others do not see her as she does.

Another instance when Alice has to consider her size as a determining feature of who she is, is when she is trapped inside the White Rabbit's house. In this scenario Alice considers the nature of maturity. If physical growth is directly related to getting older, the relationship has been radically displaced. She realizes that she cannot get any bigger than she already is at her present size, thus she agonizes over the fact that she may never grow older and will therefore be trapped in childhood perhaps forever.

‘I do wonder what *can* have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one – but I'm grown up now,’ she added in a sorrowful tone; ‘at least there's no room to grow up any more *here*. But then,’ thought Alice, ‘shall I *never* get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way – never to be an old woman – but then – always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn't like *that!*’ (1982, p29)

The character that really challenges Alice's ideas about who she is, is the Caterpillar. In her encounter with him he asks the fundamental question - who is she. Whereas the Pigeon was concerned with *what* Alice was, the Caterpillar seems preoccupied with determining her essence, and the question revolves around her personality and/or

inner self, as opposed to her role in the world. He demands to know who she is from the start of their dialogue. At this point, Alice is thoroughly confused about this issue, as becomes clear in their conversation:

‘Who are *you*?’ said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I – I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.’ ‘What do you mean by that?’ said the Caterpillar, sternly. ‘Explain yourself!’ ‘I can’t explain *myself*, I’m afraid, Sir,’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see.’ ‘I don’t see,’ said the Caterpillar. ‘I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,’ Alice replied, very politely, ‘for I can’t understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.’ ‘It isn’t,’ said the Caterpillar (1982, p35-6).

Alice, as she tells the Caterpillar, has already changed size many times before this conversation, and as such, begins to question what the implications of these continual metamorphoses are. The Caterpillar, rather than placating poor Alice, suggests that such physical changes are a part of life, and doesn’t acknowledge the absurdity of such rapid variances in size.

The Caterpillar represents the Victorian schoolmaster or governess, in that he asks seemingly unanswerable questions of Alice and demands that she repeat a nonsense verse to him. For instance, we find the following:

Here was another puzzling question; and as Alice could not think of any good reason, and as the Caterpillar seemed to be in a very unpleasant state of mind, she turned away. ‘Come back!’ the Caterpillar called after her. ‘I’ve something important to say!’ This sounded promising, certainly: Alice turned and came back again. ‘Keep your temper,’ said the Caterpillar. ‘Is that all?’ said Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could. ‘No,’ said the Caterpillar (1982, p66).

In it, one can see that the Caterpillar assumes the authoritarian or adult role, and Alice is the student. He assumes that he knows more than Alice, which is reasonable as he is an inhabitant of Wonderland whereas she is not, but it is the patronizing stance that he takes which allows him to be interpreted as an ‘educator’. In addition, when Alice cannot remember *How doth the little busy bee*, he demands that she recite *You are Old, Father William*. He then criticizes her, saying that she did not make a few mistakes, but that it was “wrong from beginning to end”(1982, p71). Lurie writes about the Alice books that they: “are full of the moral verses found in contemporary school readers and of the rote question-and-answer method of teaching”(1990, p7).

The Cheshire Cat further compounds Alice's failing sense of self-confidence when he insists that she is mad. "'You're mad.' 'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice. 'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here'"(p51). Alice does not believe this though and is not convinced that he is mad, despite his argument, namely that a dog is sane because it growls when it is angry and wags its tail when it's happy. He maintains that he does the opposite and therefore is mad. Alice retorts that she calls this 'growling' purring, to which he nonchalantly tells her she can call this what she will. The argument is taken no further. But over and above this, 'madness' is not the only debility attributed to Alice. The Gryphon refers to her as a simpleton and berates her many times because she doesn't understand the way that it speaks. But throughout, Alice never identifies with the creatures and is always in opposition to them, despite her propensity for sympathy. Thus she is further alienated from them, and perhaps this separateness is how Alice can remain sane in a world that is chaotic.

Apart from size issues, Alice must question her identity because of the extremely hostile behaviour directed at her. Because of this antagonism towards her, she attempts to maintain a sense of self by recalling the real world. She does this by reciting lessons and doing sums, yet she cannot remember them properly. Things that usually come naturally to her, do not do so in Wonderland and she therefore does not have anything to measure herself against. In the real world Alice would have conventions as a determining aspect of her personality. She would know what behaviour was appropriate in any given situation. But what she faces in Wonderland is a total subversion of convention and she therefore has no predetermined patterns of behaviour to rely on. Instead of sinking to the pettiness of her companions and being rude and uncivil, she manages to maintain her manners at least.

In Looking-Glass land, size changes are not the device Carroll uses to highlight the theme of discovering one's identity. The methods are more varied, and more transparent in discussing Alice's sense of self. It is no longer a case of Alice being introspective, but rather we see her through the eyes of the characters she encounters.

The most obvious example of Alice's identity being questioned and/or challenged happens in the woods where things have no names. Names are, after all, a means of defining who we are, or are at least a starting point for elaboration. They answer the central question of the Caterpillar's 'who are you?' Not knowing her name causes

distress and although Alice is able to walk with a fawn in perfect harmony, afterwards she is relieved to know her name once more.

‘What do you call yourself?’ the Fawn said at last. Such a soft sweet voice it had! ‘I wish I knew,’ thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, ‘Nothing, just now.’ ‘Think again,’ it said: ‘that won’t do.’ Alice thought, but nothing came of it. ‘Please, would you tell me what *you* call yourself?’ she said timidly. ‘I think that might help a little.’ ‘I’ll tell you, if you’ll come a little further on,’ the Fawn said. ‘I can’t remember *here*.’ So they walked on together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field, and here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice’s arm. ‘I’m a Fawn!’ it cried out in a voice of delight. ‘And, dear me! You’re a human child!’ (1982, p136).

The Fawn, interestingly, is not frightened by Alice’s presence until she tries to touch it. This seems almost indicative of Alice’s child nature coming through, her desire to pet the animal. The roles of animal and child are predetermined, who is master and who is lower on the hierarchic scale. She sets the precedent of distrust. It accordingly demands to know what she calls herself. It is as though her name reveals who and what she is, a human child. The idea here is that naming of things signifies what they are. A fawn by nature is not the friend to a child. In addition, despite the anxiety at being separated, Alice is able to walk on blissfully unaware of any outside influences and responsibilities and roles are concepts that are forgotten. William Empson writes that “the talk goes on to losing one’s name, which is the next stage on her journey, and brings freedom but is like death; the girl may lose her personality by growing up into the life of convention, and her virginity (like her surname) by marriage.”(Gray, 1992, p353)

The incident with the fawn is not the only time when Alice is confronted with being labelled a ‘human child’. The Unicorn labels Alice, as we see in: “He turned round instantly, and stood for some time looking at her with an air of deepest disgust. ‘What – is – this!’ he said at last. ‘This is a child!’ Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her and spreading out both his hands towards her in an Anglo-Saxon attitude. ‘We only found it to-day. It’s as large as life, and twice as natural!’”(1982, p175). The Lion too treats Alice as though she is a fabulous monster, particularly as he cannot place her in the natural order of things. She is treated as though she is a mythical creature, and placed under a scientific gaze, dissected, as it were. ‘Are you animal – or vegetable – or mineral?’ he said, yawning at every other

word. 'It's a fabulous monster!' the Unicorn cries out, before Alice could reply (1982, p175-6).

It is as though Carroll begs the question of what it is to be human. In the text, the Looking-Glass creatures repeatedly scorn Alice because she is a 'human child.' The Fawn deserts her and the Unicorn and Lion treat her with scepticism and ultimately deem her to be inferior to themselves. Thus the human child has become something that is reviled and brought under the hypothetical magnifying glass by Carroll's imagined society. "Is it alive?' 'It can talk,' said Haigha solemnly. The Unicorn looked dreamily at Alice, and said 'Talk, child'"(1982, p175).

Alice is not only labelled and categorized by criteria unknown to her, but she is also made to question her identity within the dream world when the Tweedles tell her that she isn't real. Of course this is an upsetting concept to wrap her mind around, and thinking of herself as merely part of the Red King's dream has frightening connotations. She is faced with the idea that she may disappear (possibly permanently) if he should wake up. If she isn't real, then what is she and what will happen to her? If she is only a figment of the Red King's imagination, she not only has no control over the dream, but "as she herself perceives, she is also in greater danger of extinction"(Gray, 1992, p343). In the following extract we observe Alice's dismay and contemplation of this concept:

He shouted this so loud that Alice couldn't help saying, 'Hush! You'll be waking him, I'm afraid, if you make so much noise.' 'Well, it's no use *your* talking about waking him,' said Tweedledum, 'when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real.' 'I *am* real!' said Alice, and began to cry. 'You won't make yourself a bit realer by crying,' Tweedledee remarked: 'there's nothing to cry about.' 'If I wasn't real,' Alice said, half laughing through her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous – 'I shouldn't be able to cry.' 'I hope you don't suppose those are *real* tears?' Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt (1982, p145).

What seems to be thrown up for interpretation is that childhood innocence is something of the past. Unlike *Wonderland*, where Alice uses her real world experiences to reassure herself of who she is, in Looking-Glass land all she has is her function as a Pawn and later as a Queen. Yet these prove unsatisfactory. Roger Henkle writes that "on entering Looking-Glass she is confronted with difficulties in moving forward, as if her need now is to move out, away from home and childhood and into the adult world of roles and responsibility"(Gray, 1992, p362).

In the first book there is a driving motivation on Alice's part to explore her inner self, and she repeatedly ponders who she is. She overcomes the physical changes of Wonderland and emerges triumphant in the sense that she not only survives the ordeal but also is able to see her adventures as a 'curious' dream. Overall, she describes the experience as a positive one.

In *Looking-Glass land*, Alice is not undergoing an introspective search for self, in that the narrative does not contain the question 'who am I?' She is told who she is by the overbearing creatures she meets. She is a human child. Ultimately her label determines who she is and outlines her role in the narrative (as 'other') and in society – a child with little power. *Looking-Glass* answers Alice's previous questions of identity. She does not emphatically reflect on her *Looking-Glass* experiences as positive, and there is a doubt as to who dreamed the adventure. As Henkle suggests (Gray, 1992, p362), Alice is designated roles in *Looking-Glass* and real life. She achieves her adult role as the Queen and just as she has to master the chaos of the banquet, so she will have to do the same in her future life. She will have to conquer the uncertainties of fate and make sense of the real world.

3.4 Metamorphosis and Extinction: the Fate of Being Alice

Death is a concept that frequents the first *Alice* book, and is also included as a theme in the sequel. In Wonderland though, it is a thing that is merely joked about, an idea that Carroll toys with. At the opposite end of the scale, in *Looking-Glass land* death is dealt with in a more sobering manner. An online literary critic writes:

Alice, Victorian Goth? : Among the many unusual facets of Alice is its morbidity – its frequent references to death. In this respect, *Alice* is more like one of the classic Grimm or Perrault fairy tales with all their violence and eventual fatality (www.campusnut.com/book.cfm?article_is=7328§ion=3).

In Wonderland the topic of death is something of a glossed-over issue. For instance the first reference to death happens early on in the text: “ ‘Well,’ thought Alice to herself. ‘After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down-stairs! How brave they’ll all think me at home! Why, I wouldn’t say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house!’ (Which was very likely true)” (1982, p8).

Alice is naive about her fluctuating identity and also in the way she contemplates death. She exhibits a kind of detachment that it is something that does not affect her personally. “‘For it might end, you know,’ said Alice to herself, ‘in my going out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?’ and she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out, for she could not remember ever having seen such a thing”(p12). We are aware that death is inevitable. When the flame is blown out, nothing remains. This is why Alice cannot remember having ever seen a flame after it has been extinguished.

Alice’s whole adventure in Wonderland is riddled with potentially hazardous situations that could result in her death, yet she does not realize this at the time nor when she wakes. Firstly, there is the falling down the tunnel, which is soon followed with the finding of the bottle marked ‘drink me.’ She convinces herself that it will be perfectly all right to drink and shouldn’t have any dire consequences because if it were poisonous, it should be labelled. She then nearly drowns, is almost lynched by the angry mob outside the White Rabbit’s House and from there, she becomes the enormous puppy’s plaything and is almost trampled and/or eaten. What next? She avoids injury in the Duchess’s house as pots and pans fly past her head and later she participates in a game of croquet with a Queen obsessed with beheading people.

The penultimate example of a near-death experience for Alice is when the cards in the courtroom attack her. She subsequently wakes only to find that dead leaves that have fallen onto her face have replaced the cards. Coveny writes, “the juxtaposition of waking and the image of the dead leaves is no casual coincidence. Carroll’s art was too carefully organized for it not to have some special reference of feeling. It has all the force of a poetic continuity, a felt development”(Gray, 1992, p332). He implies that Alice undergoes a symbolic death, in that she wakes to reality but fantasy dies.

