

ALICE IN WONDERLAND: A SUMMARY OF SELECTED CRITICISM
AND AN EXPLICATION

A THESIS

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PREFACE

There are two types of people who read Alice in Wonderland, by far the larger group being those who relegate Lewis Carroll's book to their "best loved" list, putting it in their book shelf next to the works of Edna St. Vincent Millay and ten years installments of Reader's Digest Books of the Month. Then there are the Carroll critics. These readers do not "love" Alice in Wonderland; they do not cherish it or condescend its contents. Instead they study the book as a serious work of art worthy of serious consideration. I wish to emphasize that I agree with the second group of readers. The purpose of this thesis is to achieve an accurate and, as far as possible, an objective study of Alice in Wonderland by an explication which takes into account various critical viewpoints.

Chapter one is essentially biographical. In it I consider four aspects of Carroll's personality which are pertinent in giving the reader clues to the reading of Alice. These four aspects of his personality are his sense of humor, his rage for order, his logical mind, and his fondness for little girls. Each of these is important to Alice in Wonderland in that each contributes to an understanding of the peculiar combination of elements found in the book. His sense of humor is present in Alice, and it keeps the book from becoming pure nightmare. Carroll's rage for order in life helps explain his interest in the

order or lack of order in Wonderland. His logical mind contributed to the topsy-turvy logic in Alice, and of course his interest in little girls lead to the creation of Alice herself.

Chapter two is a selective survey involved with a group of critics who interpret Alice in Wonderland as satire and allegory. These critics range from arguing that Alice is a topical political and religious allegory to interpreting the book as a metaphorical version of growing up. These more general interpretations are especially helpful in showing that Alice is a child faced with a complex world.

Chapter three revolves around Carroll's use of logic and language in Alice in Wonderland. Here one discovers that the book's form is the illogical assumption that a child can go down a rabbit hole, and yet neither the reader nor Alice "forget" basic logical rules of time and space. In Wonderland both logic and language are relative to each character.

Chapter four attempts to synthesize the information collected in the first three chapters. It is an explication of the book which deals with Alice as a child's dream-vision of a relative world. Alice is an intelligent child with good sense who judges Wonderland as she moves through its absurd places and characters. But, because she cannot adjust to Wonderland's absurdities, she becomes aggressive and hostile, finally destroying Wonderland's insane order to save her own sanity. The book's final irony is the

narrator's paradoxical denial and affirmation of order.

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CHAPTER I

SOME BIOGRAPHY OF IMPORTANCE

. . . with a faint smile lighting his [the White Knight's] gentle foolish face, as if he enjoyed the music of his song, he began.

A college theater director once instructed one of his students that her motivation for the part she was rehearsing was penis envy. She struggled through rehearsal after rehearsal trying to isolate feelings of penis envy in order to follow the director's instructions, but her work was in vain. She concluded that subconscious motivation was worthless in the theater. She could no more remember penis envy, and thereby transfer such an abstraction into usable concrete motivation, than she could remember her birth trauma. Much the same is true of psychological critics who try to psychoanalyze a dead author in terms of his work. For example, Dr. Phyllis Greenacre came to an amazing discovery about Gulliver's Travels. She analyzed Gulliver and determined that he not only had an anal personality, but, alas, an anal fixation. Her proof rests on Gulliver's preoccupation with flatulence and defecation throughout his travels.¹ Perhaps she is right in her interpretation of Gulliver, but a problem arises. She uses her knowledge of Gulliver to conclude that Swift himself had an anal fixation which unconsciously

¹Phyllis Greenacre, Swift and Carroll, p. 40.

motivated him to create an anal Gulliver. She, like the college director, has arrived at an ambiguous unconscious motivation and applied it to a concrete work of art. And, like the student actress, the reader finds himself in the impossible situation of using such information in understanding the work.

Lewis Carroll, like Swift, Joyce, Kafka, and a myriad of other authors who have written in the form of the dream vision, has been subjected to many psychological biographies.² This is not to denounce all biographical criticism of Carroll, however, as there are facts about his life which are pertinent in understanding how his Alice books came to be written, and in giving clues to the reading of Alice in Wonderland. This information is pertinent in that it is factual and concrete rather than psychological conjecture.³ Essentially,

²It is interesting to note that Alice in Wonderland had received practically no serious critical attention until the rise of Freudian critics in the early 1920's. This may account for the overwhelming emphasis on the psychoanalytic approach to the Alice books in a relatively small body of Carroll criticism.

³Because this paper will touch only lightly on psychological biography, anyone interested in pursuing the subject further will find Phyllis Greenacre's Swift and Carroll to be a most complete analysis. Her basic thesis revolves around Carroll's unresolved Oedipal complex which is responsible for the creation of such bitch goddesses as the Queen of Hearts and the Red Queen. Alice, who is a positive force in Carroll's psyche, was created as a reversal of this Oedipal complex; Alice and Carroll being proportionately the ages of Carroll and his mother during his Oedipal stage. Such poems as "Jobberwocky" and "The Hunting of the Snark" are inexplicable because the stem from Carroll's "primal scene"

there are four facets of Carroll's personality which are important to his work; his sense of humor, his rage for order, his logical, mathematical mind, and his fondness for little girls.

His Sense of Humor

Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), born in 1832 at a parsonage in Daresbury, Chesire, grew to develop the fine wit which had been in his family for four generations. From letters written by Carroll's father to Carroll when he was a boy, one can determine many similarities between the Rev. Charles Dodgson's sense of humor and that which Carroll later developed. Both men were able to laugh at themselves and society, both based much of their humor on logical inconsistencies, both often used the theme of death in their writing and both used a tone of wild nonsense and fast moving plots.⁴

which is far too powerful and painful to be expressed clearly. Other sources which discuss Carroll psychoanalytically are Paul Schilder's "Psychoanalytic Remarks on Alice in Wonderland and Lewis," The Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases, LXXXVII (1938), Martin Grotjahn's "About the Symbolization of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," The American Imago, IV (December, 1947); Florence Becker Lennon's Lewis Carroll (London, 1947), George Shelton Hubbell's "Triple Alice," Sewanee Review, XLVIII (1940), and John Skinner's "Lewis Carroll's Adventures in Wonderland," The American Imago, IV (December, 1947).

⁴Derek Hudson, Lewis Carroll, pp. 23-24.

Carroll's ten brothers and sisters were endowed with great humor, too, and throughout his life Carroll wrote and received letters full of jokes, puns, and assorted witty absurdities.⁵ But what does this sense of humor mean in terms of Carroll's art?

Humor, as we all know, requires a certain degree of objectivity. If one makes a joke on himself, he must temporarily see himself with enough detachment to put himself into the perspective of a joke. This is exactly what Carroll's humor allowed him to do.

In politics Carroll was conservative and felt great respect for the royal family. It is reported that Queen Victoria, after reading Alice in Wonderland, requested (commanded) a copy of Carroll's next book. Just a few months later she received, much to her surprise, a copy of An Elementary Treatise on Determinants by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, mathematical lecturer at Christ Church, Oxford.⁶ As much as he respected the Queen, he had enough perspective on the situation to pull such a joke. Carroll finally denied this story the year before he died, but Queen Victoria admitted it.

⁵Ibid., pp. 34-35.

⁶John Macy, "Her Majesty's Jesters," The Beakman, (April, 1931), 154.

Carroll was also capable of poking fun at the Charles Lutwidge Dodgson part of himself--the serious Oxford don, mathematics teacher and logician. Carroll constantly reverses rules of logic, mathematics, and rhetoric in Alice in Wonderland to make jokes. For example, when Alice meets the Chesire Cat, she demands proof when he says that everyone in Wonderland is mad (crazy), including her.

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

Alice didn't think that proved it at all: however, she went on: "And how do you know that you're mad?"

"To begin with," said the Cat, "a dog's not mad. You grant that?"

"I suppose so," said Alice.

"Well then," the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad."⁷

Of course the logic in this passage is fallacious, but it is Carroll's blatant misuse of a syllogistic proof that creates the humor. He parodies his artistic side, too, in Through the Looking Glass with the White Knight, a kind of self-portrait, who is seen as a gentle, ridiculous Don Quixote.⁸ Carroll, who was an amateur inventor, thought up hundreds

⁷Lewis Carroll, The Annotated Alice, p. 89.

⁸John Hinz, "Alice Meets the Don," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LII (1953), 263-264.

of gadgets such as a traveling chess board, a new method of sealing envelopes, and the famous postage stamp case.⁹

Many of Carroll's inventions are still used, but many were absurd from conception. It is Carroll's ability to laugh at his own silliness which makes this passage of the White Knight's possible.

"Well, just when I was inventing a new way of getting over a gate--would you like to hear it?"

"Very much indeed," Alice said politely.

"I'll tell you how I came to think of it," said the White Knight. "You see, I said to myself, 'The only difficulty is with the feet: the head is high enough already.' Now first I put my head on the top of the gate--then the head's high enough--then I stand on my head--then the feet are high enough, you see--then I'm over, you see."¹⁰

From the evidence available, it appears that the only area of life which Carroll would not treat jokingly was religion. Nor would he tolerate religious jokes from anyone in his company.¹¹ But the rest of his world from dreams to a calculus problem was an open target for his wit. Thus, to assume that Alice in Wonderland is an outgrowth with conscious wit of Carroll's subconscious as its control device, is to insult his artistry. Because of Carroll's humor, the upsidedown world of Wonderland is not pure horror,

⁹Martin Gardner, notes in The Annotated Alice, p. 296.

¹⁰Carroll, op. cit., p. 151

¹¹de la Mare, op. cit., p. 230.

nor pure slapstick, but an ordered, artistic view of that world seen in all of its frailties by Carroll with humorous detachment.

