

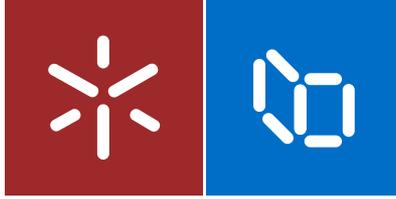


Universidade do Minho  
Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas

Hugo Filipe Rodrigues Machado

Fantasy vs Repression:  
Representations of the Child and the  
Feminine in Lewis Carroll's Alice Cycle





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Professora Doutora Paula Guimarães

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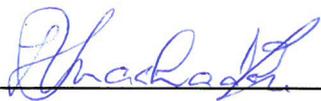
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Assinatura: \_\_\_\_\_



(Hugo Filipe Rodrigues Machado)

Para a Alice,  
Minha querida afilhada,  
A quem não faltará uma infância feliz  
E o sonho,  
Porta para um inquebrantável mundo fantástico.



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Braga, April, 2017.



## RESUMO

O objetivo principal desta dissertação é abordar o papel relevante que o escritor inglês Lewis Carroll (1832-1898) teve no desenvolvimento da chamada Literatura Infantil. O trabalho em questão pesquisa quer o contexto específico quer as inovações que o autor incorporou no seu revolucionário ciclo: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) e *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), com relação à evolução do conceito de infância e à representação do feminino, que marcam o início de uma mudança no papel da criança e da mulher na sociedade. Distanciando-se do realismo cru, tendência que caracterizou a época Vitoriana, o autor apresenta o fantástico como um estilo que combina uma linguagem plena de humor situacional e um fluxo narrativo de cariz episódico. No sentido de estimular a imaginação da criança, Carroll reescreve as formas mais tradicionais do conto de fadas e da fábula, nomeadamente através da inesperada introdução de diálogos desafiantes e de ilustrações alusivas às suas narrativas. Além disso, ele recorre ao elemento do sonho para sugerir certos significados latentes e subjacentes aos episódios e situações, provavelmente com a intenção de questionar a identidade quer de Alice quer do próprio leitor.

O absurdo literário (*nonsense*) que caracteriza a escrita do autor permite assim dois níveis distintos de leitura – o da criança e o do adulto. No primeiro, é possível constatar a percepção que Carroll tem da criança: um ser sensível e com uma maneira particular de entender o mundo. Todavia, no segundo, o absurdo de Carroll permite-lhe parodiar criticamente a sociedade vitoriana e os seus valores, sem comprometer a sua própria posição social e profissional, como diácono e matemático em Oxford. Relativamente à figura feminina em *Alice*, denota-se uma prevalência de representações fortes e independentes; personagens maioritariamente severas e autoritárias que, quando contextualizadas na era Vitoriana, demonstram uma subversão ousada e crítica. Assim, as questões de género e a separação entre as esferas pública e privada são aspetos centrais ao seu texto, permitindo a Carroll revisitar padrões educacionais femininos, relacionamentos conjugais e até noções de maternidade.

Esta problematização está intimamente associada ao debate central deste estudo, que é a tentativa de demonstrar a forma única como Carroll representa a fantasia e o fantástico: inicialmente pretendendo espelhar a liberdade como um valor ou prática contrária à repressão, mas também como algo que em última instância pode representar a própria repressão. Por um lado, Carroll apresenta um mundo paralelo e sem regras, para poder confrontar as regras rígidas que existem no mundo real, as quais significam repressão. Mas, no final, o leitor conclui que um mundo (louco) sem regras também acaba por resultar num contexto repressivo e injusto, fundado numa arbitrariedade total. As formas através das quais o autor reinventou o fantástico inspiraram a literatura infantil moderna e também outros autores, os quais demonstraram um interesse particular no seu estilo, como James Joyce ou Virginia Woolf. Da mesma forma, ele veio a ter uma grande influência no Surrealismo e nos seus artistas, muitos dos quais eventualmente o reconheceram como antecessor.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: INFÂNCIA, FEMININO, *NONSENSE*, FANTASIA, REPRESSÃO.



## ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to bring Lewis Carroll (1832 - 1898) to light as an important writer in the context of the development of Children's Literature. The work researches both the specific background and the innovations that the author incorporated in his revolutionary *Alice* cycle: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), with regard both to the evolution of the concept of childhood and his representations of the feminine, which echo the beginning of a change in children's and women's role in society. Moving away from a crude realism, the tendency that characterized the early Victorian era, the author presents a fantastic style encompassing a language full of situational humour and word play, and a distinctive narrative episodic flow. In order to stimulate the child's imagination, Carroll rewrites the more traditional forms of the fairy tale and the fable, namely through his unexpected introduction of challenging dialogues and allusive illustrations in his fantastic narratives. Additionally, he recurs to the dream element to suggest certain latent and underlying meanings that are present in most episodes and situations, intending to enhance an eventual crisis of identity in Alice and in the reader himself.

The literary nonsense that characterizes the author's writing thus allows two distinct levels of reading – the child's and the adult's. In the first, it is possible to see Carroll's clear perception of the child as a sensitive being with a particular way of understanding the world. However, in the second, Carroll's nonsense allows him to critically parody Victorian society and its strict values, without compromising his own social and professional position as a deacon and a mathematician at Oxford. Concerning the female figure in *Alice*, there is a prevalence of strong and independent representations; these are mostly severe and authoritarian characters who, when contextualized within the Victorian era, demonstrate a bold and critical subversion. Thus, questions of gender and the division between the public and domestic spheres are central aspects underlying his text, allowing Carroll to revisit female educational patterns, marital relationships and even notions of motherhood.

These issues are closely connected with the central question of this study, which is the attempt to demonstrate Carroll's unique form of representing fantasy and the fantastic: one that is initially intended to mirror freedom, as a value or practice opposed to repression, but which ultimately may also represent a form of repression. Carroll's fantasy aims at representing a parallel world without rules, in order to confront the strict rules that exist in the real world, which signify repression. But, in the end, the reader concludes that a (mad) world without rules equally results in a repressing and unjust world, grounded in pure arbitrariness. The ways in which the author reinvented fantasy inspired modern children's literature and also other authors who demonstrated a particular interest in his style, such as James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. Likewise, he came to be a major influence in Surrealism and its artists, who indeed recognized him as their predecessor.

KEYWORDS: CHILD(HOOD), FEMININE, NONSENSE, FANTASY, REPRESSION.



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“For I think a child’s first attitude to the world is a simple love for all living things.”

- Lewis Carroll



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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Although the child has always, since the beginning of humanity, been unconsciously recognised as being somehow different from the adults, this difference has not always been reflected in the way in which the adults treated children and represented them in literature and other forms of art. It is of chief importance to refer that in Victorian times – though generally a very strict and repressed period – children and childhood began to be sensed as something worthy of attention and as having their own needs, which in turn led to some political and social change. Schooling was not for everyone and even the pedagogical methods were not the most orthodox when compared with those of our times, as they were very much connected to the narrow moral values that also characterised the Victorians. The overwhelming distinctions of class and gender dictated the roam that children followed within the educational system; while lower-class children were time and again victims of child labour, girls did not have access to the same subjects and education as boys at schools had, a direct consequence of the prevailing patriarchal social order.

The present dissertation, written in the context of the Masters in English Language, Literature and Culture and titled *Fantasy vs. Repression: Representations of the Child and the Feminine in Lewis Carroll's Alice Cycle*, aims on the one hand to explore the way in which the child and the feminine were perspectivated and represented in the nineteenth century, with a particular emphasis on the moment that marked a change in the concept of the child and in the vision of childhood, and which resulted in the implementation of a set of laws aimed at protecting children. On the other hand, and since it is a work departing from the area of English literature, its focus of analysis will be on a remarkable work of the Victorian era, the *Alice cycle*: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), which has marked not only the change in the perception of the child, as a being requiring special attention, and in the perception of girls as not merely little 'angels in the house' as women's social status in the nineteenth century was perceived, but also the evolution of children's literature itself as a new and challenging genre that critically reflected and imaginatively expressed those same changes. It is, thus, this work's purpose to show as well how Lewis Carroll, first and foremost known for being a writer for children (whom he adored), marks an important turn in the way that contemporary writers wrote for children, especially with a view to entertain and amuse and not only to teach or instruct them, making him stand as a hallmark in the history of children's literature.