Thus, the first *Alice* book has an abundance of examples that revolve around the ‘death’ topic. Although Alice is often in perilous situations, she manages to move on from them unscathed. An environment that holds potential dangers surrounds her. The fact that Alice never does come to any serious harm suggests that coming to terms with her own mortality is the real issue at hand. Through all the changes and dangerous situations she is placed in, it becomes clear that she manages to overcome them, and in this way, Alice grows as a person.

In *Looking-Glass* Alice is first confronted about her mortality by the talking flowers. In this instance Alice's death is directly implied, but like in many similar encounters Alice changes the subject. Whereas in *Wonderland* this morbidity was usually casually mentioned, the focus now is on Alice's fate. "‘You're beginning to fade, you know – and then one can't help one's petals getting a little untidy.’ Alice didn't like this idea at all, so, to change the subject..."(1982, p123).

When conversing with the Gnat, Alice is forced to consider that death is only part of the cycle of life, as she considers how insects always die. She is faced with the idea that we all die eventually, some sooner than others. Once again, we note how Alice has no control over fate and death itself, but merely has to come to terms with inevitability. The Gnat enlightens her about the Bread-and-Butterfly's fate:

‘ And what does *it* live on?’ ‘Weak tea with cream in it.’ A new difficulty came into Alice's head. ‘Supposing it couldn't find any?’ she suggested. ‘Then it would die, of course.’ ‘But that must happen very often,’ Alice remarked thoughtfully. ‘It always happens,’ said the Gnat. After this, Alice was silent for a minute or two, pondering (1982, p134).

The Crow that descends upon the Tweedles is almost a symbol in itself, not only for its traditional association as a symbol of death, but also because it brings about darkness. Alice has already faced that the Red King has the potential to fade her out of existence if he wakes, and so too if the Crow manages to catch Alice, her dream will end and therefore so might she. Alice feels that she is in danger (possibly of death). "‘The crow must have flown away, I think,’ said Alice: ‘I'm so glad its gone. I thought it was the night coming on’"(1982, p152).

In *Looking-Glass*, the conversations Alice has with Humpty Dumpty convey a fascination with Alice's age. Both Humpty Dumpty and the White Queen discuss this issue. Humpty Dumpty's discussion of this aspect raises many questions about Carroll's inclusion of this theme. Apart from the fascination with Alice's age, not conventionally a topic that one would linger on in everyday conversation, one realizes that there is something sinister underlying Humpty Dumpty and Alice's dialogue. Despite the argumentative nature of the conversation, he does in fact snatch at a subjective truth:

‘Seven years and six months,’ Humpty Dumpty repeated thoughtfully. ‘An uncomfortable sort of age. Now if you'd asked *my* advice, I'd have said “Leave off at seven”- but it's too late now.’ ‘I never ask advice about growing,’ Alice said indignantly. ‘Too

proud?' the other enquired. Alice felt even more indignant at this suggestion. 'I mean,' she said, 'that one can't help growing older.' 'One can't perhaps,' said Humpty Dumpty; 'but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven.' 'What a beautiful belt you've got on!' Alice suddenly remarked. (They had quite enough about the subject of age, she thought) (p162).

She is neither seven nor eight, stuck in between these ages, and on the threshold of puberty. What is disturbing about this passage though is that Humpty Dumpty suggests that 'with proper assistance' Alice could have remained seven. What does he mean by this? The only real way that Alice could remain seven years old would be if she were dead. Roger Henkle observes that: " Looking-Glass takes place in mid-winter; the first book's golden aura now seems only the yellowing of age. Alice is rudely told by the flowers that she is beginning to fade. Humpty Dumpty dwells on her age and the possibility of death." (Gray, 1992, 362). There are other indications in the text that reflect the attention to growing old, and these are contained with the White Knight's poem, 'A-sitting on a gate'.

The whole interaction between these two characters is shadowed by Humpty Dumpty's fate. He does eventually 'die' by falling off the wall, and we know that he couldn't be put back together again. Aside from this though, Alice once again is in an uncomfortable spot, not wanting to draw attention to herself, and disconcerted by Humpty Dumpty's remarks about remaining seven years old. Thus she diverts him with an arbitrary compliment.

Similarly, the White Queen dwells on Alice's age, and therefore that life is slipping away. Alice, by being discussed in terms of how old she is, recognizes that she, like everybody else, gets older each day, and that death is something that she will deal with too. We see in the extract that the queen is trying to comfort Alice because she tells her that she is lonely. But instead of offering any real consolation, she again draws Alice into that upsetting state of considering her age. Her youth is not a permanent feature of her life, is not a solid concept and certainly not comforting to think about. The White Queen urges Alice to:

'Consider what a great girl you are. Consider what a long way you've come to-day. Consider what o'clock it is. Consider anything, only don't cry!' Alice could not help laughing at this, even in the midst of her tears. 'Can you keep from crying by considering things?' she asked. 'That's the way it's done,' the Queen said with great decision: 'Nobody can do two things at once, you know. Let's consider your age to begin with – how old are you?' (1982, p152)

Again, Alice's mortality is brought into the limelight. In the second book though, the focus seems to have shifted. Alice is challenged directly to consider the implications of growing older, and is confronted by the characters to this effect. In *Wonderland* Alice does have 'moments' in which to ponder such things, for instance when she is trapped in the White Rabbit's house and she thinks about whether there is a correlation between size and age. In *Looking-Glass*, the connection between old age and death is more explicit and centred around Alice. She learns that the insects die and that the Nursery rhyme characters' fates are determined by their stories.

I think that in this regard Alice shows a maturity and awareness of her part in the cycle of things, and which was not evident in *Wonderland*. This suggests that Alice has progressed in *Looking-Glass*, in that she witnesses many metamorphoses (of venues and characters that change into other characters), but is able to grow stronger from her experiences. She not only 'survives' the hardships and uncertainties of *Looking-Glass*, but emerges triumphant because she is able to maintain a type of distance from the 'fatalistic' happenings in this world.

Chapter 4

The *Alice* books: a socio-cultural commentary

The *Alice* books captivate a large readership, and provide reading pleasure to both children and adults. There is an added dimension to the two narratives – they have the scope to be reflexive tools in excavating what it must have been like to live during the Victorian era. On the one hand, children can appreciate the texts as tales of fantasy, and on the other, adults are allowed the opportunity of further exploring this social dimension of the narratives. As with many fantasy texts, they have been looked at from every conceivable angle, and this diligence results in a conflict over whether, for instance, the ‘psycho-sexual’ theorists should be given any serious consideration.

There are those who propose that the *Alice* books have psycho-sexual elements built into the stories. Alice’s fall down the rabbit-hole serves as a starting point for the psycho-sexual analysis of her adventures. In a post-Freudian society these theories are given credence, and why should they not be validated? After all, we know that the *Alice* books can be interpreted as Alice’s exploration of an inner world of the subconscious. The texts pay attention to the issue of the protagonist growing up, and surely sexual development forms part of this. Nevertheless, there is another school of thought that has grown wary of psycho-analysing the texts, and that want them to be categorized as ‘pure’ fantasy. Derek Hudson writes that Carroll “did not send Alice down the rabbit-hole on a summer’s afternoon for the benefit of a future generation of Freudians but for the present pleasure of three small Victorians”(1958, p32).

This is important to bear in mind, but is it ever possible to completely divorce a text from its context? Alison Lurie considers that works of juvenile literature are “subversive in one way or another: they express ideas and emotions not generally approved of or even recognized at the time; they make fun of honoured figures and piously held beliefs; and they view social pretences with clear-eyed directness”(1990, p4). Putting psycho-analytical approaches aside, the *Alice* books were principally created for children’s recreation, but, at the same time, constructed with underlying criticisms of society.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll's agenda for criticizing societal norms and expectations is accentuated. Even the illustrations contain likenesses of the politicians of the day. For instance, the picture that accompanies the train episode, features a man with an uncanny resemblance to Benjamin Disraeli (prime minister in 1868). Disraeli pictorially appears again as the Unicorn. The Lion is purportedly a reproduction of William Gladstone, who took over from Disraeli as prime minister. It is only fitting that these political opponents should therefore be pitted against each other in *Looking-Glass*. Carroll also submits the current political (and social) aspects of capitalism and materialism for interpretation, and although these structures are not explicitly dealt with, they form part of the fabric of the texts, as sub-themes. Tied to materialism, Carroll questions and ultimately mocks the technological advances of his time and the rising attitudes towards 'progress'. He also attacks the snobbery of the upper class Victorians and proffers a return to traditional values in the form of the White Knight.

This list of social conventions that Carroll is critical of in *Through the Looking-Glass* perhaps demonstrates how this text contains a more scathing approach to society than its predecessor. What it does have in common with *Alice in Wonderland* as far as a social critique is concerned is that it too has been over-analyzed and dissected, lending itself to multiple interpretations. I venture to suggest that some of these theories may be self-generated and not firmly rooted in the text. In other words, there is often scant 'evidence' to support such ideas, and ultimately they turn out to be opinions rather than literary commentary. For instance, Prickett offers for scrutiny a religiously-grounded theory about the *Looking-Glass* Queens. He proposes that the Red Queen represents the Church of Rome and the White Queen embodies the Church of England. He provides no tangible textual support for his claims, and relies upon conjecture – drawing parallels between their personalities and the nature of the two Churches:

Where the Red Queen is confident – and certainly believes herself infallible – the White Queen is merely vague and amiable, boasting of being able to read words of one letter. When frightened by the monstrous Crow, she says she couldn't even remember her own name – a confession which gives plausibility to the theory that the Crow is Disestablishment (Prickett, 1979, 142).

Alison Lurie presents a historical take on *Alice in Wonderland*, where she compares the Queen of Hearts, Queen Victoria, and the King of Hearts to Prince Albert. Unlike in *Looking-Glass*, where there are at least illustrations to establish the inclusion of political figures, in *Wonderland* there is no such pictorial aspect. Nor is there any direct (or even oblique) textual reference. Lurie generalizes about the fictional characters and historical ones, backing her ideas with inadequate textual evidence – the Queen of Hearts and Queen Victoria have in common a passion for roses and bowing courtiers; the King of Hearts and Prince Albert are apparently interchangeable because they take second place to the ‘Queen’ (Lurie, 1990, p43).

Thus, when examining the socio-cultural perspectives conveyed in the two texts, it is important to distinguish between what is factual and what is mere speculation. Although literary critics might be allowed a relatively large latitude for inventing theories, one must not forget that these are not always decisively grounded in the texts, and must not be passed as factual premises. To accept Lurie’s proposal that the Queen of Hearts and Queen Victoria are one and the same, would be to render a totally different socio-cultural reading of the first *Alice* book. To accept such a comparison as a factual proof would undermine the tangible socio-cultural concepts brought to light in the narrative and the dialogue.

4.1 Class issues

Alice, a ‘fabulous monster’, operates as a representative of the middle-class Victorian child. The reader never loses sight of this fact, and Alice creates an impression of the ‘spoilt’ child as she journeys through these foreign lands. Alice, “prim and earnest in pinafore and pumps, confronting a world out of control by looking for the rules and murmuring her lessons, stands as one image of the Victorian middle-class child”(Gray, 1992, p334).

In fact, very early on in her *Wonderland* adventures, she expresses her socio-economic status, as she ardently hopes she hasn’t become Mabel during the night, because Mabel lives in a ‘pokey little house’ and has no toys to play with. Alice,

even at the tender age of seven, has at least some insight into her family's situation. She also attempts to define herself by the knowledge, and ultimately the education, that she possesses.

The narratives also reveal the Victorian class system, in which there are pre-conceived distinctions between the gentility and the commoner. Despite the snobbery that Alice displays ("He took me for his housemaid," she said to herself as she ran. "How surprised he'll be when he finds out who I am!" [1982, p27]), she is still the icon of sensibility and sanity in *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass*. In her first adventure Alice repeatedly demonstrates the privileged existence and expectations of the middle-class child. When speaking with the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, Alice indignantly objects to the suggestion that she would pay for extra lessons in which tasks of manual labour would be taught. " 'I've been to a day-school, too,' said Alice. 'You needn't be so proud as all that.' 'With extras?' asked the Mock Turtle, a little anxiously. 'Yes,' said Alice: 'we learned French and music.' 'And washing?' 'Certainly not!' said Alice indignantly" (1982, p76).