His Rage for Order

One of the most fascinating aspects of Carroll's character was his intense obsession for order. What internal complexities drove him to fastidious neatness is anybody's guess, but we do know that he was pre-occupied with immaculate orderly living. His interest in order and its opposite, disorder, plays an important part in Alice in Wonderland and its conflict of order and disorder. One can find in the many biographies of Carroll literally hundreds of examples of this rage for order.

Probably the most commonly cited example is Carroll's letter register which he began in 1861 and kept until he died in 1898. In this register he entered each letter he wrote or received according to date, and each entry consisted of the sender's or receiver's name, the date, and a detailed summary of the letter's content.¹² Carroll entered over 98,721 letters.¹³ He also kept a record of all his luncheon and dinner parties. These entries in his diary included the

¹²Donald Rackin, "The Critical Interpretations of Alice in Wonderland: A Survey and Suggested Reading" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, 1964), p. 29.

¹³Hudson, op. cit., p. 122.

guest list and a diagram of the seating arrangement. Carroll also kept a menu book in order to avoid serving a guest the same food served a previous visit.¹⁴ His study was arranged with each piece of furniture in precise alignment, and his entire house was meticulously clean.¹⁵ Besides a massive set of mechanical pencils, and pencil sharpeners, Carroll kept nine graduated sizes of notebook paper, so that no matter how long a letter he wanted to write, he could fill each page exactly, closing every letter at the bottom of the page.¹⁶

As he grew older, Carroll became even more eccentric. He became obsessively occupied with perfection of minute details and physical appearances. He corrected any grammatical error spoken in his presence and insisted that the people who wrote him, especially little girls, follow a set of rules which he had set down in a pamphlet on letter writing. He attended the dentist's office daily and any child who happened to be with him was forced to do the same.¹⁷

Throughout Carroll's writing career, Macmillan was his publisher. Macmillan made sizable profits from the Alice

¹⁴Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll, p. 136.

¹⁵John Skinner, "Lewis Carroll's Adventures in Wonderland," The American Imago, IV (December, 1947), 10.

¹⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁷Rackin, op. cit., p. 35.

books, Sylvie and Bruno, The Hunting of the Snark, A Tangled Tale, etc., but they undoubtedly deserved their pay because Lewis Carroll believed in perfection of all things, including the finished copies of his books. It is understandable that any author wishes his books to be produced as beautifully and flawlessly as possible, but Carroll was obsessed with perfection. He kept watch over every edition of Alice in Wonderland printed during his lifetime, and he set a precedent for correction with the first edition. Pleased on his initial contact with the first edition of Alice in Wonderland, Carroll soon changed his mind. Tenniel was unhappy with the reproduction of his prints and Carroll agreed. He immediately recalled the first edition. Charles Morgan described the uproar:

There was never an author more elaborately careful than Lewis Carroll for the details of production or one that can have more sorely tried the patience of his publisher. The beginning was harmless enough. He wanted Alice to be a table-book and thought that red would be most pleasing to childish eyes and the edges were to be cut smooth but to be ungilded--though he afterwards liked the gilding used on a new impression. He was anxious, he said, to have fifty of the two thousand copies as soon as possible, as his young friends were all growing out of their childhood so fast, and one copy was to be bound in white vellum for Alice Liddell. The edition . . . was peacefully printed by the end of June 1865, but, when forty-eight copies had been given away, a storm broke. The author, dissatisfied with the printing of the text and of the Tenniel illustrations, recalled them, and cancelled the whole edition.¹⁸

¹⁸Charles Morgan, The House of Macmillan, pp. 79-80.

Carroll's reaction was typical of his attitude toward imperfection. He would not allow flawed material to reach the public, and the following letter is his response to Macmillan over the first edition mix-up (notice that Carroll retains his wit by deliberately omitting "c" as though it were an error):

In case we have the first edition so printed from the electro-types, what should you advise me to do with regard to the 2,000 printed at Oxford? The choice seems to lie between these courses.--

- (a) reserve them till next year, to "sell in the provinces" (as has been suggested to me), or to send abroad, but keeping the price to 7/6--
- (b) sell them at a reduced price . . .
- (d) sell the whole as waste paper . . .

Of these 4 courses, (a) seems to me scarcely honest, & my own opinion inclines to (d).¹⁹

Of a later German edition which he considered badly done he wrote to Macmillan saying:

How gladly I would sacrifice double the profit which that unfortunate 3,000 copies brought in; if only I could annihilate them off the face of the earth.²⁰

And what was it that so provoked Carroll that he felt compelled to write such a letter? He had discovered a tiny black spot on the side of Alice's nose in one of Tenniel's illustrations.²¹ Such a preoccupation with this minutia

¹⁹An unpublished letter from the Rosenbach Foundation as quoted by Rackin, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁰Ibid., p. 27

²¹Ibid., p. 26

illustrates Carroll's almost pathological desire for perfection.

Morgan further describes Carroll's relationship with Macmillan giving good insight into his driving need for order:

He was fully prepared to miss the Christmas market rather than hurry an edition, and yet for all his care mistakes crept in. They became an obsession; he felt them as an old lady feels draughts. Uneven inking, cropped margins, irregular levels of opposite pages-- he missed nothing.²²

But what does all this mean? What significance did Carroll's obsession for order, even to the most minute details, have in his works? The answer to this question lies in a definition of nonsense. There are, of course, many definitions of nonsense just as there are multiple definitions for any literary genre. But there is a commonly held critical assumption about nonsense that holds true for Carroll-- nonsense is a type of irony that finds its source in incongruities. In the case of Alice in Wonderland the basic incongruity is between the appearance of order, Alice's world, and the appearance of disorder, Wonderland. Disorder is Alice's worst enemy, as Wonderland chaos threatens her orderly concept of the world, and, like Carroll, she clings tenaciously to her ways. But Carroll the man who had enough objectivity to laugh at himself, had enough nerve to create a world of chaos.

²²Morgan, op. cit., p. 81.

His Mathematical Mind

Lewis Carroll's career as a mathematician started long before his formal schooling began. Collingwood reports that when Carroll was a "very small boy" (he does not say what age) he became interested in a book of logarithms. He took the book to his father and said, "Please explain." Mr. Dodgson tried in vain to convince Carroll that he was too young to understand, but his efforts were ignored as Carroll insisted on an explanation.²³ Until he entered school, Carroll's favorite pastime was creating elaborate games and puzzles with which to entertain his brothers and sisters. At the age of twelve, Carroll entered preparatory school at Richmond. He was always a fine student and the Headmaster, Mr. Richmond, wrote the following to Carroll's parents at the end of his first year.

He has passed an excellent examination just now in mathematics, exhibiting at times an illustration of that love of precise argument, which seems to him natural.²⁴

When he was fourteen he completed his work at Richmond and transferred to Rugby where again his Headmaster, Dr. Tait, was impressed by Carroll's talents. To his father Tait wrote:

²³Collingwood, op. cit., p. 12

²⁴Ibid., p. 25.

My dear Sir, --I must not allow your son to leave school without expressing to you the very high opinion I entertain of him. I fully coincide in Mr. Cotton's estimate both of his abilities and upright conduct. His mathematical knowledge is great for his age, and I doubt not he will do himself credit in classics.²⁵

Then in 1851, Carroll went to Oxford. As always he was an outstanding student receiving first-class honors in mathematics, second in "Classical Moderations," and third in history and philosophy. He took a B. A. and M. A., became a full member of the teaching staff, and a deacon in the Church of England.²⁶ He spent the rest of his life in the academic environment of Oxford, as a mathematics teacher for twenty-five years and later as Curator of the Common Room.²⁷

In short, the center of Carroll's career revolved around mathematics and logic. Carroll's professional work, mathematical articles, pamphlets and books were, like his lectures, dry, tedious, and not particularly inspired. However, they comprise the vast majority of Carroll's published writings. In any bibliography of Carroll's work

²⁵Florence Becker Lennon, Lewis Carroll, p. 45.

²⁶Ibid., p. 52

²⁷Carroll was a poor teacher. His students said that he was dry and dull and attendance at his classes was notably scanty. Just as he never enjoyed giving a sermon, he never enjoyed teaching because of his stammer. The following is from his diary November 30th, 1881, Volume II, p. 402: "I find by my journal that I gave my first Euclid Lecture in the Lecture-room on Monday, January 28, 1856.

one can find many inviting works such as "The Fifth Book of Euclid Treated Algebraically, so far as it relates to Commensurable Magnitudes," or "The Formulae of Plane Trigonometry." But these works belong to Carroll's vocation and not his avocation, for his real enjoyment came from toying with, reversing, and bending laws of mathematics and logic. He delighted in creating puns, puzzles, and games, especially for children, in which math and logic were hidden in nonsense. One mathematician, Warren Weaver, described Carroll as a "dull . . . capable teacher of elementary mathematics,"²⁸ but explained that when Carroll tried to approach logic professionally he met with only limited success. "It was when he let logic run loose," Weaver said, "that he demonstrated his true subtlety and depth."²⁹

It consisted of twelve men, of whom nine attended. This morning I have given what is probably my last: the lecture is reduced to nine, of whom all attended on Monday: this morning being a Saint's Day, the attendance was voluntary, and only two appeared.--E. H. Morris, and G. Lavie. I was Lecturer when the father of the latter took his degree in 1858.

"There is a sadness in coming to the end of anything in life. Man's instincts cling to the life that will never end."

²⁸Warren Weaver, "Lewis Carroll: Mathematician," Scientific American, CXCIV (April, 1956), 124.

²⁹Loc. cit.