In *Through the Looking-Glass* Carroll again picks up the 'snobbery of the middle-class' as a theme, and he introduces this concept in the Garden of Live Flowers. On this occasion it is not Alice who displays the 'middle-class snobbery', but the flower characters. In this episode Carroll depicts the various species of flowers as being allocated different and descending ranks. We see during their dialogue with Alice that the Daisies represent the lower classes (the masses) and that the Tiger-Lily is the matriarchal figure in the hierarchy of flora. We discern that she is scornful and condescending to those lower in rank, namely the less exotic plants. She most definitely exhibits the idea that the Daisies, because they are a common garden plant, have no individual status, and she refers to them as only 'the daisies'. They discuss a tree near them, and we read:

'It says "Bough-wough!" cried a Daisy. "That's why its branches are called boughs!" 'Didn't you know *that*?' cried another Daisy. And here they all began shouting together, till the air seemed quite full of little shrill voices. 'Silence, every one of you!' cried the Tiger-Lily, waving itself passionately from side to side, and trembling with excitement. 'They know I can't get at them!' it panted, bending its quivering head towards Alice, 'or they wouldn't dare to do it!' 'That's right!' said the Tiger-Lily. 'The daisies are worst of all. When one speaks, they all begin together, and it's enough to make one wither to hear the way they go on!' (1982, p122)

In the text, the upper classes patronize the lower classes. More than this, we find the age-old notion that it is the upper class's moral responsibility to guide the working masses, to set a good example of the 'moral' life. Thus they stretch out a paternal hand over the working classes, treating them as children that need to be kept in check. Another responsibility is to provide services. "Good drains, good water, decent light and air could reduce the amount of vice; and by making the working classes more contented with their lot, could make them more law-abiding – and less dangerous"(Houghton, 1957, p41).

The Duchess too, traditionally part of the gentry, contradicts this idea of the 'morally superior upper-class'. Carroll points out through this reprehensible character the discrepancies between having maxims and living by them. The Duchess, despite her title, is a living contradiction to her proposed 'morals'. She is an honorary guest of the Queen's croquet party. She is exposed in the chapter 'Pig and Pepper' as being cruel, savage and utterly self-absorbed. She cares for no-one but herself – she violently hurls her baby at Alice, who barely manages to catch it. She depicts how 'class' does not necessarily dictate 'moral' behaviour.

Being part of the gentry does not signify any type of moral superiority, as Carroll depicts with his special type of 'nobility'. The *Wonderland* inhabitants are afraid of their Queen, and this fear is transferred to the King because of his association with her cruelty. At the start of the croquet game, there is pandemonium. The Queen instils fear into her subjects: " 'Get to your places!' shouted the Queen in a voice of thunder, and people began running about in all directions, tumbling up against each other" (p110).

Alice interacts with the 'nobility' of these foreign lands, yet they convey natures that are in contrast with their rank and status. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, as in *Wonderland*, characters defy their titles. What I mean by this is that the 'nobility' in *Looking-Glass* land are not highly esteemed creatures. The exception to this is the White Knight, who represents the age-old values of honour, chivalry and nobility. Carroll offers him as a symbol – he is unpretentious and does not exhibit the condescending attitudes that usually pervade those of high social standing, despite

being part of the 'gentlefolk'. Further, through the example of the White Knight, Carroll begs the question, what is a gentleman?

The author appears to be warning the Victorian reader about their present-day infatuation with establishing the label of 'gentleman'. Although the term is loosely used here, Harold Laski captures the essence of what Carroll attempts to challenge through the traditional White Knight (who operates as a symbol of virtue and honour). He writes in his essay 'The Danger of being a Gentleman' about the way that the 'gentlemanly ethic' has outlived its usefulness in society because of

its anti-intellectual and anti-democratic bias, its elevation of respectability and good form over talent, energy and imagination, and its perpetuation (through such institutions as the Victorian public schools) of the values of the leisured elite (Gilmour, 1981, p1).

Yet status was not unalterable. One could industriously improve one's standing in the eyes of society. As Houghton observes, "it became possible as never before to rise in the world by one's own strenuous efforts, the struggle for success was complemented by the struggle for rank"(1957, p6).

Alice's experiences in *Through the Looking-Glass* denote an attention to the issue of servitude – Carroll comically tackles this topic by having Alice reluctantly comply with the other characters' demands for her to be their 'servant'. When Alice first meets the White Queen the topic of conversation turns to the tradition of employing a 'lady's maid'. These women were expected to pamper and appease, whilst helping with the most basic of tasks such as dressing their mistresses. For the middle and upper-classes, to have a servant (or many servants) was an issue of status – it was an accepted norm. 'But really you should have a lady's maid!' 'I'm sure I'll take *you* with pleasure!' the Queen said. 'Two pence a week, and jam every other day.' Alice couldn't help laughing, as she said 'I don't want you to hire *me*'" (1982, p149).

Thus, Carroll plays with the idea of the snobbish dependency of the elite. By making the White Queen utterly helpless (she cannot pin her own shawl nor brush her hair), he shows that upper-class women, despite being socially able, have become so accustomed to being aided with simple activities that they can no longer look after

themselves. Alice offers to help the White Queen, and demonstrates her self-sufficiency. It is her compassion that makes her the Queen's 'servant'.

When she meets the Lion and Unicorn, she is forced into another moment of servitude. On this occasion, Alice has little choice but to help them – she is instructed to cut their plum-cake, while the suggestion is that she is to have none. It has already been established that they think of her as a lesser being, as they call her a 'fabulous monster' that is then shortened to 'monster'. She is not treated as an equal but rather as an inferior. While she goes about slicing the cake, several negative comments are made – "What a time the Monster is, cutting up that cake!"(1982, p177) – as though she is not even there. In this way the King, Lion and Unicorn convey a type of 'middle class snobbery'.

When examining the texts in tandem, one sees that the 'lower classes' are given a distinctive voice, and in this way Carroll draws attention to the differentiation between the various classes. The 'lower-classes' of Victorian England are represented in the texts - Pat the gardener, the Gryphon and the Frog-Footman of *Through the Looking-Glass* form part of this working-class faction. Donald Gray assesses Carroll's portrayal: "Dodgson does not often use dialect. The Irish dialect spoken by Pat, like the lower-class idiom used by the Gryphon later in this book and by the Frog-Footman in *Through the Looking-Glass* ("wexes" for "vexes"), was a common device of nineteenth century humorists"(1992, p30).

Carroll imitates the speech patterns of the Irish and working-class citizens in an attempt to single them out as a significant sector of society. He also identifies their stations in life - they are all servants in one capacity or another. Generally speaking, their 'master' characters maltreat them. Pat, we see, is bossed around by the White Rabbit (who is his employer) to the extent of placing him in peril.

'Now tell me, Pat, what's that in the window?' 'Sure, it's an arm, yer honour!' (He pronounced it "arum.") 'An arm, you goose! Who ever saw one that size? Why, it fills the whole window!' 'Sure, it does, yer honour: but it's an arm for all that.' 'Well, it's got no business there, at any rate: go and take it away!' There was a long silence after this, and Alice could only hear whispers now and then; such as 'Sure, I don't like it, yer honour, at all!' 'Do as I tell you, you coward!'(1982, p30)

When considering anything to do with class issues, it is unavoidable that money must enter the equation, in that it is a determining aspect of class. The Victorian society that Carroll criticizes is Capitalist in nature, organized into sectors of wealth in descending order, where the middle classes are the more affluent groups in society, and the lower (working) classes are impoverished.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the idea of Capitalism is further advanced and elaborated upon. The most startling example occurs when Alice is on the train, as the passage is riddled with innuendos about money and there is the suggestion that without money, one cannot, symbolically speaking, move forward. In addition, it brings to mind the saying that time is money, and the fact that the other passengers speak and even think in chorus demonstrates that this is a concept held by the general public. In other words it is a collective consciousness and/or consensus. Alice has not bought a ticket and the Guard and passengers berate her for this:

A great many voices all said together ('like the chorus of a song,' thought Alice) 'Don't keep him waiting, child! Why, his time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!' 'I'm afraid I haven't got one,' Alice said in a frightened tone: 'there wasn't a ticket-office where I came from.' And again the chorus of voices went on. 'There wasn't room for one where she came from. The land is worth a thousand pounds an inch!' 'Don't make excuses,' said the Guard: 'you should have bought one from the engine-driver.' And at once the chorus of voices went on with 'The man that drives the engine. Why, the smoke alone is worth a thousand pounds a puff!' Alice thought to herself, 'Then there's no use in speaking.' The voices didn't join in, this time, as she hadn't spoken, but, to her great surprise, they all thought in chorus (I hope you understand what thinking in chorus means – for I must confess that I don't), 'Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!' 'I shall dream about a thousand pounds to-night, I know I shall', thought Alice. All this time the Guard was looking at her, first through a telescope, and then through an opera-glass (1982, p129).

Carroll appears to express a focus on “ the machine as a brutalizer of the human sensibility, the agent of a repressive society that, while it goes forward materially, is the enemy of the individual human spirit”(Tennyson, 1993, p215). One has only to consider the 'chorus' on the train, to witness this idea in action. The passengers are depersonalised (the Goat, the Beetle, the Horse, the Gnat) and operate as a unit (and can even 'think in chorus'). What they say reinforces a lack of distinguishing features and they repeat mantra-like expressions about the value of time, land, smoke and language - all aspects of the new wave of technological advances in transport and communication. If one were to make a virtual comparison between fiction and

reality, these passengers would represent the entrepreneurs and businessmen of Victorian Britain. Carroll, using his particular brand of nonsense style, identifies this sector of society and the values these people attach importance to. He points out that everything is appraised in terms of its economic status – even language is something that can have a value affixed to it.

Materialism is also a key component to the second text, and there are numerous examples to be found. Alice herself demonstrates this idea when she gathers the dream rushes. She never is satisfied with how many she has and continues to pick them even though once she has done so, they literally dissolve and lose all their qualities that made them desirable in the first place. They lose their scent, and ultimately disappear. Thus, Alice would appear to be a materialist, as we see:

‘The prettiest are always further!’ she said at last, with a sigh at the obstinacy of the rushes in growing so far off, as, with flushed cheeks and dripping hair and hands, she scrambled back into her place, and began to arrange her new-found treasures. What mattered it to her just then that the rushes had begun to fade, and to lose all their scent and beauty, from the very moment that she picked them? (1982, p156)

4.2 Destabilizing the ‘ordered’ world

Carroll, apart from demonstrating the absurdity of the middle-classes’ conceited attitudes, also mocks the ‘rules’ and etiquette that they use to set themselves apart from the lower classes. There seems to be this stiflingly ordered universe and as Alice is a product of her time, even she tries to order the occurrences in Wonderland, desperately attempting to figure out the ‘rules’ of conduct and happenings. Yet Carroll does not ever allow her to reach a level of comfort, despite the fact that Alice has almost made a ‘rule’ that she should expect the unexpected. “ Alice had got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen, that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way”(1982, p31). She knows that when she eats or drinks anything in Wonderland, she will either grow or shrink. Yet this is not constant. On one occasion, when she drinks from a little bottle, nothing happens. In this way, Carroll keeps Alice on her toes, so to speak, and undermines her ability to order her surroundings. She is thus alienated from her ‘ordered’ way of life, and can remain critical of the moment.

Alice cannot master these rules, as they do not stick to any convention or formula – she cannot even hold onto the idea that every action has a consequence. She can only accept the happenings in Wonderland and Looking-Glass land as unique. Everything Alice witnesses defies convention. She plays croquet, which by nature is a game that should have rules, yet there are none. Players proceed at random, the hoops move and the hammers are not constant either.

Similarly, the ultimate example of order, a trial, is turned into a complete farce, and notions of justice, logical thought and procedure are destabilized. The trial of the Knave of Hearts is a circus, in which justice is irrelevant and facts count for nothing. The King wants to deliver the verdict before any witnesses have been called. People are called to testify when they know nothing about the case. “ ‘What do you know about this business?’ the King said to Alice. ‘Nothing,’ said Alice. ‘Nothing whatever?’ persisted the King. ‘Nothing whatever,’ said Alice. ‘That’s very important,’ the King said, turning to the jury”(1982, p93). Evidence is non-consequential as the accused is considered to be guilty before the testimony is even heard. The court case revolves around stolen tarts, yet it in fact transpires that they haven’t been stolen at all. The main piece of damning ‘evidence’ is a set of nonsense verses, which deal in extremely vague concepts, and is essentially meaningless. This ‘evidence’ is a random letter that has been picked up, and which has no bearing on the trial in any case:

‘It isn’t a letter, after all: it’s a set of verses.’ ‘Are they in the prisoner’s handwriting?’ asked another of the jurymen. ‘No, they’re not,’ said the White Rabbit, ‘and that’s the queerest thing about it.’ (The jury all looked puzzled.) ‘He must have imitated somebody else’s hand,’ said the King. (The jury all brightened up again.) ‘Please, your Majesty,’ said the Knave, ‘I didn’t write it, and they can’t prove that I did: there’s no name signed at the end.’ ‘If you didn’t sign it,’ said the King, ‘that only makes the matter worse. You must have meant some mischief, or else you’d have signed your name like an honest man.’ There was a general clapping of hands at this: it was the first really clever thing the King had said that day. ‘That proves his guilt, of course,’ said the Queen (1982, p94).

Carroll takes the structural elements of the trial and makes them nonsensical, undermining the formality and strict observance of rules of law. The reason that it ‘doesn’t matter a bit’ is that the King has already decided that the Knave is guilty. Evidence will be used to convict him, regardless of whether in fact it is evidence or not. The first witness, the Mad Hatter, and later Alice, have no knowledge about the accused or the crime, yet they are asked to testify. Thus Carroll uses nonsense to poke

fun at the Victorian legal system, and it is not so much a poignant attack on it, as it is about satirizing Victorian correctness. Peter Hunt (1995) writes that Carroll “constantly parodies the logic of social structures – tea and dinner parties, games of croquet or chess, the protocols of polite conversation (‘Curtsey while you’re thinking’), revealing them to be as provisional as semantic difference: things are done like this, because this is how they are done” (p142).

The banquet is another example of the weakening of conventional ‘rules’ of behaviour. Carroll shows the arbitrariness of the formal dinner party and shows how rituals are at once pretentious and merely customary gesticulation that has no real meaning. Alice is formally introduced to a leg of mutton, and this is an illustration of etiquette being severely mocked. She is urged to make a thank-you speech and when she says “I rise to give thanks”(1982, p203), she literally does get lifted off her feet. The guests make a toast to (or rather *of*) Alice’s health, and a bizarre unfurling of toasting happens. Instead of civilly rising their glasses, they empty the contents of their glasses over their heads, pour their drinks on the table and proceed to drink in this manner.

Carroll also attacks the ‘properness’ of Victorian middle and upper class conduct. The Lobster Quadrille is a typical parody in the text, as it clearly defies the notion of performing daily activities with decorum and discretion. It also violates the notions of self-control, as the Mock Turtle and the Griffon subvert conventional dancing by galloping around, performing somersaults and swimming and generally behaving in a wild fashion:

‘You can really have no notion how delightful it will be
When they take us up and throw us, with the lobsters, out to sea!’
But the snail replied ‘Too far, too far!’ and gave a look askance –
Said he thanked the whiting kindly, but he would not join the dance.
Would not, could not, would not, could not, would not join the dance (1982, p132).

Alice is relieved when it is over and comments that it was ‘interesting’ to watch. The Lobster Quadrille is thus a perversion of adult reality. This is another instance in the text where Carroll’s “professional scepticism about systems, whether law, social conduct, education or games, since the slightest change of terms, or even of individual

letters (the Mock Turtles' school teaches reeling, writhing, and fainting in coils), exposes their instability"(Hunt, 1995, p142).

4.3 Regression and 'Progress'

Darwin was an extremely influential figure in the Victorian period, his scientific discoveries creating doubt about the commonly accepted truth about man's origins, that humankind is a creation of God. His ideas about Natural Selection, in which species that are able to adapt to their changing environment prosper and evolve, affected all areas of society; Darwin affected how we think of ourselves in relation to other animals, as well as brought doubt to the fundamentals of Christian upbringing. The Victorian was concerned with "the conception of man: have we free-will or are we human automatons? And if we have the power of moral choice, what is its basis? A God-given voice of conscience? Or rational calculation deciding which of two actions will promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number? Is man a man or simply a higher ape?"(Houghton, 1957, p11-12)

Carroll touches upon 'evolution' as a sub-theme in *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass*. In this way he includes a topical aspect to the narratives, as surely Darwin's theories were circulating Victorian drawing-rooms. There is a clear case of 'evolution' when Alice gets out of the pool of tears. Empson writes: "it is made clear (for instance about watering-places) that the salt water is the sea from which life arose"(Gray, 1992, p345). This scene is reminiscent of Noah's ark - after a flood new life appears. At least it is 'new' in the sense that Alice rather suddenly encounters a multitude of creatures that seem magically to appear. The illustrator, Tenniel, alerts the reader to the 'secret' that this is an observation about the evolutionary process, in that there is a monkey's face peering from behind the other animals in one of the pictures. This is surprising when one considers that there is no correlation between the illustration and the text, no mention made of an 'ape', and it does seem incongruous with the other animals. That it is in the picture is no doubt a deliberate attempt to hammer out an evolutionary idea.

Carroll, although not identifiably using the 'ape' as a textual symbol, does correlate the dialogue and evolutionary theory. Naturally, the ape is a symbol of man's origins and this was widely accepted in his times. In contrast, the Dodo is part of an extinct

species. These two creatures are linked in that one represents where we come from and the other what may become of us.

The *Wonderland* Caucus 'race' also sheds light on the Darwinian aspect of the text. It is circular in nature and ends only when the creatures are exhausted and can not go on any further. They are able to stop whenever they wish, and some do fall out of the race. A circle has no distinct sides and therefore no clear beginning or end. A circle is also a symbol of continuation. The 'race' almost suggests that life itself is a continual going round in circles, and there is the idea of 'from dust to dust.' The Dodo has to ponder who has won the race, because the race is not bound by rules of competition. "This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it stood for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said '*Everybody* has won, and *all* must have prizes'" (1982, p23). Subsequently the Dodo tells Alice she must furnish the prizes and as Empson writes, "All the animals win, and Alice because she is Man has therefore to give them comfits, but though they demand this they do not fail to recognize that she is superior"(Gray, 1992, p346).

There is most definitely the establishing of a hierarchical system in play, as Alice is placed at the top of the chain as the benefactor. By laws of nature, humankind is above the animals. The irony though is that it is the extinct Dodo who gives Alice her own thimble as her prize. She is rewarded for her participation by an animal whose extinction is at humankind's hand.

In keeping with Darwin's ideas about our origins, Nature is given a prominent role in the books; Nature serves as a source of refuge for Alice. For instance, she escapes from the animals who are trying to harm her in the White Rabbit's house by taking refuge in the nearby wood. Even though the enormous puppy then hounds her, she is able to avoid being harmed by hiding behind a thistle bush. In this way she is protected from a grisly death. In addition, she escapes the Crow's imminent threat by retreating into the woods, where again she hides.

When Alice walks with the Fawn in the woods where things have no names, one most definitely detects a critique of urbanized, industrialized society. In these woods Alice

and the Fawn operate on a level of equality, not separated by definitions of what they are. In Nature there are pre-established relationships, just as in society, yet in Nature the relationships are based on necessity. For example we have the predator and its prey. They co-exist by means of serving functions. There is no motivation that is not based on either survival or need. Animals are not motivated by greed, lust and power as people are. There is also no interference of human emotions, where people are in constant competition with one another, not through necessity but self-absorption.

We are also presented with a reverse case of evolution in *Wonderland* when the Duchess's baby turns into a pig. To move from a higher being to a lowly, domesticated animal must signify something for the reader to ponder. It turns into a scavenger. In Jewish as well as other cultures, the pig is perceived to be an unclean animal. I think that this episode brings up the nature-nurture debate, addressing whether as humans we are genetically programmed to be humane, or whether our upbringing determines whether we become civilized individuals.

Why does the baby turn into a pig? There is always method to Lewis Carroll's madness. Peter Hunt (1995) writes in the chapter, 'Transitions (1890-1914)' that the: "doctrine of original sin came to be replaced by scientific theories of evolution which presented the child as biologically, intellectually or socially primitive. Children were 'savages', awaiting the education that would transform them into civilized adults"(p169). Just as it was parents' and adults' God-given duty to mould children into mature adults, so too was England's taming of the 'savages' of the Empire seen in the same light. Adults of inferior races were seen as being child-like in that they apparently behaved in the same way that children of superior races did. Hunt also writes that "the uninhibited high spirits of childhood were equated with those of supposedly 'primitive' societies, and progress towards socialization was identified with progress towards civilization. Both the family and the extended family of empire required to be ruled with a mixture of kindness, firmness and self-confidence"(1995, p169).

In *Wonderland*, anything is possible. If a baby can devolve into a pig, then the converse is true. A pig can evolve into a baby. The following extract shows how the

possibility of change is of little consequence in *Wonderland*: “ ‘Bye-the-bye, what became of the baby?’ said the Cat. ‘I’d nearly forgotten to ask.’ ‘It turned into a pig,’ Alice quietly said, just as if it had come back in a natural way. ‘I thought it would,’ said the Cat, and vanished again”(1982, p90). The Cheshire Cat shows that it wouldn’t have mattered either way whether the baby had turned into a pig or fig. Carroll seems to express the idea that class or race does not predetermine civility. Are we not all ‘human’ Carroll seems to be asking.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, evolution as a subject does not get raised; rather ‘evolution’ is queried in terms of society and modernisation. The emphasis in this text is to look at society and how progress in technology and the pace of living, have altered our perceptions as we constantly strive to be better and faster and more advanced. Having said this though, there does seem to be a correlation between imagery of the Caucus-race and that of the final banquet:

The candles all grew up to the ceiling, looking like a bed of rushes with fireworks at the top. As to the bottles, they each took a pair of plates, which they hastily fitted on as wings, and so, with forks for legs, went fluttering about in all directions: ‘and very like birds they look,’ Alice thought to herself, as well as she could in the dreadful confusion that was beginning (1982, p203).

In the accompanying illustration of this scene, we are presented with the same or extremely similar birds from the Caucus race. Is this an attempt to link the idea of Man’s origins of the first book to the White Queen’s prophetic cry that something is about to happen?

I have already dealt with the *Looking-Glass* train as a symbol of Capitalism, but it has another aspect to it that is pertinent to Carroll’s observations about his industrial Victorian society. It also operates as the symbol of ‘progress’. For it was this technological advance that admitted Britain into the ‘golden age’ and opened up Victorian eyes to numerous possibilities, both economic and social. Railway transport denoted a transition from the pastoral way of life to the industrial, and was embraced as the way of the future. Yet, if man is dependent upon machines for movement, is he not at the same time cut off from Nature and autonomy? “What is experienced as

being annihilated is the traditional space-time continuum which characterized the old transport technology. Organically embedded in nature as it was, that technology, in its mimetic relationship to the space traversed, permitted the traveller to perceive that space as a living entity” (Schivelbusch, 1980, p43).

In Alice’s experience on the train, there is, firstly, a noticeable lack of descriptive detail about the passing scenery. In fact, the only time that a ‘natural’ thing is mentioned is when the engine ‘screams’, before jumping over a brook. Is this another instance of technology conquering nature, and do the engine’s ‘screams’ denote a horror in the act of doing so? The second facet of this episode that intrigues me is that the other passengers are non-human, with the exception of the ‘gentleman’, who is interestingly enough dressed in white paper. It is all the more strange that these characters converse about modern methods of transport and communication, in a context where Alice is treated as an item to be delivered. Alice is so put out by this dialogue that she wishes she could be back in the woods. Is this a longing to return to our roots?

‘She must be labelled “Lass, with care”, you know-‘ And after that other voices went on (‘What a number of people there are in the carriage!’ thought Alice), saying ‘She must go by post, as she’s got a head on her-‘ ‘She must be sent as a message by the telegraph-‘ ‘She must draw the train by herself the rest of the way-‘ and so on. But the gentleman dressed in white paper leaned forwards and whispered in her ear, ‘Never mind what they all say, my dear, but take a return-ticket every time the train stops.’ ‘Indeed I shan’t!’ Alice said rather impatiently. ‘I don’t belong to this railway journey at all – I was in a wood just now – and I wish I could get back there!’(1982, p31).

Industrialization and technological progress are most definitely under fire when one examines the textual suggestions made in *Through the Looking-Glass*. A facet that Carroll appears to be honing in on is that advances bring about a loss of individuality.

The White Knight and his passion for invention speaks volumes about the Victorian attitudes towards ‘progress’. It is this character that highlights that “man’s inventions may not work for his betterment alone, but may in ways unknown to him work rather to undermine the whole fabric of his existence on the planet” (Tennyson, 1993, p226). For instance, he creates a box to store sandwiches and clothes, yet its usefulness is undermined by the fact that it is upside down (to keep the rain out, as he tells Alice). All his inventions are totally impractical, but as he maintains, and in keeping with the

Victorian desire to constantly invent new things, “ ‘It’s as well to be provided for everything’”(1982, p182).