Other critics, too, have mentioned the importance of Carroll's mathematical training. John Macy reports a conversation he had with a physicist, Professor Reginald Fessendon. Fessendon explained that a mathematician is trained to see the world beyond its normal Euclidean three-dimensional world. Even in Carroll's time mathematicians were comfortable with concepts of "negative quantities and inverted values and of contracting and expanding bodies."³⁰ From a mathematician's point of view then, the logical concepts of Wonderland were not strange or ridiculous, but rather reversals of common physical laws which were well within his realm of scientific exploration. One must remember that Einstein did not pull his concepts of relativity out of thin air. He had a body of theoretical knowledge from which to build his theories. During Carroll's time the mathematical world was bursting with questions of time-space relations, finite universes, and electro-magnetism. Carroll, who was not a great mathematician but rather a fine artist, knew the implications of these mathematical theories and let them "run loose" in fiction. There are many more fine articles on Carroll as mathematician and logician which will be discussed in depth in Chapter III. Let it suffice for now to say that in his fiction Carroll drew heavily on his knowledge of logic and mathematics.

³⁰Macy, op. cit., p. 154.

All the Little Girls

That Lewis Carroll had a somewhat unusual fondness for little girls is no secret. As a matter of fact, Carroll's psychoanalytic critics have a fine roll in the mud with this bit of information. But in this study the sexual implications of Carroll's perversion is beside the point. The point is to discover how his fondness for little girls affected his writing of Alice in Wonderland.

We know that Carroll went to great pains to entertain children, and where he found himself stammering and shy upon meeting adults, he could make friends with children without the slightest fear of embarrassment. Because he enjoyed meeting little girls, Carroll kept at his home a marvelous assortment of games, puzzles, and intricate mechanical toys as a kind of enticement.³¹ He gave frequent dinner parties for two or three of his child friends and took more than one summer picnic. But perhaps the best way to understand Carroll's verbal relationship with his child friends, as this is the most crucial point concerning the conception of Alice in Wonderland, is through the letters he wrote to them. One should watch for signs of nonsense, for Carroll obviously believed that logical inconsistencies, those things which diverged from the expected, were entertaining to children.

³¹Collingwood, op. cit., p. 369.

To Isabel Standen in 1869 he wrote:

MY DEAR ISABEL,-- Though I have only been acquainted with you for fifteen minutes, yet, 'as there is no one else in Reading I have known so long, I hope you will not mind my troubling you. Before I met you in the Gardens yesterday I bought some old books at a shop in Reading, which I left to be called for, and had not time to go back for them. I didn't even remark the name of the shop, but I can tell where it was, and if you know the name of the woman who keeps the shop, and would put it into the blank I have left in this note, and direct it to her I should be much obliged A friend of mine called Mr. Lewis Carroll, tells me he means to send you a book. He is a very dear friend of mine. I have known him all my life (we are the same age) and have never left him. Of course he was with me in the Gardens, not a yard off--even while I was drawing those puzzles for you. I wonder if you saw him?

Your fifteen-minute friend,
C. L. Dodgson³²

And to a child named Magdalen in 1875:

MY DEAR MAGDALEN,--I want to explain to you why I did not call yesterday. I was sorry to miss you, but you see I had so many conversations on the way. I tried to explain to the people on the street that I was going to see you, but they wouldn't listen; they said they were in a hurry, which was rude. At last I met a wheelbarrow that I thought would attend to me, but I couldn't make out what was in it. I saw some features at first, then I looked through a telescope, and found it was a countenance; then I looked through a microscope, and found it was a face! I thought it was rather like me, so I fetched a large looking-glass to make sure, and then to my great joy I found it was me. We shook hands, and were just beginning to talk, when myself came up and joined us, and we had quite a pleasant conversation. I said "Do you remember when we all met at Sandown?" and myself said, "It was very jolly there; there was a child called Magdalen," and me said, "I used to like her a little; not much, you know--only a little." Then

³²Ibid., p. 370.

it was time for us to go to the train, and who do you think came to the station to see us off? You would never guess, so I must tell you. They were two very dear friends of mine, who happen to be here just now, and beg to be allowed to sign this letter as your affectionate friends,

Lewis Carroll and C. L. Dodgson³³

Both letters, especially the one to Magdalen, are full of nonsense which apparently delighted his child friends. After all, he wrote them to entertain little girls. And yet, the second letter, is more than just silliness. Contained within it is a deep philosophical concern--identity. Carroll studied the contents of the wheelbarrow from different points of view. First with normal vision which revealed some features, then with a telescope (a broad view) which revealed a countenance, then with a microscope (close scrutiny) which revealed a face, and finally a mirror--reflection, which revealed his identity. The identity then is multiple, for he has taken several views of himself.

So Carroll's efforts to entertain his favorite little girls led directly to his creation of Alice in Wonderland,

³³Ibid., p. 371-372.

which was written for children.³⁴ But at the same time, his nonsense was meaningful and filled with deep philosophical concerns.

³⁴The often-quoted story of Carroll's original creation of Alice in Wonderland should be mentioned, here. On July 4, 1862, Carroll took the three Liddell sisters on a rowing trip up the Thames. It was on this trip that he conceived the story of Alice and told it to the Liddell sisters. Alice was so pleased with the story that she plagued him for days until he agreed to write it down. This story is substantiated by numerous scholars, but one should be careful not to equate the original telling of the story with the final artistic product. Carroll did not complete the writing and re-writing of Alice in Wonderland until just before it was printed in 1866.

CHAPTER II

ALLEGORY, SATIRE, AND METAPHOR

There is more evidence to come yet, please your Majesty.

For some reason, perhaps because of the lure of Carroll's unusual personality, the vast bulk of Carroll criticism is in some way biographical. Chapter I was designed to establish the importance of certain biographical facts to the production of his Alice in Wonderland--to show how Carroll's wit, compulsion for order, logical mind, and inordinate interest in little girls were all essential traits in his artistic work. This is straight biography, not intended to probe Carroll's unknowable psyche or to serve as an explication of his work, but to provide clues to the reading of Alice in Wonderland.

Chapter II is designed with the book itself in mind. Because there are many allegorical and satirical readings of Alice in Wonderland, any study attempting to arrive at a final explication must certainly include a survey and evaluation of this criticism. The allegorical and satirical critics divide into two camps--those who propound a specific topical reading in terms of Carroll's religious and political activity in Victorian England, and those who interpret Alice in Wonderland as a broad allegory (or satire) on human nature.

The Topical Critics

Lewis Carroll was conservative in politics and actively interested in the religious and political affairs of his time. His political interest is well substantiated by the number of pamphlets and diary entries he wrote about the affairs of Church and State during his years at Oxford. Carroll was also a student of poetry. He was well versed in the classics and read avidly the works of his contemporaries. His topical critics make these facts their primary concern.³⁵ Their central thesis revolves around the discovery of certain political and church members characterized in Alice in Wonderland and determines the sources of its poetical and clerical parodies. Unfortunately, their criticism has a tendency to diminish rather than enhance Alice in Wonderland, for such criticism limits the book's scope to only a specific time and place and thereby denies its universality. Perhaps the best example of topical criticism is Shane Leslie's allegorical "Lewis Carroll and the Oxford Movement." It is the best example, not because it is the best criticism, for it is not, but because it was the first to deal with Carroll through this critical genre and clearly the most

³⁵See Shane Leslie's "Lewis Carroll and the Oxford Movement," The London Mercury, XXVIII (July, 1933), 233-239, Alexander Taylor's The White Knight, and Martin Gardner's annotations in The Annotated Alice.

absurd. Leslie's article is not in itself highly important to Carroll criticism; however, it was the catalyst and inspiration for Alexander Taylor's The White Knight which is important in Carroll criticism. Therefore, Leslie's article deserves close scrutiny.

Leslie began his essay with an honest enough question when he asked "to what extent did Lewis Carroll reflect contemporary ecclesiastical history in his famous works?"³⁶ Leslie then proceeded to cite examples of parodies written about the Oxford movement during Carroll's time and points out that "their (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland's and Through the Looking Glass') theological import has been strangely overlooked by students."³⁷ With this in mind he then decides that "it is not profane to suggest that Alice in Wonderland may contain a Secret History of the Oxford Movement."³⁸ He does not define profane, but still he is within the realm of the book and makes his point well when he describes Alice as a "Freshman Everyman" wandering through the religious halls of Victorian Oxford. After all, in allegory even Oxford can be viewed as a microcosmic world. But at

³⁶Op. cit., p. 233.

³⁷Loc. cit.

³⁸Loc. cit.

this point Leslie departed from common sense, reason, self-control, and all the attributes held sacred to good critical analysis. His words are priceless examples of the critic who forces his preconceived ideas on a work of art:

The White Rabbit, whom she immediately meets, is the type of simple English clergyman with his hold fixed like some country Rectory. When he takes his watch out of his pocket (a curious proceeding for any rabbit) he strikes a supernatural note immediately. Alice follows him down the Rabbit-hole and it will be remembered that on the way down she noticed a jar significantly labelled Orange Marmalade, which was and still is the symbol of old-fashioned Protestantism since the arrival of the immortal King of that name. Alice expected like St. Augustine that she would come out at the Antipodes with her feet in the air and walking on her head. She found herself in a low long Hall with locked doors: some of these doors were for High people and others for the Lowly. Perhaps this is ment as an allegory for the Church of England. Alice used a tiny golden key (presumably the Key of the Holy Scripture) to open the lesser door. The process of becoming High or Low is of course an Anglican acquirement or privilege and when she drinks out of the bottle labeled DRINK ME, she has taken a drink of a doctrine which makes her so small that she can pass through the Low door."³⁹

One can immediately see the absurdity of Leslie's reading. Carroll never referred to a Low door, but rather every door in the hall is normal sized while the one Alice wanted to go through was "little" not "Low."⁴⁰ The jar of Orange Marmalade was empty so Alice put it back on a shelf as she passed and, unlike St. Augustine, Alice was only worried over how to curtsy while still falling through the air. Leslie seems to have hand-picked those details useful to his thesis and

³⁹Ibid., pp. 233-234.