The poem he performs for Alice also raises issues about ‘progress’. It has strange imagery and we know that it is a nonsense verse. Yet it operates on more than one level. Although he is a complete eccentric, the sentiments that underlie the poem are not to be discredited. The ‘nonsense’ that he spouts makes a mockery of Carroll’s society’s odd behaviours. He speaks of ‘Rowland’s Macassar oil’, which does exist and was used for greasing one’s hair. Carroll then is making an observation, using parody, about the inventions of humankind that serve no real purpose except vanity. “A world that used it must have been as nonsensical as any that could be devised by the author. And the parody of Wordsworth’s leech gatherer seems even more powerful now than in the nineteenth century: what could be more foolish than paying for leeches to suck sick people’s blood?”(Gray, 1992, p370)

Chapter 5

A whole new world...

5.1 Explicating Alice's 'curious' dreams

“Fantasy is a sophisticated mode of storytelling characterized by stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness, and a subversive treatment of established orders of society and thought” (Attebery, 1992, p1). This quote quintessentially summarizes the *Alice* books - they use ‘games’ to undermine what Carroll perceived as nonsensical Victorian systems and modes of thought. Characteristically, *fantasy* directs our attention to the realities of everyday existence; underneath the playfulness there is often an acerbic critique of established norms.

Attebery stresses that the *fantasy genre* is virtually impossible to classify, as its mechanisms do not conform to a specific style. The literary techniques of fantasy writers cover an extraordinary range of ideas, and they constantly challenge the notion that there are limits to creative expression; the genre of fantasy is forever inventing new symbols and styles of expression. On the other hand, there does seem to be a clear differentiation between fiction and fantasy. The element that renders them distinctively unlike, has to do with imaginative space. Whereas fiction narratives are usually rooted in a realistic setting, fantasy is set in a location that is ‘other’ to reality.

Fantasy is always dependent upon the ‘real’, as it utilizes symbols and language for comprehension of the fantasy text. Yet, fantasy does not incorporate ‘realism’; in fact it acts as an escape from reality. Thus ‘reality’ is the departure point for works of fantasy. In the case of the *Alice* books, Carroll uses the literary device of dreams to take the reader into another world, and thus experience a new perspective on reality.

Of particular interest and an authority on the subject of ‘fantasy writers’ is Edmund Little. He has published a highly insightful work titled *The Phantastes* (1984) and it covers the great fantasy writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, including commentary about JR Tolkien, CS Lewis, and Lewis Carroll, to mention but a few authors he discusses. He is an expert in the field of *fantasy* studies, and has developed intriguing theories about how fantasies impact upon the reader and how they stylistically function. He describes how the *Alice* books operate in levels of the ‘unreal’ that are always, even if tenuously, linked to the real world.

In the act of writing a piece of fiction, Little suggests that the author engages with his or her own world and the written work has its own, separate realm, a type of 'Secondary space'. Thus the Primary world is that of the author and the Secondary world is that of his or her characters. When it comes to fantasy, and indeed in the *Alice* books, there is an extra layer. We can dissect the *Alice* books in terms of these three 'spaces'. During the writing process, the Primary world is in the background, the Secondary world (Alice's Victorian everyday space before she falls down the rabbit hole and through the mirror) foregrounds the Tertiary world (Wonderland and Looking-Glass land respectively). Little writes that Alice's dreams "constitute Tertiary Worlds, because each narrative opens with the Secondary World of Alice's waking life" (1984, p39).

Both books are clearly dream representations. Alice, our protagonist, is the dreamer and at the end of each narrative she wakes once more to her real life. Having categorized the 'spaces' is particularly useful, as it neatly partitions Alice's real world and those of her dreams. Having said this, the Secondary world is only briefly elucidated in the texts – when looking for 'evidence' of her Secondary world experiences, one draws textual inferences from the Tertiary worlds of *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass*.

The literary device comes in when one considers that Alice enters and exits Wonderland and Looking-Glass land by falling asleep and waking, respectively. In the first text, Carroll offers us little introductory information other than that Alice is sitting on the riverbank with her sister and that she is feeling sleepy. There is a smooth transition between what constitutes reality and when the dream actually begins. "So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her"(1982, p7). We are given a pre-warning that something untoward is about to happen by the upper-case letters in 'White Rabbit'. The narrative goes on: "There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too Late!'"(1982, p7) It is only when Alice runs after this

strange creature that the dream truly begins, as there is now a schism between her physical body and her dream-self. She has left the real world behind.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, it is perhaps a more complex transition. This time around, Alice is “sitting curled up in a corner of the great armchair, half talking to herself and half asleep”(1982, p107). There is more wilfulness to Alice’s dream on this occasion, as we hear her talking to her cat about her desire to enter the reflected image of her living room. She believes that this alternate place exists and that it will be an exact replica of her living room.

There is a sense that Alice has directed her dream, although once asleep she is, at first, baffled by the rules of reversal. This is a ‘mirror-land’, and everything works in the opposite way to how it would in the real world. To go forward one has to go backward, for example. Yet at the beginning of this adventure we see Alice outlining her dream setting, describing a space that is a clear mimic of reality, and her sensory perceptions and imagination shape the commencement of her dream. There is a sense that this time reality and fanciful daydreams fuse.

‘Let’s pretend there’s a way of getting through. Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it’s turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It’ll be easy enough to get through-’ She was up on the chimney-piece, while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist. In another moment Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room (1982, p111).

In Wonderland, the return from the Tertiary dream world to reality is rather sudden. There is no gradual phasing out of the dream and taking up the story in her Secondary world. Alice’s dream ends at the trial of the Knave of Hearts. As is characteristic of dreams, Alice wakes because she is severely distressed. While at the trial she is appalled by the injustice she observes. Verdicts are delivered before hearing the case, and witnesses give inconsequential trivia as evidence. When she is called to testify (about something she knows nothing about), she strongly informs the court of her disdain and as such evokes the wrath of the Queen of Hearts. She wakes before the Queen has time to punish her and is therefore not physically harmed. Her dream has become a ‘nightmare’ and the threat of violence prompts her to return to the safety of

her sister's arms. The fact that Alice moves between the realms of the 'real' and the 'unreal' during the course of her adventures, surely confirms Little's ideas about being able to categorize the three 'fantasy spaces.'

'Off with her head! The Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved. 'Who cares for *you*?' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!' At this the whole pack rose up in the air, and came flying down upon her; she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face (1982, p97).

Alice tells her elder sister about her 'curious dream'. While she refers to her adventures as being a 'dream', she happily accepts it as a tangible experience. She never makes reference to reality's having informed the dream nor does she attempt to rationalize and/or analyse it when she wakes. Her sister, on the other hand declares it an invalid experience because it is rooted in the 'real' and is influenced by the surrounding noises. Why does Carroll give Alice's sister the opportunity to express such melancholy? She is, essentially, the voice of adulthood. She stands in contrast to Alice, who is a symbol of youth and imaginative freedom; her sister exposes how adult society represses the passions of youth and advocates that thinking practically is a more important aspect of life than having an imagination. Alice's sister ...

sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again and all would change to dull reality – the grass would be only rustling in the wind, and the pool rippling to the waving of the reeds – the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the Queen's shrill cries to the voice of the shepherd-boy – and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farm-yard – while the lowing of cattle in the distance would take the place of the Mock Turtle's heavy sobs(1982, p98-9).

She also reflects upon how Alice's carefree childhood will be replaced by adult responsibility, and imagines Alice as a grown woman telling stories to other children. In this way, Alice's sister confirms that dreaming has a significant role in the developing of self and personality. Alice, because of her dream experiences, would be able to empathize with children when she became an adult and would be able to "feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days"(1982, p99).

Alice is blissfully unaware of the future implications for her and the inescapability of womanhood. The dream has served a purpose in her everyday existence. She will be better equipped to deal with the arbitrary and frustrating facets of reality, because she has faced and overcome them in Wonderland. Thus, Carroll raises a valid view – the imagination and dreams have a significant role in dealing with problems, as they offer an alternate space in which to resolve issues. Before Freud, dreams were not given much consideration, and perhaps Carroll is one of the first people to acknowledge the importance of dreams and the stimulation of the imagination.

In Looking-Glass land, Alice finds that her dream has become unmanageable and chaotic. Like the trial she participates in, she realizes that the banquet she attends is also a sham of respectability and order. She faces pandemonium at the banquet, as plates, knives and spoons fly about, and any semblance of a cordial dinner has finally disintegrated. Once again, her dream is turning into a ‘nightmare’. Alice directs her anger at the Red Queen, and subsequently finds herself in her living room. Carroll labours the process of the exit this time, splitting the ‘waking’ into three sections. At the banquet, Alice shakes the Red Queen, threatening to turn her into a kitten. Which is exactly what does happen. “She took her off the table as she spoke, and shook her backwards and forwards with all her might. The Red Queen made no resistance whatever: only her face grew very small, and her eyes got large and green: and still, as Alice went on shaking her, she kept on growing shorter – and fatter – and softer – and rounder – and-”(1982, p205). The next mini-chapter called ‘Waking’ reads only: “- it really was a kitten, after all”(1982, p206)

Some would argue that Alice does not control her dreams, and is in fact escaping them because they threaten to engulf her. In Wonderland, she is being attacked. In Looking-Glass land, *she* physically threatens the Red Queen. To a young lady of culture this would be a reprehensible action - a momentary lapse of self-control and restraint. Gillian Avery, on the other hand, sees Alice’s return to reality as being under favourable circumstances. She writes, “She always takes final control, overcoming the hostility of the court of the Queen of Hearts with her cry – “ ‘Who cares for *you*?... You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’”; and shaking the stiff, dictatorial, governessy Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, back to a soft, fat,

round, black kitten. It is wishfulfillment of the most appealing kind”(Gray, 1992, p326).

Thus far I have looked at the transitions between the Secondary and Tertiary worlds. Within the texts Carroll employs a ‘dream structure’ as a means to animate the action. It has been suggested that the complex dream atmosphere of the story could be a reflection of the widespread use of opium during the early Victorian era. It was used habitually then, although the use of opium was mostly before Carroll’s era, still the school of thought remains that there are apparent parallels between drug-induced hallucinations and the growing and shrinking Alice endures. To be objective though, there does not seem to be any tangible evidence to support such theories (not textually anyway), because Alice merely undergoes physical changes.

The image of the Caterpillar sitting on his mushroom smoking a hookah has come to be recognized as a symbol of the counter-culture drug theorists. The Caterpillar is the picture of tranquillity and he addresses Alice in a ‘languid, sleepy voice’ (1982, p65). He is “a large blue Caterpillar, that was sitting on top with its arms folded, quietly smoking a long hookah, and not taking the smallest notice of her or of anything else”(1982, p65). One can see how the Caterpillar smoking his hookah has become an icon of the theory that Alice’s size changes really depict the altered mind-set of a drug user.

Her transformations are brought about either by drinking from a bottle, eating bits of mushroom or eating little cakes. She is never sure what exactly the result will be. Of course, the drug connection may be the creation of the modern mind, a reflection of our time and not Carroll’s. After all, Alice needs to have a stimulus in order for her to change size. Hypothetically speaking, if there were more textual evidence to back up the ‘opium’ theorists, it would create an interesting slant to Little’s three ‘fantasy spaces.’ If Alice’s eating and drinking symbolized the taking of narcotics, then surely she would be entering a ‘fourth imaginary space’?

Opium theories aside, in *Wonderland*, Carroll plays with the idea of dreams within dreams. To take a transitional stance again, one can observe the shifts of consciousness Alice experiences. Firstly, she is asleep on the bank; when she falls down the rabbit hole (she is already dreaming) she feels she is dozing off and she

dreams of Dinah. She wakes into another dream when she lands at the bottom of the tunnel (Little, 1984). The following extract illustrates Alice's moving through various imaginative spaces, and communicates the idea that from dream to dream certain concepts are retained and modified.

And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself, in a dreamy sort of way, 'Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?' and sometimes 'Do bats eat cats?' for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it. She felt that she was dozing off, and had just begun to dream that she was walking hand in hand with Dinah, and was saying to her, very earnestly, 'Now, Dinah, tell me the truth: did you ever eat a bat?' when suddenly, thump! thump! Down she came upon a heap of sticks and dry leaves, and the fall was over (1982, p25).

Dreams expand and distort existing thoughts. In *Wonderland*, this phenomena is conveyed by the Cheshire Cat. Lennon(1947) expounds the Cheshire Cat's role as a character and ultimately discusses its significance within the dream context. She concludes that Alice's pet cat, Dinah, features as this feline creature. She writes that "the appearing and disappearing Cheshire Cat is a sort of guardian imp and liaison officer between the two worlds; an undercurrent of Wonderland is Alice's longing for Dinah, so perhaps the cat with the disappearing head (the Cheshire Cat, from Charles's birthplace) is Dinah's dream-self"(p 183). It is interesting, and gives credence to Lennon's position about the Cheshire Cat, that Dinah at least psychologically begins the journey with Alice. She is present in Alice's initial dreams and when Alice arrives at the Tertiary world, it follows that her cat can change from its Secondary role as pet to become a Tertiary world figure. Again, there appears to be what I can only describe as 'transference' of dream matter.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, fused dreams are again used as the means of communicating the story. Alice shifts location and characters metamorphose (the egg transforms into Humpty Dumpty and the White Queen becomes the Sheep), and there is this sense of the 'unreal' altering of space that is such a common feature of reverie. She finds herself going backwards and forwards between places, for example between the shop and rowing in the boat. Another transition occurs as she moves from surveying the land to being on a train, which in turn gives way to another space - it disintegrates and she is subsequently talking to the Gnat under a tree. The train's physical dissolution illustrates the haphazard shifting of location during dreams. "In her fright she caught hold at the nearest thing at hand, which happened to be the goat's beard. But the beard seemed to melt away as she touched it, and she found

herself sitting quietly under a tree”(1982, p132). Similarly, the mirror in her living room becomes like gauze and the rushes melt and disappear. There are ample examples of dissolving imagery in the text; the narrative conveys the elusive, half-remembered events and ideas that frequent dreams.

Alice is still the dreamer, but her dream-adventure has an added dimension. In her interaction with the Tweedle brothers, we learn that Alice may be a figment of the Red King’s imagination.

‘He’s dreaming now,’ said Tweedledee: ‘and what do you think he’s dreaming about?’ Alice said ‘Nobody can guess that.’ ‘Why, about *you!*’ Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. ‘And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you’d be?’ ‘Where I am now, of course,’ said Alice. ‘Not you!’ Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. ‘You’d be nowhere. Why, you’re only a sort of thing in his dream’(1982, p145).

In a sense, the narrative dream is compromised. In Alice’s previous adventure there is a clear distinction between Alice and her sister’s dreaming of Wonderland; in Looking-Glass land the mirror-image idea is transposed into the dream aspect of the story. While Alice is dreaming of the Red King, he is dreaming of her. We never witness any tangible exchange between these characters, and the Red King features as a silent and ominous figure that slumbers under his tree. When Alice returns to the comfort of her living-room armchair, she “continues to puzzle over which was the ‘real’ dream, and which its mirror-image” (Prickett, 1979, p141). In addition, she ponders whether Dinah has again accompanied her (psychologically) in the form of Humpty Dumpty. “Alice suggests that Dinah was Humpty Dumpty, ‘however, you’d better not mention it to your friends just yet, for I’m not sure’”(Lennon, 1947, p183).

No answers are supplied to Alice’s doubts and questions, although Carroll does elaborate on that reality and dreams (or imaginative space) overlap and interact. Carroll ends this complex tale with a question of his own that he poses to the reader: “Which do you think it was?”(p208) He iterates that fancy and real life are reconcilable aspects of existence, and should be so, because “Life, what is it but a dream?” (p209)

5.2 Playing with conventional time

Fantasy operates on a different plane from reality and therefore does not necessarily have to adhere to the 'rules' of laws that govern reality; Carroll firmly lodges his fantasy as a contrast to the conventional sciences whilst retaining their 'rules' as something to rebel against. That is to say that he provides a logical scientific explanation for the seemingly illogical happenings in *Wonderland*. "Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end? 'I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?' she said aloud. 'I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think-'" (p8) Alice does not land in Australia or New Zealand, as she suspects she will, but eventually comes to rest at the earth's core. Fisher corrects Alice's assumption that she will fall through to the other side of the earth, and asserts that,

The problem, which also courted the attention of Plutarch, Bacon, and Voltaire, had been correctly assessed by Galileo. Alice would fall with increasing speed and decreasing acceleration until she came to the exact centre of the earth, where her acceleration would be zero. Subsequently her speed would decrease, with increasing deceleration, until she reached, as she half suspected, the opening on the other side, where she would fall back again, and again, and again, oscillating back and forth forever, air resistance eventually bringing her to rest at the centre of the earth (1973, p323).

Alice's fall down the rabbit hole has been analysed in terms of psychological space as well as having psychosexual connotations. Alice's entrance into the Tertiary world of *Wonderland* can also be examined using scientific rationale. Close textual examination reveals the scientific 'evidence'. This brings me to discuss the treatment of *time* within the books. Carroll intends to undermine and subvert as many scientific norms as he possibly can, and he challenges traditional notions of physical phenomena that are taken for granted.

In *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass land*, time conforms to an 'alternate' *modus operandi*. Scientific premises support that Alice's first adventure takes place at the centre of the earth. Carroll has used Galileo's theory to underpin and technically justify a different time-scheme. He employs 'lunar time' and there are many events and incidents within the text to support this hypothesis. Stephen Prickett describes how Alice "lands safely because, of course, there is no gravity to pull her further. But in *Wonderland*, at the centre of the earth, there is also no rotation of the earth, no

alternation of day and night, and therefore no 'solar time'"(1979, p132-3). He contends that lunar time still is in operation.

Carroll alerts the educated reader to this lunar system during the tea-party episode, where much is made of the issue of *time*. The Mad Hatter is preoccupied with this subject and speaks to Alice of his acquaintance with Time (a person). "If you knew Time as well as I do,' said the Hatter, 'you wouldn't talk of wasting *it*. It's *him*'"(1982, p56). He also makes the point of asking what date it is, and subsequently tells her that her watch indicates the incorrect day, emphatically stating that it is two days off.

The Hatter was the first to break the silence: 'What day of the month is it?' he said, turning to Alice: he had taken his watch out of his pocket, and was looking at it uneasily, shaking it every now and then, and holding it to his ear. Alice considered a little, and then said, 'the fourth.' 'Two days wrong!' sighed the Hatter (1982, p55).

In the previous chapter we learn what month it is. Alice comments that because it is May, the March Hare will not be "so mad as it was in March"(1982, p52). Although the Mad Hatter is hardly what one would call a voice of sanity, he is in fact correct about the date. If one cross-references the fourth of May with a lunar calendar, the corresponding lunar date is the sixth of May. To substantiate and collaborate this idea, Prickett urges that one check the lunar almanac for 1865, as it proves his 'lunar time' theory.

There are other hints in the first *Alice* book that lead one to the conclusion that lunar time is the *modus operandi*. Fred Gettings includes in his book about the occultist and mythological origins of cats, an interesting explanation of the symbolism of the Cheshire Cat. He notes that it is "a lunar symbol, derived from the Egyptian Bastet mythology, with a lunar face which laughs, like the man in the Moon, and a crescent grin. The Cheshire Cat waxes and wanes, appears and disappears just like the moon itself"(1990, p67). He also advocates that the illustration, in which the Cheshire Cat peers down at Alice from its perch in the branches of a tree, is not at all random. Carroll and indeed Tenniel are, according to Gettings, "making use of the ancient link between the Cat and the Moon, which is probably why the feline is depicted high on a tree, against the sky. When the cat disappears, it leaves only a crescent of teeth behind, and even the very word "crescent" evokes the Moon"(1990, p66).

Aside from tracing the scientific *raison d'être* behind his adopting of alternate time principles, Carroll goes further than this. He makes the concept of conventional time topsy-turvy, unreliable, and thereby undermines the ordered Victorian way of life. They lived by 'scheduled time'. By this I mean that the Victorian age was when *time* became something that could clearly be quantified, not by natural phenomena but by railway intervention. There appeared to be a vigorous focus on efficiency and time as being co-dependent. The railway system in Britain developed and flourished in the 1800s, and this invention was a great motivator in the revolutionized way of thinking about *time* as something that signified a 'progressive society'. Michael Freeman writes that, "the new speed of travel inevitably brought about a new speed of living. Punctuality and time-keeping were transplanted from railway operation directly into people's lives. The frenetic pressure to be 'on time' was born out of the early railway age"(1999, p21).

Carroll manipulates *time*. At the tea-party, the March Hare dips the Mad Hatter's watch into a cup of tea in the vain hope that this will make it work again. He also tries to fix the springs by using butter. This is clearly symbolic – in Wonderland, standard time is irrelevant. His watch is broken, but aside from that, it serves no purpose as it only tells what day it is. He says that it stopped working a month previously when the Queen of Hearts accused him of murdering Time. Thus, it is always six o'clock and always tea-time. All the places are set at the table because there is no *time* to do the dishes. The Mad Hatter and his company simply move places when they want a clean cup.

In *Looking-Glass*, *time* defies conventional definition, and names of days do not signify only one date.

'We had *such* a thunderstorm last Tuesday – I mean the last set of Tuesdays, you know.' Alice was puzzled. 'In *our* country,' she remarked, 'there's only one day at a time.' The Red Queen said 'That's a poor thin way of doing things. Now *here*, we mostly have days and nights two or three at a time' (1982, p195).

The Red Queen's remark about the 'poor thin way of doing things' one day at a time, raises a satirical observation about Alice's and Carroll's society – if it were possible, they would most likely speed up time. This seems to echo an earlier snippet of conversation between Alice and the Duchess: " 'If everyone minded their own

business,' the Duchess said, in a hoarse growl, 'the world would go around a good deal faster than it does.' 'Which would not be an advantage,' said Alice" (1982, p48).

The Red Queen's statement makes a mockery of obsessive Victorian time-keeping and is perhaps a warning. If one lives at such a feverish pace, one in fact loses *time*, and I think that this is the most important observation Carroll makes about his world - namely, that life is to be savoured. TS Eliot captures what I think Carroll was objecting to – an unshakable belief in progress and the depersonalisation it fosters, that we are going through the motions of life, urged on by 'mechanical time', while still smugly "assured of certain certainties,/ The conscience of a blackened street/ Impatient to assume the world" (Eliot, 1961, p23).

There is also in Looking-Glass land a *time reversal* technique; the cause-and-effect relationship is transformed into an absurd formula, with the effect coming before its cause. We hear from the White Queen that the King's messenger is in jail, without having had his trial and without ever having committed a crime. Thus there is a 'preventative' justice. Carroll presents a ludicrous scenario, while drawing a parallel between this and society's attempts to become quicker and faster at everything. He uses humour to hone in on the point that the well-oiled machine of Victorian society is perhaps heading for disaster, since traditional values are lost in the pursuit of progress. In the following extract, we read how the Queen goes through the 'effects' of pricking herself (a bleeding finger and her cries of agony), before the actual event. It is no accident that "her screams were so exactly like a steam engine", illustrating that time-keeping and progress are themes that are correlated. Thus Carroll's very narrative reads:

'Have you pricked your finger?' 'I haven't pricked it *yet!*' the Queen said, 'but I soon shall – oh, oh, oh!' 'When do you expect to do it?' Alice said, feeling very much inclined to laugh. 'When I fasten my shawl again,' the poor Queen groaned out: 'the brooch will come undone directly. Oh, oh!' As she said the words the brooch flew open, and the Queen clutched wildly at it, and tried to clasp it again. 'Take care!' cried Alice. 'You're holding it all crooked!' And she caught at the brooch; but it was too late: the pin had slipped, and the Queen had pricked her finger. 'That accounts for the bleeding, you see,' she said to Alice with a smile. 'Now you understand the way things happen here.' 'But why don't you scream *now?*' Alice asked, holding her hands ready to put over her ears again. 'Why, I've done all the screaming already,' said the Queen. 'What would be the good of having it all over again?' (1982, p151-2)

There is also no clear coherence between the present, the past and the future. The White Queen's offer to hire Alice as her personal servant brings this issue to the fore.

She says that she will be compensated for services rendered with a payment of jam; yet, it is conditional. She would only ever receive jam 'every other day'. Perhaps Carroll demonstrates by this exclusion of 'today', how anticipating the future and dwelling in the past, prevents people from living for the moment, so to speak.

Chapter 6

'Language': a Topic of Conversation

Carroll manipulates the conventional uses of English for humorous purposes, yet there is an underlying severity to this literary device. In a larger sense he attempts to demonstrate through the subversion of linguistic norms, that language is a system as arbitrary as any other. He does not create a new alternate language scheme, but rather toys with the one in existence. Thus he subverts language while maintaining intelligibility. Mellor proposes that it is "a linguistic structure, which, although it denies or distorts customary vocabularies, grammar, syntax, and the usual order of events, nonetheless maintains an absolute control over the relation of order to disorder"(1980, p168).

Carroll tackles the question, what is *English*? His characters definitely offer interesting takes on this subject, and in most cases they serve to scorn the complexity of this linguistic system.

'In that case,' said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, 'I move that this meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies-' 'Speak English!' said the Eaglet. 'I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!'(1982, p22).

They also highlight the fact that *English* must conform to the correct rules of execution, and as the White Queen suggests, it would be better to speak a foreign language than to speak improper English. " 'Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing'"(1982, p128). Yet, it is the Frog Footman's mode of speaking and Alice's inability to understand him that suggests that elocution is a serious component of English.