⁴⁰Carroll, op. cit., p. 30.

ignored these which were not.

Perhaps the most efficient method of summarizing the remainder of Leslie's article is simply to list the allegorical counterparts which he "proves" in his essay. For Alice in Wonderland we find that:

1. The cake is the Cake of Dogma.
2. The mouse is a Church mouse.
3. Dinah the cat is a Catholic, the Church mouse's enemy.
4. Alice's Scotch terrier is a Presbyterian, also the Church mouse's enemy.
5. The Duchess is the White Rabbit's Bishop.
6. The Mouse's tale is a sermon on Predestination.
7. The Caterpillar is a symbol of Oxford Philosophy (i.e., Dr. Jowett).
8. The Queen is the House of Commons.
9. The Cook is Dean Stanley.
10. The Chesire Cat is Cardinal Wiseman.
11. The Chesire Cat's grin is "that grin of satisfaction with which the Papal Curia have always regarded Anglican affairs."⁴¹
12. The March Hare is the Low Church.
13. The Hatter is the High Church.
14. The Dormouse is the congregation.
15. The garden is the Garden of Preferment.

⁴¹Leslie, op. cit., p. 235.

Leslie went on to violate Through the Looking Glass in precisely this same manner, and ended his paper by saying, "We suggest that Lewis Carroll had all of this and a great deal more at the back of his mind when he wrote his two masterpieces."⁴² One cannot help but think that to create the intricate allegory which Leslie implies he did, Carroll would have had all of this at the front of his mind.

When Alexander Taylor picked up Leslie's method of interpreting Alice in Wonderland, he was somewhat more judicious in his explanation of the allegory. He disagreed with Leslie that the allegory was consistent from beginning to end but rather wrote, "The story grew out of separate bits and pieces linked together more by association of ideas than by cause and effect."⁴³ The only real disagreement, however, is in deciding the author's intention. While Leslie said Carroll intended an allegory of the Oxford Movement, Taylor said he did not actually intend it, but the book just came out that way. One could ask, and with perfectly good grounds, how either man got the inside information on Carroll's intentions as they both wrote long after his death.⁴⁴ Taylor was

⁴²Ibid., p. 239.

⁴³Taylor, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁴Carroll died January 14, 1898. Leslie wrote in 1933 and Taylor in 1952.

also slightly more judicious (perhaps laborious is a better word) in his interpretation of the allegory he found, but he always ended up at the same place as Leslie. Rather than just say that the garden is the Garden of Preferment as Leslie did, Taylor said that because the garden "was a symbol of happiness or fulfillment" for Alice, then it must have been the Garden of Preferment.⁴⁵ Taylor admittedly goes beyond a pure allegorical approach in his book, for a large section is devoted to Carroll's biography and correspondence. But both he and Leslie commit the same errors---they diminish Alice in Wonderland as a work of art and they manage to stifle every ounce of humor in the book. One critic explains that "they take a no-nonsense attitude toward Carroll's nonsense."⁴⁶ Derek Hudson responds to Taylor's book in the following manner:

It is not surprising that such an unusual tour de force as the "Alice" books should have aroused enormous curiosity and stimulated a minute examination of the text, an occupation harmless enough so long as it was treated humorously and taken not too seriously Nonsense lends itself particularly to an endless search for hidden meanings. But when we are told, as we have been told, in The White Knight by Alexander L. Taylor (1952), that the books are laced throughout with intentional references to religious and academic controversy, the joke has gone too far.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Taylor, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁶Charles Matthews, "Satire in the Alice Books," Criticism, XII (Spring, 1970), 105.

⁴⁷Hudson, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

One would be a fool to deny the possibility of any political or religious references in Alice in Wonderland. After all, Carroll lived in a time of social upheaval and he was interested in the controversies. Some of that interest undoubtedly showed up in his art. However, the purpose of this paper is to find useful criticism which will lead to an explication of Alice in Wonderland, not to examine the book for possible topical references which would be of little help in understanding the book as a whole.

Another area of topical criticism, which has no specific critical proponent, but which pops up in every major biography and receives close attention in Martin Gardner's annotation, is poetical parody. This criticism entails the relatively simple process of discovering what poem was parodied in the poetry of Alice in Wonderland. Only two of the ten poems in Alice in Wonderland are not parodies. Perhaps all that needs to be said on this subject is that, although it supplements one's enjoyment to know a poem is being parodied, it is not necessary to either the essential understanding or the humor in the poems. They are remarkable for their ability to stand alone. At one point Carroll, too, believed that the poems would be meaningless if people did not know the source of parody and when considering editions translated into French he wrote to Macmillan:

verses would be the great difficulty as I fear, if the originals are not known in France, the parodies would be unintelligible; in that case they had better perhaps be omitted.⁴⁸

The poems were not omitted, however, and the book was still a success in France. Obviously Carroll felt that the parodies were important, and no student of Carroll can afford to ignore them, but people can and do read Alice in Wonderland with no knowledge of the poetic parodies and miss little of the book's meaning.⁴⁹ Like the topical references, a study of specific poetic parodies is beyond the scope of this paper. However, one should be aware of these areas of criticism, as they serve as a springboard to the more general allegorical and satirical readings of Alice in Wonderland.

General Allegory and Satire

Far more useful and constructive than the critics of topical allegory are those critics who interpret Alice in Wonderland as an allegory or satire concerning a general view of the Victorian age and the child living in it, or

⁴⁸Collingwood, op. cit., p. 191

⁴⁹For an explanation of each parody see Gardner's The Annotated Alice. The opening poem "All on a Golden Afternoon" and "The Mouse's Tale" are not parodies. The others, "How Doth the Little Crocodile" (p. 38), "Father William" (p. 69), "Speak Roughly to Your Little Boy" (p. 84), "The Mock Turtle's Song" (p. 133), "'Tis the Voice of the Lobster," (p. 139), "I Passed by His Garden" (p. 140), "Beautiful Soup" (p. 141), and "They Told Me You Had Been to Her" (p. 158), are all parodies and are fully explained by Gardner.

even more general, the child in any adult world which leads to general metaphor. The critics who write about Alice in Wonderland as allegory and satire often make no distinction between the two terms. But as a general rule, allegory can be considered as a one to one relationship between the physical and symbolic aspects of the work. Such an allegorical reading interprets Alice as a child trying to grow up in an adult world. Satire, on the other hand, involves poking or prodding some particular aspect of the world as presented in Alice such as a jab at Victorian social decorum. It will be shown later that both of these readings are metaphorical.

Such a broad allegorical and satirical view of Alice in Wonderland helps explain its universal popularity and treats the book as an aesthetic unified whole rather than breaking it into fragments of historical facts. In short, these critics are interested in discovering not "a secret history of the Oxford Movement," but the secret of the book itself. Both Charles Matthews and Henry Seidel Canby belong to this group, and while both have written articles helpful toward a final explication of Alice in Wonderland, neither critic takes the book to its deepest metaphorical level: both limit the book to Victorian allegory and satire but neither is as specific as the topical critics.

Charles Matthews, in his excellent article on Alice

in Wonderland, sees Alice as a "norm . . . the embodiment of Victorian practicality."⁵⁰ He emphasizes the Victorian practice of observing proper etiquette and of dogmatically pounding rules into the heads of children. In Victorian England there was a rule for everything, and Matthews gives good evidence to show the satiric exposure of Victorian etiquette in Alice in Wonderland. However, Matthews only propounds a theory and does not apply it to the book, nor does he understand the implications of his theory in terms of the book as a unified whole. Therefore, it is valuable to apply Matthew's theory to the book.

One of Alice's primary concerns as she falls down the rabbit hole is falling clear through the earth. She is not worried about being hurt, but rather how she should curtsy while falling through the air--she would happen to end up in New Zealand. Then she thinks to herself, "Perhaps I shall see it written up somewhere."⁵¹ Of course, she will not find an etiquette book in Wonderland, for rules of behavior are relative there, but throughout most of the book Alice clings to the Victorian notion of proper behavior. She chastises herself when she is rude to some Wonderland character even though they are consistently rude to her.

⁵⁰Matthews, op. cit., p. 109

⁵¹Carroll, op. cit., p. 48.

Alice is perplexed by other modes of behavior such as the Caterpillar's verbal aggressiveness, which she considers improper, or the rules of the Queen's croquet game which are unlike the Rules Alice has learned. However, it is important to remember that Alice does not remain static as she moves through Wonderland. She changes her attitude toward a number of things, not the least among them is etiquette. At the end of the book when Alice becomes infuriated with the trial over who stole the tarts, she loses control:

"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. "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"⁵²

At this point Alice has rejected all those prescribed modes of behavior in the Victorian social decorum and has acted in terms of her own set of rules.

In another excellent article, Henry Seidel Canby sees Alice in Wonderland as a slightly different kind of

⁵²Carroll, op. cit., p. 161.

satire. He emphasizes the fact that the Victorian people believed in solidarity. There was, according to Canby, "a general agreement that everyone knew what was reality."⁵³

When one applies Canby's theory to the book, he finds that in Wonderland reality becomes multiple realities with each creature seeing the world in a different way. The physical laws of Alice's Victorian reality disappear and thus, Alice can change size, animals can talk, little boys can turn into pigs, and Chesire Cats can disappear. Alice is in a constant state of dismay because what she considered real and absolute becomes quite relative. Soon after her entrance into Wonderland she says:

Dear, dear: How queer everything is today. And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been 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.⁵⁴

Once Alice's perception of reality is destroyed, she must, of course, begin to question her identity because all her old frames of reference are gone.