Then he looked at Alice. 'To answer the door?' he said. 'What's it been asking of?' He was so hoarse that Alice could scarcely hear him. 'I don't know what you mean,' she said. 'I speaks English, doesn't I?' the Frog went on. 'Or are you deaf?'(1982, p199).

Carroll distorts conventional language, and demonstrates by doing so that 'meaning' is not specifically dependent on words and can exist in a system of unuttered signs. Carroll recorded in an article titled 'The Stage and the Spirit of Reverence' that "...no word has meaning inseparably attached to it; a word means what the speaker intends by it [Saussure's *parole*], and what the hearer understands by it [Saussure's *langue*],

and that is all. I meet a friend and say ‘Good morning!’ Harmless words enough, one would think. Yet possibly, in some language he and I have never heard, these words may convey utterly horrid and loathsome ideas” (Mellor, 1980, p171).

He establishes that *meaning* is not singularly attached to the words themselves. For instance, when Alice is falling down the rabbit hole she speculates that she will arrive at the ‘Antipathies.’ She says “ ‘How funny it’ll seem to come out among people that walk with their heads downwards! The Antipathies, I think-’ (she was rather glad there was no one listening, this time, as it didn’t sound at all right)”(1982, p8). In her mind the word has a specific meaning, and the reader understands that she is referring to the Antipodes.

In the texts, words have *fluctuating meaning*. Carroll uses puns, most explicit in the famous Mock Turtle and Gryphon episode. In this context he shows that *meaning* is in constant vacillation and that a word has more than one interpretative level. Similar to the Antipathies-Antipodes, Carroll again relies on the reader’s knowledge of English to extract the meaning and humour from the Mock Turtle’s rendition of his school subjects. We realize that ‘Reeling and Writhing’ constitutes ‘Reading and Writing’, and ‘Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision’ replace ‘Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication and Division’. Yet words signify more than one fixed meaning and are open to interpretation. Although on surface inspection we perceive the self-evident play-on-words, there is another echelon of meaning; these words are also reminders of the (at times) painful hardships of one’s schooling years.

Time and again Carroll uses the motif of *fluctuating meaning*, as a way to highlight the difficulties of the English language, and to suggest that *meaning* is not a concept set in stone. In Looking-glass land, Carroll interposes his views about language being an arbitrary convention, when Alice reads ‘Jabberwocky’. Although it is a nonsense poem and uses nonsense words, they can be understood, because they convey a meaning while allowing room for interpretation. Michael Holquist writes that “Carroll’s portmanteaux are words and not gibberish because they operate according to the rule which says that all coinages in the poem will grow out of the collapse of two known words into a new one. Carroll can deploy words he invents and still communicate because he does so according to rules” (Gray, 1992, p395).

Alice ponders the meaning of the poem, and does arrive at some type of conclusion about the events described in it. She says, ““Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t exactly know what they are! However, *somebody* killed *something*: that’s clear, at any rate-”(1982, p116-8). Perhaps Alice has hit the nail on the head, so to speak, because this appears to be one of the central areas of concern for Carroll – that language is more complex than correlating specific words with specific meanings. A word can *mean* several things, depending on its context within a sentence and the intention and tone of the speaker. As we see in ‘Jabberwocky’, the poem conveys a story, despite containing non-English words, and these words in turn convey meaning. “The sense of nonsense can be learned. And that is the value of it: it calls attention to language” (Gray, 1992, p395).

Humpty Dumpty provides the explication of ‘Jabberwocky’. He is the means by which language and the subjective meaning of words are brought into the limelight. As Elizabeth Sewell records “Nonsense is maintaining some kind of balance in its language. After all, Humpty Dumpty who is the chief language expert in the Alice’s is himself in such a state” (Gray, 1992, p384). His analysis of the poem is extremely amusing, and also makes sense (at least to himself) of words that he doesn’t understand. Humpty Dumpty effectively is satirizing the Victorian belief in exact sciences and etymology. He demonstrates that words can mean what one wants them to; although his description of ‘glory’ would, by dictionary definition, be ‘wrong’, he makes the point that it means something to him. (Just like Alice’s Antipathies):

‘I don’t know what you mean by “glory”,’ Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. ‘Of course you don’t – till I tell you. I meant “there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!”’ ‘But “glory” doesn’t mean “a nice knock-down argument”,’ Alice objected. ‘When *I* use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master – that’s all’ (1982, p163-4).

Carroll draws the reader’s attention to the multi-dimensional meaning of words, and explores, as a major linguistic topic, the difficulty in discerning between the literal and the idiomatic. He exposes the arbitrariness of certain expressions of speech; the Caterpillar stubbornly responds to Alice’s ‘you see’ and ‘you know’ with evident disdain. The White Knight spouts ridiculous sayings, stating that the wind is as ‘strong as soup’ (1982, p182); when he gets stuck in his newly invented helmet, he tells Alice that ‘it took hours and hours to get me out. I was as fast as- as lightning,

you know' (1982, p185). The Dormouse speaks of a 'muchness' being a concrete object, as something that can be drawn. He lists the most interesting collection of subjects for drawing beginning with the letter M, ranging from mousetraps and the moon, to memory and a muchness. "You know you say things are "much of a muchness" – did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness!" (1982, p59).

Throughout the exchange between Alice and the Dormouse, there is a tension between the literal and the idiomatic, and Carroll again employs the fluctuating meaning technique.

'But I don't understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?' 'You can draw water from a water-well,' said the Hatter, 'so I should think you can draw treacle from a treacle-well - eh, stupid?' 'But they were *in* the well,' Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice the last remark. 'Of course they were,' said the Dormouse: 'well in' (1982, p59).

There are many incidences of Carroll teasing out idioms and rendering them ridiculous. One instance that springs to mind is when the guinea-pig juror cheers something the King has said, and is 'suppressed by the officers of the court' (1982, p90). Carroll makes this legal terminology into a tangible concept – the cheering guinea-pig is stuffed into a canvas bag, and in this way is 'suppressed'. To labour my point, in *Looking-Glass* we read, "There's nothing like eating hay when you're faint," he remarked to her, as he munched away. 'I should think throwing cold water over you would be better,' Alice suggested: '- or some sal-volatile.' 'I didn't say there was nothing better,' the King replied. 'I said there was nothing like it.' Which Alice did not venture to deny" (1982, p172).

Carroll generates discussion about *names* (personal and labelling) and there are many instances in *Looking-Glass* where these issues are raised. The Gnat comments that Alice would not appreciate losing her name and attempts to amuse her, saying that she would be able to avoid coming in to lessons if her governess did not know what to call her. "The governess would never think of excusing me lessons for that. If she couldn't remember my name, she'd call me "Miss", as the servants do.' 'Well, if she said "Miss", and didn't say anything more,' the Gnat remarked, 'of course you'd miss your lessons'" (1982, p134-5). Alice is completely pragmatic, and the intended humour is lost on her. She insists that the Governess would then give her another title, namely, Miss. Thus, Alice and Miss are interchangeable, suggesting that names designate identity and status.

Directly after this encounter Alice finds herself in the woods where things have no names. Alice and the Fawn walk together peacefully and unhindered by the usual relationship between human and animal because of the loss of defining labels. This allows them to momentarily experience a harmonious companionship. Mellor writes, "Beneath the phenomenological realm of structured experience may lie an ultimate harmony of things coexisting in loving peace. When Alice enters the forest where things have no names, where no nouns are spoken and hence no divisions made between one thing and another, she and the fawn can unite in perfect friendship"(1980, p174). The peace then is destroyed by the reintroduction of names and what they imply about the two beings.

Carroll seems to be challenging the common Victorian assumption that to name something is to understand, and in a sense, own the thing. Humpty Dumpty emphasizes this idea, when he speaks of being the 'master' of words. Similarly, the Red Queen says that "when you've fixed a thing, that fixes it, and you must take the consequences"(1982, p195). Yet it is the White Knight that pragmatically lays out the distinctions between what a thing is called, its name, and what that thing is:

The name of the song is called "*Haddock's Eyes*". 'Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?' Alice said, trying to feel interested. 'No, you don't understand,' the Knight said, looking a little vexed. 'That's what the name *is called*. The name really is "*The Aged, Aged Man*".' 'Then I ought to have said "That's what the *song* is called"?' Alice corrected herself. 'no, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The *song* is called "*Ways and Means*": but that's only what it's *called*, you know!' 'Well, what *is* the song, then?' said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered. 'I was coming to that,' the Knight said. 'The song really *is* "*A-sitting On A Gate*": and the tune's my own invention'(1982, p186-7).

Carroll implies that words that label are not necessarily in tandem with the objects they describe. They are often misleading and bizarre. To state the obvious, an object can exist in and of itself, without being labelled. We have a prime example of this, in the exchange between Alice and the Fawn. Thus labels can obscure the true nature of things because they are merely linguistic signs. Giving something a label implies an understanding and knowledge about the thing, which may in fact depreciate it. "That words 'point at' things is thus drawn into question. In *Wonderland*, for instance, attributes can exist without a subject to which they refer: Alice sees 'a grin without a cat.' Labels or signs have no fixed relationship to the things they purportedly designate"(Mellor, 1980, p172).

Indeed, in *Through the Looking-Glass* we are presented with an attribute existing without a subject; the Red Queen poses a riddle for Alice: 'Take a bone from a dog: what remains?'(1982, p194). The answer is rather thought provoking and suggests that attributes do not constitute the thing itself. We read "Why, look here!" the Red Queen cried. 'The dog would lose its temper, wouldn't it?' 'Perhaps it would,' Alice replied cautiously. 'Then if the dog went away, its temper would remain!' the Queen exclaimed triumphantly" (1982, p194).

Carroll undermines the reliability of labels and achieves this end by using what Mellor calls 'empty symbols'(1980, p172). Things that are 'fixed' in the real world, that we are able to identify because of their names, are unstable in *Wonderland* and indeed in *Looking-Glass* land. Alice grabs a jar of what she expects to have marmalade inside (because the bottle is labelled ORANGE MARMALADE), and she discovers that there is nothing in the bottle. Although the label signifies that it is Orange Marmalade, this is not the case. The notion that labels do not specify what a thing is, is further elaborated on with the White Knight's invention of an extremely strange 'pudding'. It is comprised of blotting paper, sealing-wax and gunpowder, thereby defying what it is to be a pudding - in that it is not sweet and is inedible, yet he opts to call this invention an after-dinner delight.

The *Looking-Glass* Insects are intriguing when considering names and labels. Carroll appears to be satirizing the arbitrariness of names, by offering ones that perform a descriptive and accurate account of what each insect is. For instance, why do we call a Butterfly a Butterfly? It certainly doesn't look like butter, and isn't made of this matter. He offers us the Bread-and-butter-fly for examination. " 'Crawling at your feet,'said the Gnat (Alice drew her feet back in some alarm), 'you may observe a Bread-and-butter-fly. Its wings are thin slices of bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar'"(1982, p134).

Finally, Alice's experiences in the Sheep's shop brings to light Carroll's objection to names being random descriptions - she is not permitted to distinctly visualize the object she wants to buy, and is therefore unable to name the item. " "Things flow about so here!' she said at last in a plaintive tone, after she had spent a minute or so vainly pursuing a large bright thing that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes

like a work-box, and was always in the shelf next above the one she was looking at” (1982, p154). She has to content herself with calling it ‘the thing.’

Carroll questions even the fundamentals of English, and takes issue with traditionally understood concepts of language; he destabilizes them in an attempt to compel the reader to re-evaluate what is typically taken for granted. He addresses the fact that in language ‘rules’ are not observed when speaking, namely, when one has a conversation. He pokes fun at the ins-and-outs, the finer details of grammar, and addresses the fact that the technical side of speech is prone to manipulation whilst still conforming to the ‘rules’. In other words, nonsense speech can use the rules of ‘proper’ English and make a new genre and/or mode of speaking. He then at once adheres to and flouts the ‘rules’ of grammar and syntax. “It is not a question of a nonsensical sentence, like ‘colourless green ideas...’, being grammatical – it is a matter of grammar accommodating agrammaticality within itself. The predicate ‘nonsense’ launders a solecism as one launders ill-gotten money. Rules are made to work paradoxically against themselves”(Lecercle, 1999, p126).

I think that the Duchess’s speech to Alice at the croquet game adequately illustrates that with nonsense, ‘alternate rules’ work with and in opposition to the ‘rules’ of correct English. She says “ ‘Be what you would seem to be’ – or, if you’d like it put more simply – ‘Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise that what you would have appeared to them to be otherwise’”(1982, p72). Lecercle tackles this issue of exploiting the conventional linguistic system when he writes about the inherent ‘paradox’ of English grammar, and declares the two new rules nonsense writers (including Carroll) have adopted. They are simply that sentences can be any length and that “ANYTHING GOES as a subject of certain predicates, for even ‘setmul gsap’ is utter nonsense’ is a correct sentence”(1999, p127).

With communication in mind, I will address here Carroll’s presentation of dialogue. For the purpose of elucidating Carroll’s satire of conversational language, I shall firstly look at a prototypical approach to conversation, namely the Grecian perspective. Lecercle outlines its premises as such:

The aim of the speakers is to exchange information; there must be fair play in the exchange (one takes one’s appointed turn, abstains from interrupting, etc); there must be a

will to agree and compromise (one must consider the other's point of view, abstain from issuing threats or indulging in verbal terrorism); and there must be sincerity in the exchange: participants must mean what they say and say what they mean (Lecerle, 1990, p250).

Carroll ridicules the Victorian penchant for 'polite conversation' and this emerges at the Mad Hatter's tea-party. The *tea-party* is traditionally the formal setting and home of this facet of Victorian life and Carroll takes the custom of polite exchange and compliments, uses their typical setting and turns conversational 'rules' on their head. Wine is offered, when there is none at the table. Alice comments that the table is set for more than three people, and the Hatter responds that she needs a haircut. When she scolds him for making a personal remark, she receives no apology but instead is asked a riddle, 'Why is a raven like a writing desk?' He has no answer himself. The 'rules' that are broken are simply that one shouldn't offer what one doesn't have. Observations usually are followed by some kind of explanation. And a riddle serves no purpose if there is no answer.

'Have some wine,' the March Hare said in an encouraging tone. Alice looked round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. 'I don't see any wine,' she remarked. 'There isn't any,' said the March Hare. 'Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it,' said Alice angrily. 'It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited,' said the March Hare. 'I didn't know it was *your* table,' said Alice: 'it's laid for a great many more than three.' 'Your hair wants cutting,' said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech. 'You should learn not to make personal remarks,' Alice said with some severity: 'it's very rude.' The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he *said* was 'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?' (1982, p55)

Aside from the evident hostility in not making Alice welcome at the table, and for being highly critical of her appearance (remarking about her manners too), one gets a sense of the suppression of violence. Carroll seems to address that the exchanging of pleasantries is oftentimes a *façade*, which serves to disguise the real objectives of the speakers. One can extend this and say that although the actual words are not 'violent' in nature, they give rise to the possibility of violent thought and action. Even Alice's forcing her presence on the other characters expresses something more. She doesn't accept the rebuttal and joins them disregarding their protests that there is not enough room.

Surely the Victorians would have adopted the Grecian (or at least a similar system) conversational etiquette, revelling in the structured, rational playing out of discussion. Carroll undermines the idea of the ordered conversation and shows that a conversation is, on some level, an intellectual contest. The Red Queen, who regards herself as

somewhat of an elocution expert and Alice's tutor in manners, lays down one of the rules of Looking-Glass dialogue. The Red Queen describes the Grecian idea of 'fair play' during a conversation, and in this way Carroll reveals the absurd sticking to any type of conversational formula.

'Speak when you're spoken to!' the Queen sharply interrupted her. 'But if everybody obeyed that rule,' said Alice, who was always ready for a little argument, 'and if you only spoke when you were spoken to, and the other person always waited for *you* to begin, you see nobody would ever say anything, so that-' 'Ridiculous!' cried the Queen. 'Why, don't you see, child-' here she broke off with a frown, and, after thinking for a minute, suddenly changed the subject of conversation (1982, p192).

Carroll demonstrates time and again in the two texts that while conversation may be externally civil, there is an underlying violence and words betray our motives. People generally want theirs to be the accepted view, and while still listening to another's arguments, we are devising verbal counter-attacks. Definitely, we understand that there is "the violence of insinuation and threat, as the opponents try to gain the most favourable position, always threatening to give way to physical violence" (Lecercle, 1990, p254). One has only to consider the episode with the Caterpillar to see this idea in action. In fact, the vast majority of dialogue Alice engages in is argumentative, and has a verbal combative quality to it.

The Lecercle quote above has been lifted from a trenchant commentary about a near-confrontation between the King of Hearts and the Cheshire Cat, but applies to most other dialogues in the texts. But, as Lecercle points out, it is not only the otherworldly characters who have learnt the art of deceitful conversation (remember the Duchess), for Alice too is an expert at maintaining a façade of polite dialogue. Seemingly innocuous words veil darker (psychological) intentions as well as serving a self-preserving function. " 'How do you like the Queen?' said the Cat in a low voice. 'Not at all,' said Alice: 'she's so extremely-' Just then she noticed that the Queen was close behind her, listening: so she went on '-likely to win, that it's hardly worth while finishing the game'" (1982, p67).

We see that she is about to say something negative, and transforms this into a compliment, obviously worried about losing her head. Everyone is familiar with this scenario, of being 'caught out', about to say something negative about the eavesdropper or new arrival to the conversation. She uses what Lecercle calls 'syntactic skill'. He writes that, "The subjective judgement on the Queen becomes an

apparently objective judgement on her performance. The well-bred Victorian miss is a consummate hypocrite. So she must be, if she is to survive in the world of conversation, where survival of the most eloquent is the rule” (Lecerle, 1990, p251).

Nina Auerbach expands upon the aspect of verbal aggression, proposing that Alice is led through Wonderland by her subconscious desires - she erupts into violent poetry because she wants to dominate the other creatures and be an authoritarian adult figure. Alice subverts her literary knowledge time and again. When she repeats ‘You are Old, Father William’ to the Caterpillar the poem adopts a violent twist in the final stanza, as Father William threatens to kick his son down the stairs. The Gryphon and the Mock Turtle hear Alice’s version of ‘Tis the Voice of the Sluggard’. In the second stanza she describes how an Owl and a Panther are sharing a pie together, and the suggestion is that the Owl becomes the next course for its companion.

When the pie was all finished, the Owl, as a boon,
Was kindly permitted to pocket the spoon:
While the Panther received knife and fork with a growl,
And concluded the banquet by- (1982, p83)

At this point she is interrupted by the Gryphon, who, it seems, anticipates what Alice’s conclusion to the poem will be.

In summation, when exploring Carroll’s satirical observations about the English language system, there are many examples to choose from, and many linguistic concepts to be explored. I have, essentially, attempted to cover what I feel are the key areas of concern - namely that for Carroll, *meaning* is not fixedly attached to words and labels are unreliable and not determinant of a thing’s essence. Carroll reminds the reader that the English language is a system of signs and words and it has flaws like any other system. One might call him a forerunner to the linguistic revolution attributed to Saussure, since he shares the belief that “the linguistic sign, whether spoken or written, acquires its meaning, its significance, from conventions. On this view, meaning is a matter of *nomos* or institution rather than *physis* or nature” (www.humesociety.org/hs, 1986, p99). Finally, he demonstrates that conversation, as part of this linguistic system, is based on the same arbitrary conventions.

Bibliography

Primary Source:

Carroll, Lewis (1982 edition). Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass. Great Britain, Suffolk: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd

Gray, Donald J (1992). Alice in Wonderland: Authoritative Texts of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Secondary Sources:

Attebery, Brian (1992). Strategies of Fantasy. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Azar-Luxton, Grizéll (ed)(1998). "Oxford in Wonderland". Cape Librarian, Vol 42: Number 3. Pages 8-18. South Africa.

Coveny, Peter (1967). The Image of Childhood. Hammondswoth: Cox & Wyman Ltd.

Egoff, Sheila, Stubbs, Gordan, Ashley, Ralph, and Sutton, Wendy (1996). Only Connect. Toronto, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eliot, TS (ed Eliot, Valerie) (1961). T.S. Eliot: Selected Poems. London: Faber and Faber Limited.

Fisher, John (ed) (1973). The Magic of Lewis Carroll. Great Britain: Butler and Tanner Ltd.

Freeman, Michael (1999). Railways and the Victorian Imagination. New Haven

and London: Yale University Press.

Geer, Jennifer. 2003. " 'All Sorts of Pitfalls and Surprises': Competing Views of Idealized Girlhood in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books". *Children's Literature* 31 (2003) 1-24. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/Children's_literature/v031/31.1geer.html. 27/08/2003. Hollins University.

Gettings, Fred (1990). *The Secret Lore of the Cat*. London: Grafton Books.

Gilmour, Robin (1981). *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd.

Houghton, Walter E (1957). *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-70*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Hudson, Derek (1958). *Lewis Carroll*. London: Unwin Brothers Limited.

Hunt, Peter (ed) (1995). *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hunt, Peter (ed) (1996). *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*. London, New York: Routledge.

Jackson, Mary V (1989). *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic: Children's Literature in England From its Beginnings to 1839*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Jackson, Rosemary (1981). *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen & Co.

Jenkins, Elwyn R (ed) (1981). "Death in Children's literature". *Crux: A Journal On the Teaching of English, Vol 15: number 2*. Pages 25-37. South Africa: Foundation of Education, Science and Technology.

- Khorana, Meena (ed)(1996). Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 163: British Children's Writers, 1800-1880. Detroit, Michigan: Broccoli Layman Clark Books.
- Lecerle, Jean-Jacques (1990). The Violence of Language. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lecerle, Jean-Jacques (1999). Interpretation as Pragmatics. Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Lennon, Florence Becker (1947). Lewis Carroll. London: William Clowes and Sons, Limited.
- Little, Edmund (1984). The Phantastes: Studies in JRR Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, Mervyn Peake, Nikolov Gogol and Kenneth Graham. Amersham, Bucks: Avebury Publishing Company.
- Lurie, Alison (1990). Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: Subversive Children's Literature. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.
- Marsden, Gordon (ed)(1990). Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives In Nineteenth-Century Society. London: Longman Inc.
- McCoy, Kathleen and Harlan, Judith (1992). English Literature From 1785. USA, Boston: Harper-Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Mellor, Anne K (1980). English Romantic Irony. Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.
- Miller, Alice (1983). For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-Rearing. Great Britain, London: Faber & Faber Limited.
- Miller, Andrew H and Gray, Donald (eds)(1994). "Philosophy of Nonsense: The

Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature, By Jean-Jacques Lecercle”.
Victorian Studies, Volume 38, Number 1. Pages 621-3. USA, Bloomington:
Indiana University.

Miller, Andrew H and Gray, Donald (eds)(1995). “Child-loving: The Erotic
Child and Victorian Culture”. Victorian Studies, Vol 39, Number
1. Pages 468-471. USA, Bloomington: Indiana University.

Miller, Andrew H and Adams, James Eli (eds)(1998/9). “Lewis Carroll: A
Portrait With Background, By Donald Thomas”. Victorian Studies, Vol 42,
Number 1. Pages 182-3 .USA, Bloomington: Indiana University.

Milligan, Barry (1995). Pleasures and Pain: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth
Century British Culture. USA: University Press of Virginia.

Nevius, Blake (ed)(1982-3) “The Impact of Victorian Children’s Fiction”.
Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Volume 37. Pages 240-2. Los Angeles and
London: University of California Press.

Nevius, Blake (1982-3). “The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to
Victorian Fantasies for Children”. Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol 37.
Pages 497-530. Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Ostry, Elaine. 2003. “Magical Growth and Moral Lessons; or, How the Conduct
Book Informed Victorian and Edwardian Children’s Fantasy”. The Lion and
the Unicorn 27.1 (2003)27-56. [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/
lion_and_the_unicorn/v027/27.lostry.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/lion_and_the_unicorn/v027/27.lostry.html). 27/08/2003.
The John Hopkins University Press.

Prickett, Stephen (1979). Victorian Fantasy. Great Britain: The Harvesters
Press Limited.

Rooke, Patrick (1970). The Age of Dickens. Hassocks, Sussex: Wayland Publishers Ltd.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang (1980). The Railway Journey –Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century. Oxford, Oxon: Basil Blackwell.

Sherer, Susan. 1996. "Secrecy and Autonomy in Lewis Carroll". *Philosophy and Literature* 20.1 (1996) 1-19.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/philosophy_and_literature/v020/20.1sherer.html
27/08/2003. The John Hopkins University Press.

Sigler, Carolyn. 1998. "Authorizing Alice: Professional Authority, the Literary Marketplace, and Victorian Women's Revisions of the *Alice* Books". *The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.3 (1998) 351-163.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/lion_and_the_unicorn/v022/22.3sigler.html
(1998). 27/08/2003. The John Hopkins University Press.

Street, Brian V (1975). The Savage in Literature. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Tennyson, G.B and Wortham, Thomas (ed)(1993-4). "Charles Kingsley, H.G. Wells, and the Machine in Victorian Fiction". Nineteenth-Century Literature, Volume 48. Pages 212-239. _Los Angeles: University of California.

Turner, Paul (1989). English Literature: 1832-1890. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<http://www.Humesociety.org/hs> (1986). "Hume and Derrida". 31/07/ 2003.