Canby and Matthews both give important insights into reading Alice in Wonderland, but they fail to make the connection that would take Alice in Wonderland beyond a

⁵³Henry Seidel Canby, Introduction to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, p. x-xi.

⁵⁴Carroll, op. cit., p. 37.

specifically Victorian referent to a universal conflict. They fail to point out that any society has rules of etiquette, and therefore Alice need not simply be a Victorian child, but a child from any time, and that every person has a perception of reality which, if destroyed, causes great distress. Other critics have seen Alice as a universal child, however, and William Empson's explanation of Alice in Wonderland is one of the most interesting in all of Carroll criticism.

Empson writes about Alice in his book English Pastoral Poetry. He establishes a definition of pastoral which simply means any literature which is not proletarian. In other words, literature which is not propagandist in its complete acceptance or rejection of a convention. In a true pastoral the conflict derives from two viewpoints of a convention, both pro and con without a denial of either; therefore, two ingredients are needed--a swain who is a naive but clear-eyed observer who adopts an attitude toward the sometimes cruel and irrational world and the conventional attitude that the swain observes. Neither attitude is entirely right or wrong in a pastoral, and both are subject to satirical exploitation.

In his chapter on Alice in Wonderland, Empson explains Alice's role as swain. She is "child-become-

judge"⁵⁵ who is the stoic observer of the chaotic life she sees going on around her, and she is trying to grow up. Growing up, Empson believes, is the universal problem in Alice in Wonderland and he considers her changing size proof of this theme.

. . . it is the small observer, like the child, who does least to alter what he sees and therefore sees most truly Children like to think of being so small that they could hide from grown-ups and so big that they could control them, and to do this dramatizes the great topic of growing up, which both Alice's keep to constantly.⁵⁶

So, according to Empson's theory of pastoral, both the child's world and the adult's world are subject to satire in Alice in Wonderland and the satire is universal.

Another critic, George S. Hubbell, presents very much the same view as Empson. Hubbell sees Alice as a wise child who exposes the adult world. He says, "In Lewis Carroll's nonsense world, we are privileged to see our familiar adult society . . . through the thoughts of the wise child Alice."⁵⁷ In other words, Alice offers a sane vision of an insane world.

All the chattering creatures of adulthood, coming in contact with the touchstone mind of Alice, fall to the level of the March Hare and the Mad Hatter. Thus for once we get a sane view of society.⁵⁸

⁵⁵William Empson, English Pastoral Poetry, p. 253.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 267.

⁵⁷George S. Hubbell, "The Sanity of Wonderland," Sewanee Review, XXXV (October, 1927), 392-393.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 393.

But, unlike Empson, Hubbell takes sides with Alice. Rather than accept the pastoral theory that neither Alice nor the conventional world is all right or all wrong, Hubbell defends Alice.⁵⁹

Richard Morton, another critic of the general satirical and allegorical school, views Alice as the child trying to find meaning in an adult world. Morton's argument is unconvincing. He denies any structural unity in Alice in Wonderland and speaks in terms of Alice's "return to reality,"⁶⁰ without ever arriving at a definition of reality. He simply accepts Alice's world on the river bank as the "real" world making Wonderland the "unreal" world. This is a grave critical error, for much of the point in Alice in Wonderland is to deny any "real" world. However, Morton makes one very good point in his study of Alice in the adult world. He explains the ending of Alice as "a symbolic representation of the maturing child's revolt."⁶¹ If Alice, the only child in a world of adults, can perceive them as just a pack of cards thereby losing her fear of their authority,

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 387-398.

⁶⁰Richard Morton, "'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking-Glass,'" Elementary English, XXXVIII (December, 1960), 513.

⁶¹Loc. cit.

she definitely accomplishes a revolt.⁶²

At this point it seems necessary to make a distinction which none of the critics cited in Chapter II have seen fit to do. Each refers to his point of view as allegory, but none defines allegory. Allegory traditionally refers to a one-to-one relationship between an abstract and a concrete just as Leslie tried to do with his allegorical view of Alice in Wonderland. The Hatter is the High Church. But that is not exactly what Empson and the other "general" allegorical critics have done. They have proposed that Alice is a specific representation for childhood, and yet childhood carries much broader connotations than the specific High Church. Alice in Wonderland is the total of Alice's personality and is therefore too broad to be straight allegory. Metaphor, on the other hand, involves more than the allegorical one-to-one relationship. It contains a one-to-x relationship involving an expansion of the original concrete representative into a concept that is vastly complex. So what the "general" allegorical critics have actually proposed are metaphorical readings of Alice in Wonderland in which childhood is a complex state of affairs.

⁶²For more critical information concerning Alice as an allegorical child among adults see Florence Becker Lennon's Lewis Carroll, Harry Morgan Ayres' Carroll's Alice and Doris Benardete's "Alice Among the Professors," Western Humanities Review, V (1951), 239-247. These give only slight variations from Empson, Hubbell, and Morton, but they are well worth reading.

CHAPTER III

LOGIC AND LANGUAGE

"Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin," thought Alice; "but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life."

It was Carroll's interest in little girls that enabled him to write a book about a child in an adult's world, but it is his logical mind and sense of humor that let him expand Wonderland into an experience of logic and language as well. Many writers during Carroll's time wrote books about the trials of children growing up,⁶³ but few achieved the deep complexity of logical philosophical thought and language that Carroll did, nor his delightful "catch" in the use of logic and language.

In Wonderland logic is relative. What seems logical to the Queen of Hearts ("cut off his head!") does not seem logical to the Chesire Cat who has only a head with no body from which to cut it; therefore, one is faced with finding a logical fulcrum in order to catch the jokes. In other words, Alice is part of this fulcrum for she is conventional, but the main burden is on the reader himself. Carroll depended on his reader's having a commonly held view of the normal

⁶³For example, Charles Dicken's Oliver Twist, Martha Sherwood's The Fairchild Family (three books), Martha Sherwood's Henry Milner, and Carroll's friend George McDonald's At the Back of the North Wind.

physical world and language. It is this common understanding that he plays on. So throughout Alice in Wonderland logic and language work on two levels: the relativism of Wonderland and the disparity between Wonderland's logic and language and the reader's. The reader is forced into accepting--no, actually believing like Alice--that he is in Wonderland and thereby accepting the book's basic structure of false logic. But the reader, like Alice, retains his memory of what he believes to be absolute, and the two points of view clash throughout Alice in Wonderland. In this framework logic does not mean a set of formal rules, but an accepted standard of reality which the reader and Alice invariably impose on Wonderland. The resultant reaction is like an accidental chemical explosion. The chemist thinks he is mixing safe chemicals, and he is surprised when they blow up instead of settling quietly into the expected compound.

Logic

One critic says, "The timelessness of Lewis Carroll's mathematical mind saved him from the upholstery of his period."⁶⁴ Undoubtedly Carroll's logic gave Alice in Wonderland its tough-mindedness, keeping the book from

⁶⁴Canby, op. cit., p. xii.

becoming sentimental and didactic and giving Alice in Wonderland its humor. For, as Peter Alexander explains, the humor is found in Wonderland's logical absurdity.⁶⁵ He says that the logic of Wonderland is based on a false proposition "that small girls can go down rabbit-holes and find a world peopled with strange creatures."⁶⁶ From this first proposition, all other illogicalities follow logically. Alexander points out that "Carroll's training in logic . . . showed him how to construct a setting within which inconsistency would appear inevitable, and so convincing . . ."⁶⁷ Katherine Anne Porter in trying to decide how Carroll managed to be so convincing supports Alexander: "Alice takes place in everyday life. The little glass table with the key on it, and the furniture and the gardens and the flowers, the clock--they were all things we knew."⁶⁸

Alexander's central concern is in discovering why people laugh when they are faced with this Wonderland world which seems both sane and insane, simultaneously. He says,

⁶⁵Peter Alexander, "The Logic and the Humor of Lewis Carroll," Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, VI (1951), p. 552.

⁶⁶Loc. cit.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 551.

⁶⁸Katherine Anne Porter, Bertrand Russell, and Mark Van Doren, "Lewis Carroll: Alice in Wonderland," a radio panel discussion in The New Invitation to Learning, p. 208.

"We are amused at the contrast between the new inevitability and the old."⁶⁹ But this explanation seems shallow and later in his article Alexander revised his statement explaining that laughter may occur "because we are embarrassed when the naked body of our reasoning is shown to us."⁷⁰ Or, as Edmund Wilson much more clearly states, "The mysteries and the riddles, the gibberish that conveys unmistakable meanings, are all based upon relationships that contradict the assumptions of our conscious lives but that are lurking not far behind them."⁷¹

Many critics have discussed the specific logical fallacies in Alice in Wonderland, rendering highly technical readings. Although these readings are interesting, they are of little help in discovering the broad nature of Carroll's use of logic and how this logic "means" in Alice in Wonderland.⁷² For this one must turn to the text.

⁶⁹Alexander, op. cit., p. 552.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 566

⁷¹Edmund Wilson, "C. L. Dodgson: The Poet Logician," The Shores of Light, p. 545.

⁷²Technical approaches to Carroll's use of logic can be found in R. B. Brithwaite's "Lewis Carroll as Logician," Mathematical Gazette, XVI (July, 1932), pp. 174-178; D. B. Eperson's "Lewis Carroll, Mathematician," Mathematical Gazette, XVII (May, 1933), pp. 92-100; Theodore Maynard's "Lewis Carroll, Mathematician and Magician," Catholic World, CXXXV (May, 1932), pp. 193-201; and Warren Weaver's "Lewis Carroll: Mathematician," Scientific American, CXCIV (April, 1956), pp. 116-128.

Alice in Wonderland opens, as has been mentioned, with the false proposition that Alice can get down the rabbit hole. But as Katherine Anne Porter pointed out, the reader does believe the false proposition because the surroundings are familiar, and thus boundaries of reality are broken down immediately. Both Alice and the reader are vaguely disconcerted when the rabbit says, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!"⁷³ but neither is truly shocked. The narrator tells us, "When she [Alice] thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural."⁷⁴ Once boundaries of reality began to crack, relativity sets in, so while falling down the rabbit hole which she estimates to be about four thousand miles, Alice says, "After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs!"⁷⁵ At the same time notions which Alice was once sure of begin to disintegrate. "Do cats eat bats?" she wonders, or "Do bats eat cats?"⁷⁶ And remember, throughout Alice's adventures, the reader too is faced with the problem of reality. He knows that no one can eat cake to grow larger, but Alice does just that. So, he must con-

⁷³Carroll, op. cit. pp. 25-26.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 26.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 32.

clude both that one cannot eat cake and grow larger and that one can eat cake and grow larger. Carroll is careful never to let the reader forget his logical notion of reality and the second time Alice eats cake

She ate a little bit and said anxiously to herself, "Which way?", holding her hand on the top of her head to feel which way it was growing; and she was quite surprised to find that she remained the same size. To be sure, this is what generally happens when one eats cake; but 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.⁷⁷

Carroll has clearly made a normal logical assumption, that cake does not make one change size, seems to be abnormal.

He fills the book with similar logical reversals. Just as Alice thinks she has Wonderland logic button-holed, something happens to remind her that, try as she will, Wonderland cannot be ciphered out like an arithmetic problem. At one point Alice, who is sure all of Wonderland talks nonsense, is told by the Mouse, "You insult me by talking such nonsense!"⁷⁸ and tables turn on Alice. Later Alice confronts the Chesire Cat expecting him to understand her frame of reference.

"Chesire Puss," she began rather timidly, as she did not know at all whether it would like the name: however it only grinned a little wider. "Come, it's pleased so far," thought Alice, and she went on. "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 33.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 52.

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

"I don't much care where--" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.⁷⁹

But he does not understand her frame of reference, and, although the Chesire Cat's logic is undeniably sound in the conventional world, Alice is too confused to understand him. And so it goes in Wonderland. Carroll creates a constant flux of tension between a conventional acceptable logic and Wonderland logic. But he tangles the two so that they cannot be unmeshed. The result is highly significant to the overall structure of Alice in Wonderland. The reader and Alice find that conventional logic and Wonderland logic are convincing as they cannot be told apart. But all the time they are opposed, for that of Wonderland is relative while the reader's and Alice's view is absolute. At each turn in the novel Alice and the reader are forced into adopting a point of view from which to judge Wonderland. At one moment that point of view says that "anything can happen in Wonderland," but simultaneously some Wonderland character says, "No it can't," and another Wonderland creature says, "Yes it can!" Wonderland is clearly on the offensive in the game of constantly deflating any absolute vision of reality. This does make us laugh, perhaps because we do see our

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 88.

"rational" world naked.

Language

There has been only one major work written concerning Carroll's use of language. It is essentially a linguistic argument but it gives some insight into how Carroll used language, like logic, to create an absurd world. Language is extremely important in Alice in Wonderland, not for what it does communicate, but for what it does not communicate, and the purpose of this section is to study this inability to communicate. In his study Language and Lewis Carroll, Robert Sutherland devotes a great effort toward analyzing why it does not communicate. Sutherland's study is a linguistic approach in the scientific tradition of twentieth-century language study.

In the beginning of his book Sutherland states:

The bulk of his Carroll's fiction is comprised of dialogues, each of which may be conceived as a series of communication--attempts which alternate sequentially between the speakers; and the difficulties inherent in establishing communication lend themselves to humorous treatment. Moreover, the purely narrative passages are frequently devoted to his characters' involvement in linguistic processes: reasoning and solving problems, classifying and giving names to objects, testing the validity of propositions, and worrying about the nature of language.⁸⁰

There are two points made in Sutherland's statement which

⁸⁰Robert Sutherland, Language and Lewis Carroll, pp. 27-28.

are important to note. First, he said that the bulk of Carroll's fiction is dialogue which indicates that it is a fiction of immediacy. There is little straight exposition in Alice in Wonderland and no "telling." Rather, Carroll "shows," as most twentieth-century novelists do. The experience of Wonderland, then, is not filtered through a layer of ponderous narration, but happens as the reader reads. This makes it possible for the reader to be controlled by the absurd world as was discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Second, Sutherland mentions the "difficulties inherent in establishing communication." This is a fact essential to understanding Alice in Wonderland. As Sutherland mentions, the creatures in Wonderland do have an unusually great interest in language. They fret with ambiguities, puns, verbal inconsistencies, and forms of address throughout the book, but Sutherland never applies this interest to the form of Alice in Wonderland itself. He feels that Carroll's first and primary purpose in writing the book is to "amuse and entertain"⁸¹ which reminds one of Besant's Victorian criticism as presented by Henry James in "The Art of Fiction." But Alice in Wonderland is more than entertainment and amusement. Although it is entertaining and amusing, one cannot help but give Carroll credit for being more than

⁸¹Ibid., p. 228

an entertainer. He created in Alice in Wonderland a world-view of the absurd that is universal and serious as will be discussed in chapter four. But Sutherland makes an even more serious mistake when he states Carroll's secondary purpose as a warning to his readers "to pay attention to what they were saying and warning them against carelessness in their linguistic habits."⁸² [Once again one cannot forget to be wary of the intentional fallacy of reading beyond the text.] Neither Sutherland nor anyone else can guess Carroll's moral motivation for writing Alice in Wonderland. If Sutherland were right, then Alice in Wonderland would be, at least secondarily, reduced to an amusing linguistics textbook.

However, Sutherland's original observation that the creatures of Wonderland are concerned with language is valid. Alice and the Wonderland creatures have a terrible time communicating. As with logic, Alice has a conventional concept of language, but in Wonderland language is relative --to be taken as seen fit at any given moment. Communication is a serious problem in Wonderland, for no order or conventional reality can be established without language.

As long as Alice is by herself she is perfectly able to communicate--with herself. She reads the label on the bottle marked "DRINK ME" and checks in a most conventional

⁸²Ibid., p. 201.

manner to make sure it is not also marked "poison." Language functions for her in her own frame of reference. But once she encounters another creature, communication becomes and remains a grievous problem. Upon meeting the Mouse, she cannot decide how to address him for she has never spoken to a Mouse before. So Alice turns to her Latin, once the language of scholars. "A mouse--of a mouse--to a mouse--a mouse--O mouse!"⁸³ and she gets no reply. She then thought, "Perhaps it doesn't understand English."⁸⁴ Deciding it was a French mouse she says the only French she knows: "Ou est ma chatte?"⁸⁵ The mouse is immediately offended, for he understands English and French and does not find Alice at all amusing. One should note that in this, her first encounter with any of the Wonderland creatures, Alice's use of language is offensive to the Mouse. Language is, as a matter of fact, a tool of mutual offense between Alice and Wonderland creatures throughout the book. With almost every major character Alice meets, the acquaintance begins with a verbal misunderstanding. Among the most important are her meetings with the Caterpillar, the Cheshire Cat, and the guests at the Mad Tea-Party, and the trial.

⁸³Carroll, op. cit., p. 41.

⁸⁴Loc. cit.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 42.

When Alice meets the Caterpillar, her language and her identity are revealed to be inseparable:

"Who are You?" said the Caterpillar. (Notice the capital "Y" of "you.")

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.⁸⁶

The Caterpillar never does understand Alice's confused identity, nor does she ever understand why he, who must change shapes three times during his life, is not concerned with her size changes. Both have a different point of view about changing size, and neither can communicate his idea to the other.

When Alice comes to the Chesire Cat they have a short discussion as to which way Alice should go. The Chesire Cat takes Alice's questions literally and thus gets involved in a complicated conversation which could have been simple if they had been able to communicate. Finally, after the Chesire Cat's famous syllogism about mad dogs and cats (see chapter one, page 5), Alice says, "I call it

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 67.

purring, not growling;"⁸⁷ the Cheshire Cat answers, "Call it what you like."⁸⁸ Thus to the Cheshire Cat a word can mean what anybody wants it to mean.

The Mad Tea-Party is a nightmare of verbal confusion. Soon after Alice has arrived at the Tea-Party the Hatter asks Alice a riddle.

"I'm glad they've begun asking riddles--I believe I can guess that," she added aloud.

"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.

"Exactly so," said Alice.

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.

"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least--at least I mean what I say--that's the same thing you know."

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"

"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"

"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"

This is only one of several of the discussions on language that are continually being provoked by Alice and the testy

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 89.

⁸⁸Loc. cit.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 95.

Hare. Both are determined to show the other up in language ability and by doing so they find communication impossible. At this point in Alice in Wonderland, Alice's attitude toward language is still insistently conventional. But at the trial things begin to change.

At one point during the trial the King of Hearts asks Alice what she knows about the tarts that were stolen. She replies, "Nothing."⁹⁰ The King says, "That's very important,"⁹¹ and the White Rabbit steps in to correct him-- "Unimportant, your Majesty means, of course."⁹² The King cannot decide which he means. He likes the sound of both words and repeats both to himself. Each juryman writes down what appeals to him either "important" or "unimportant." "Alice could see this, as she was near enough to look over their slates; 'but it doesn't matter a bit,' she thought to herself."⁹³ Finally, Alice questions language as a means of communication and, in the case of the trial, as a means to communicate justice. One critic puts it this way: "Alice has learned to distrust her own language, a

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 155.

⁹¹Loc. cit.

⁹²Loc. cit.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 155-156.

very valuable lesson."⁹⁴

[Language as Carroll uses it in Alice in Wonderland is not a perfectable system, at least not as long as it is being spoken by Wonderland characters.] At the bottom of Wonderland's ineffectual communication, lies human imperfectability and frailty. Rankin says that Carroll's use of language in Alice in Wonderland is an "imaginative objectification of an incorrigible human condition--man's necessary dependence on what is ultimately a meaningless convention, the convention that he can use words to communicate adequately."⁹⁵

So language and logic, misshapen, reversed, nulled, and rationalized, help shape the form of Alice in Wonderland. They lead the reader to a vision of chaos and absurdity. His systems of logic and language, which he believes exist and which he functions by, are as fragile as Humpty-Dumpty and as hard to put back together. And Alice, too, the child confronted with this world finds her conflict in coming to terms with the impossibility of exact communication and all this under the control of Carroll who uses language with the morbid hilarity and ambiguity of the high good humor in Finnigan's Wake. In the next chapter one can see how form will unify the disparate elements of language and metaphor.

⁹⁴Matthews, op. cit., p. 107.

⁹⁵Rankin, op. cit., p. 216.

CHAPTER IV

AN EXPLICATION

The jury all wrote down on their slates, "She [Alice] doesn't believe there's an atom of meaning in it.

No critic has done a complete explication of Alice in Wonderland. The first three chapters of this thesis have been summaries of three critical viewpoints, biographical, metaphorical, and logical, but none of these viewpoints is complete if it stands alone. In order to understand Carroll's work with any degree of unity, all three must be bound together through explication. Alice in Wonderland is a complex novel, and while various critics have dealt with certain important aspects of its make-up, the book needs to be fused back together. All the King's horses and all the King's men have left it shattered at the base of a wall. During the trial, the White Rabbit asks the King, "Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?"⁹⁶ The King answers in his infinite wisdom, "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop."⁹⁷ This seems to be excellent advice and will therefore comprise the organization of chapter four. One can see how Alice, child-as-judge, cannot adjust to the disorder and absurd structure of Wonderland.

⁹⁶Carroll, op. cit., p. 158.

⁹⁷Loc. cit.

She is alienated and hostile in this chaotic environment and finally destroys Wonderland in order to protect her sanity.

The opening poem of Alice in Wonderland is Carroll's sentimental account of his original telling of the story. The poem's tone is opposite that of the book itself. Why Carroll included "All in the golden afternoon" and whether he wrote it before or after completing the book, is open to conjecture. But in any case the poem is not an effective counter-view of Alice which serves to emphasize the tough tone of the book itself. There is no evidence to prove that Carroll's poem is tongue-in-cheek, no matter how much one wishes it were. The poem is, unfortunately, a flaw --it is completely out of tone with the rest of the book.

The next important consideration is the narrator of Alice in Wonderland. He is not the same person who narrated the introductory poem, for the real narrator is distant from the story and not sentimentally involved. He gives the reader information about Alice in a matter-of-fact and very detached tone, and generally remains totally uninvolved except for occasional parenthetical expressions. And even these parenthetical asides are cold, detached observations about Alice. For example, in the opening of the book he tells us, "She was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth

the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies"98

This narrator does not attempt to make excuses for Alice or to gain sympathy for her, he only states facts. But because there are several of these parenthetical expressions throughout the book, the reader begins to form a concept of the narrator's personality. The narrator seems vaguely amused about Alice and Wonderland. When Alice went to see the Duchess, a footman came running out of the woods. The narrator tells us that "(she considered him to be a footman because he was in livery: otherwise, judging by his face only, she would have called him a fish)."99 In his straight narration, as well as his parenthetical asides, the narrator passes no judgments. Although he may describe characters sympathetically, he never sides with anyone in Wonderland, not even Alice. He is like the Chesire Cat, an amused observer--quite detached from the Wonderland he is describing.

There is no question that Alice in Wonderland is a dream, Alice's dream, but the question is what is the importance of the dream? Walter de la Mare states that "Dreaming is another state of being, with laws as stringent and as elastic as those of the world of nonsense."100 And another critic supports this assertion by saying, "The quality of

98 Ibid., p. 25.

99 Ibid., p. 79.

100 de la Mare, op. cit., p. 253.

nonsense is a dream quality that comes of itself

For the world of Wonderland is the world of our dreams--a world in which the logical flows from the illogical."¹⁰¹

If these statements are true, then Alice's dream is full of the logical and illogical and is, in itself, a state of being. If a dream is a state of being containing logic and illogic, then the dream is a state of paradox. Alice's dream world is one in which paradox thrives and her dream vision is a Wonderland vision of relativity, which brings us to the character of Alice herself.

Before she goes into Wonderland, Alice is an ideal Victorian child but does not remain one. She is a stereotype, to be exact--the agreeable, patient, good, put-upon, sad little Victorian girl from a sentimental novel. She is sitting on the bank with her sister. She is bored but she is not saying anything about it; she is only trying to decide if she should make a daisy-chain. It is an idyllic scene full of green grass and warm summer sun, and Alice is an ideal little girl--until she goes into Wonderland. Once she falls asleep and falls into Wonderland, Alice changes. She becomes hostile in an alien environment.

Her first frustration comes with a series of rapid size changes. She wants entrance into the beautiful garden, which will become for her a kind of Eden, but she is too

¹⁰¹Frances Wentworth Knickerbocker, "Those Nonsensical Victorians," The Bookman, LXXV (October, 1932) p. 589.

large to fit through the tiny door. So she drinks the potion marked DRINK ME and shrinks. It is at this point that she has a vision of death, thinking that she will shrink too much and end in her "going out altogether, like a candle."¹⁰² She did not go out like a candle. She did forget to get the golden key that would admit her to the garden, but she had grown too small to reach it. She tried to climb up the leg of the glass table, which was too slippery, so she "sat down and cried."¹⁰³ This is only the beginning of Alice's frustration and self-pity in Wonderland. She soon discovered a cake marked EAT ME which she decides to eat no matter what the consequences are: "Well, I'll eat it," said Alice, "and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door: so either way I'll get into the garden . . ."¹⁰⁴ But when Alice eats the cake, she grows so large that she becomes grotesque. Her body is completely distended and disproportionate. She speaks of her feet as separate entities and wonders how she will address them when she sends them a new pair of shoes at Christmas. For a moment Alice accepts the strange happenings of Wonderland and even manages to make a joke, but she checks herself immediately when she declares, "'Oh, dear,

¹⁰²Carroll, op. cit., p. 32

¹⁰³Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 33.

what nonsense I'm talking!"¹⁰⁵ Alice is truly an alien in Wonderland, for she refuses to talk nonsense, or so she believes, and she cannot adjust herself, i.e., her size, to fit into the Wonderland world. Again she is frustrated and again she cries because Wonderland will not conform to her!

Once she is thoroughly unsure of herself and her place in this Wonderland dream, she questions her identity: "Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!"¹⁰⁶ It is a puzzle that she will not be able to answer in Wonderland, but she tries. She attempts to discern her Wonderland identity in terms of the things she considers rational and true in her waking world. First she tries to work a mathematics problem: "Let me see: four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is--oh dear!"¹⁰⁷ The rules of rational mathematics do not work in this strange world so Alice decides to try geography: "London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome, and Rome--no, that's all wrong, I'm certain!"¹⁰⁸ The only thing Alice is certain of is that she is wrong. With mathematics and geography both failing,

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁰⁸Loc. cit.

Alice turns to art. She tries to recite a poem, "How doth the little busy bee," but comes out with "How doth the little crocodile." The original poem by Isaac Watts is a didactic lesson in righteous living.¹⁰⁹ Alice's poem is a poem of death--

How doth the little crocodile
 Improve his shining tail
 And pour the waters of the Nile
 On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
 How neatly spreads his claws,
 And welcomes little fishes in,
 With gently smiling jaws.¹¹⁰

Now, art will not connect Alice with her old rational world; instead everything is reversed. What was once safe and

¹⁰⁹Isaac Watt's poem goes as follows:

How does the little busy bee
 Improve each shining hour,
 And gather honey all the day
 From every opening flower!

How skillfully she builds her cell!
 How neat she spreads the wax!
 And labours hard to store it well
 With the sweet food she makes.

In works of labour or of skill,
 I would be busy too;
 For Satan finds some mischief still
 For idle hands to do.

In books, or work, or healthful play
 Let my first years be passed,
 That I may give for every day
 Some good account at last.

¹¹⁰Loc. cit.

"sane" becomes frightening, and by testing her sanity with conventional standards Alice can never discover who she is.¹¹¹ She begins to cry again and imagines what would happen if people put their heads down saying, "Come up again, dear!"¹¹² Alice thinks, "I shall only look up and say, 'Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up . . .'"¹¹³ Alice still thinks she can discover her identity from the conscious world--that she can be told from outside who she is. She is balanced between two worlds. One is the world she believes to be stable and absolute which she will impose on Wonderland, and the other is her dream world, the world of relativity, where she is faced with an environment that will not conform to her, a loss of identity, and alienation.

While Alice can never accept the Wonderland world, she is smart and she has good sense. This coupled with her alienation allows her to take on the role of judging the creatures and conventions of Wonderland in terms of her old world. She is sane and intellectually detached from all that goes on around her. In other words, Alice is a smart, tough, detached little girl who is self-centered and completely independent. For a short while Alice achieves har-

¹¹¹George Shelton Hubbell, "Triple Alice," Sewanee Review, XLVII (April-June, 1940), 187.

¹¹²Carroll, op. cit., p. 39.

¹¹³Loc. cit.

mony with nature when she begins talking with the animals she met in the pool of tears: "It seemed quite natural to Alice to find herself talking familiarly with them, as if she had known them all her life."¹¹⁴ But Alice's pure childish harmony with nature is short-lived. Alice is independent, and nothing independent can remain in harmony with nature. Nature is a balance of dependents, so Alice's unity with it can never be complete. However, once she is separated from nature she becomes intellectually detached as well.

Once detached, Alice is dangerous to Wonderland. She believes in only one order, hers. She judges the many conventions of Wonderland to be absurd, because they are not her conventions, and sets out on a journey destroying everything she finds. Her alienation from Wonderland has bred hostility. She begins her judgments and destruction with her first real social contact, the Mouse. Being unable to see relative view-points, Alice soon begins talking to him about her cat, Dinah. Alice mentions that Dinah is "such a capital one for catching mice."¹¹⁵ to which the Mouse responds saying, "As if I would talk on such a subject! Our family has always hated cats: nasty, low, vulgar things!"¹¹⁶ Feeling that she has made an error in the dis-

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 45.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 42.

¹¹⁶Loc. cit.

cussion, Alice changes the subject to a little neighbor dog who she tells the Mouse is a fine rat-killer. This time the Mouse turns pale and decides to explain to Alice why he hates cats and dogs. The poem he recites is a "long tale" written in the form of a tail in which he tells a story about a Fury and a Mouse. The poem is a death poem ending as the Fury says:

I'll try
 the whole
 cause
 and
 condemn
 you
 to
 death.¹¹⁷

The Mouse is trying to impress upon Alice that cats and dogs would kill him if they had the chance, but Alice cannot bend her way of perceiving enough to understand this. The Mouse stalks off in a huff and Alice, wishing it would come back and talk, says, "I wish I had our Dinah here. . . She'd soon fetch it back!" Alice has not caught on to a single thing the Mouse was trying to tell her. Once the Mouse is gone she starts talking to the other animals gathered around. When the Lory asks her who Dinah is, Alice replies:

Dinah's our cat. And she's a capital one for catching mice, you can't think! And oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a bird as soon as look at it!¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 51.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 53.

It just happened that Alice's audience primarily consisted of birds, all of whom make excuses for having to leave immediately. Alice says, "I wish I hadn't mentioned Dinah! Nobody seems to like her, down here, and I'm sure she's the best cat in the world!"¹¹⁹ At this point Alice begins to feel lonely again. Her inability to accept or understand another point of view leaves her isolated, and her destruction of her Wonderland is just beginning.

Next she meets the White Rabbit again. He sends her to fetch him a fan and a pair of gloves, thinking she is his servant Mary Ann. Her identity in Wonderland is most unstable. She finds his house and the gloves and fan, but on a little table she sees another bottle marked DRINK ME. Deciding she is tired of being little, Alice drinks it and grows so large that she completely fills the Rabbit's room. When Alice is little, she is in danger of either drowning or being eaten by a giant puppy, but when she is large, and thereby powerful, she finds her movements are restricted. This dilemma is just one of the many paradoxes in Wonderland which Alice finds impossible to adjust to. The White Rabbit tries crawling into the room to discover what sort of creature is boxed up in there, but Alice smacks him out the window. Next, Bill the Lizard tries to slip down the chimney and Alice sends him flying through the air with one

¹¹⁹Loc. cit.

swift kick. Her hostility toward the Rabbitt and Bill is cruel and destructive. Finally, the creatures manage to dump a barrowful of little cakes on Alice. She eats them, grows small again, and quickly runs away.

Soon Alice finds herself engaged in a conversation with the Caterpillar who insists she tell her identity. She explains that she does not know who she is because she has changed sizes too many times to be sure. The Caterpillar does not understand. He has adjusted to his environment and expects to change sizes during his life. But Alice is inflexible and, thus, maladjusted to the environment of Wonderland. The Caterpillar takes no nonsense from Alice and will not accept her confusion as valid. When she says that "three inches is such a wretched height to be,"¹²⁰ he replies indignantly, "It's a very good height indeed!"¹²¹ for he is exactly three inches long. The example above graphically illustrates Alice's confusion in the Wonderland where three inches is standard and explainable. He leaves her soon, telling her that one side of the mushroom will make her large and the other small.

First she eats a piece of the "small" side and "she felt a violent blow underneath her chin: it had

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 72.

¹²¹Loc. cit.

struck her foot!"¹²² She tries to correct her strange growth, but grows so tall that her head comes through the top of the forest, and again she is faced with a relative situation which topples her identity. A Pigeon flies out of the trees and screams "Serpent!" for Alice's neck has grown long and snake-like.

"But I'm not a serpent, I tell you!" said Alice. "I'm a --- I'm a ---"

"Well, what are you?" said the Pigeon. "I can see you're trying to invent something!"

"I--I'm a little girl," said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she'd gone through, that day.¹²³

The Pigeon finally decides, after getting Alice to admit that she had eaten eggs, that even if she is a little girl she is some sort of serpent anyway. Again Alice is not what she thinks she is. To the Pigeon she is a serpent, for it has a different point of view than Alice.

Alice goes on, facing many more relative situations, denying paradox, judging, and destroying Wonderland's insane order and then comes to the Cheshire Cat. He is the symbol of intellectual detachment who can disappear from the physical world to become pure intellect. And he has a grin making him, like Alice, an amused observer as well.

¹²²Ibid., p. 73

¹²³Ibid., p. 76

Their conversation is conducted with complete detachment, and although Alice notices that he has long claws and big teeth, she is not afraid. Intellectually, her weapons are just as good. It is interesting to note that the Chesire Cat is the only character in Wonderland that Alice does not judge as being absurd, because only when she is with the Chesire Cat, her intellectual equal, is she sure of herself. But her momentary self-assurance does not last.

Next she goes to the Mad Tea-Party and is offended by everything that happens there. The Mad Hatter and the March Hare are rude, she does not understand why they are not in time as she knows time (at the tea-party it is always four o'clock), and they insist that she be logical according to their system of logic. Alice stays for awhile, but when the Hatter suggests that she should not talk because she does not think, "she got up in great disgust and walked off."¹²⁴ And her final judgment is "At any rate I'll never go there again! It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!"¹²⁵ She judges everything that does not conform to her as being absurd.

Alice's dream becomes more of a nightmare every place she goes, and by the time the croquet game begins every social custom she has ever known is reduced to com-

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 103.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 104.

plete absurdity.¹²⁶ The croquet game is funny, but it is full of anguish as well, for Alice must do the impossible task of playing a game which has no order.

...Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed. The players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs, and in a very short time the Queen was in a furious passion, and went stamping about, and shouting, "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" about once in a minute.¹²⁷

Of course the other creatures of Wonderland find the game delightful--they are used to it, but Alice is unadjustable.

Finally, the Knave of Hearts trial begins and Alice blows Wonderland wide open. By this time she is totally detached, more rigidly infixed in her system of reality than ever, completely isolated, and openly hostile. The trial is, of course, absurd. The Queen keeps demanding sentence first, then verdict, and the King has no idea what to ask witnesses. Alice grows to her full size again (the King tries to kick her out of the court for being over one mile high) and gives her ultimate judgment: "Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!"¹²⁸ With this last decisive action, Alice destroys Wonderland to return to her own nation of reality. The dream of relativ-

¹²⁶Matthews, op. cit., p. 115.

¹²⁷Carroll, op. cit., p. 112.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 161.

ity has gone too far and Alice, who is always in control, wakes up. Objectively, as a detached observer, Alice was able to view Wonderland accurately. Even though she did not like what she saw and judged it to be absurd, she at least had the vision. But by labeling the soldiers and Kings and Queens as only a pack of cards, Alice has returned to her old subjective world. She denied what she saw to be true, that they were soldiers, and fell back on what she thought ought to be true, that they were a pack of cards. It took objective vision for her to view a relative world as a detached observer. At the same time, it was Alice's subjective judgments of her vision of relativity that destroyed Wonderland. She crippled Wonderland's absurd structure with her judgments throughout the book. She tried to put the timeless tea-party into time, she tried to stop the Duchess' morals, she tried to change the croquet game, and she ruined Wonderland's justice at the trial. Alice's judgments are right according to what she saw (the Mad Hatter is mad, the Duchess is furious, and the animals are absurd), but she is so critically detached that she is amoral.

Alice's sister tries to explain the dream away in naturalistic terms when Alice tells her about it, but the dream remains a reality unto itself. Alice's nightmare of paradox and relativity becomes an absolute through the form

of the book - this form is Carroll's genius. The detached narrator who has "ordered" the book restores Alice to sanity and order. Throughout Alice in Wonderland he has used a comedic tone of amused observer as perspective. Thus, the final joke is the narrator's arrangement of the book. He has created a world of paradox, Wonderland. Into it he put a child who cannot comprehend paradox, and then he restores order through disorder. By doing so, he both denies and affirms the existence of order in the world. In Wonderland absolutes such as physical laws become relative, and relative notions can only be viewed by Alice in terms of her own absolutes. This is the persona's final joke - the age old cosmic view of paradox.

Within this form, Alice's role is to fight for sanity in the midst of insanity. She is ruthless in her fight, but she cannot be judged as right or wrong in her actions. She must renounce and destroy Wonderland in order to keep her own identity. Alice's conflict is universal. Carroll, by removing Wonderland from familiar notions of time and space and by embodying the book's form around the universal dilemma of paradox, has created an artistic work that lives beyond its time of creation as a lasting piece of fiction.

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