The fact that literary studies are nowadays necessarily intertwined with cultural studies is not a novelty and, for this reason, a social contextualization is always an asset in the literary analysis of the

author's ideas, in a comprehensive attempt to answer questions such as why a particular subject was chosen by a certain author, in a certain way, in a particular time. In this respect, Lewis Carroll is no different from any other writer and, even though he wrote specifically for children, he was first of all an individual living in the Victorian society. And there is no denying that the social context under which *Alice* was written was controversial; there was a strictness and a prudishness associated to the period, in turn attached to the traditional values of family and good manners, often associated to the middle- and upper-classes. However, there was also a latent or potential reversal of this order, connected to the social upheavals associated to certain minorities, such as women and children, alongside many others which indeed coexisted and combined in transgressive ways. We will see the extent to which this coexistence can be seen in Carroll's *Alice* cycle, and if so, how this can be interpreted in both cultural and aesthetic terms.

I believe that the writing of a dissertation about Lewis Carroll's *Alice* cycle is therefore justifiable by the major role that this work has played in the development of children's literature with an entertaining vein, revealing and recognising a focus on children's particular needs (cognitive, psychological/emotional), alongside women's social claims for equality, by representing, parodying and subverting gender roles, and unusually presenting a girl protagonist in a children's story. As the title of this study suggests, Alice and the other characters, and their adventures, will be used to illustrate the social claims for children and for women, providing some possible meanings underneath the language play and the situations that are so particular to Carroll's narrative style – nonsense. Moreover, we will see the array of interpretive possibilities that this narrative style offers to the readers: both children and adults.

This dissertation is deliberately divided into five distinct and fully developed parts or chapters that also naturally complement each other's purposes and contents. In a first stage, chapter one introduces the general topic of children's literature as a new writing genre and briefly discusses its contemporary and modern critical fortunes. In order to understand the evolution of the concepts of childhood and the feminine – what it was to be a child and a woman in the nineteenth century, I present an overview of these concepts in Victorian culture, namely the myths and traditions regarding the idealised child and woman. For that purpose, some of the most influential authors and literary works of the period are taken as examples to help us understand the conceptions, misconceptions, ideas and ideals surrounding the nineteenth-century child and woman.

After collecting the relevant data about the evolution of these concepts which predate the nineteenth century, we proceed to a second stage of the study with chapter three. It initially presents a brief biographical study of Lewis Carroll's life and literary evolution, to help us understand some of the

author's ideas, which might help us to better understand his style and his stories. However, the chapter's main objective is to present a detailed analysis of the innovative narrative features of the *Alice* stories, and namely the challenging representations of the child and the feminine that Carroll introduces in the cycle, with the purpose of proving the author's dual strategy to write for children, and to write for adults with some critical agenda of his own, mainly in terms of the central binary concepts of fantasy and repression.

Chapter four focuses on more detailed and specific aspects of form and content in the narratives. The first subchapter analyses the aim and the impact that Carroll's language use and writing style – linguistic and situational nonsense – had on those interpretations on the part of both the children and the adults. The second subchapter is intended to explain the important role of illustrations in children's literature, and particularly in Carroll's *Alice* stories. Was this medium simply a strategy to entertain children, or did Carroll see those illustrations as another *narrative* within the narrative? The last subchapter explores the central arguments of this project – the relevance of the discourse of fantasy and freedom versus that of convention and repression in the stories; namely, the way that Carroll used fantasy as mirroring freedom – expressing the Romantic ideals about children, and contrasting them with the Victorian reality of convention and repression towards both children and women.

Finally, chapter five, which could be named "*Alice's After-Lives*", presents a complementary study on how Carroll's *Alice* stories inspired and influenced future artists and writers, namely of the twentieth century, also in terms of the way children's stories were written from then on. The chapter presents an overview of some of these children's stories, as well as of some of the modernist authors and artists that were influenced by *Alice* in their works; it thus reveals Lewis Carroll's style as being inspirational, in the sense that other important artists saw it as an original way to express ideas, in some cases social ideas, as well as inaugurating new literary approaches for both children and adults.



# 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPOSED THEME AND ANALYSIS OF ITS CRITICAL FORTUNE

Children's literature has been seen not only as a form of art but also as an educational vehicle. It is to be found in both narrative and verse forms, including short stories or poems, which were in turn included in books, magazines, or even, as in the past, newspapers. As the designation suggests, it is a literature aimed at children or at a public with an interest in this age group, and written with a purpose of being entertaining, formative, or both.

If we look back in time, we will see that children's literature shares a close connection with an oral tradition, which the adults used to pass their knowledge on to children, before publishing had even existed. Only when printing came into existence, did children's literature records become traceable; and many classic tales (e.g., fairy tales) that we associate exclusively to children, but which were originally created for adults and only later adapted, often contain a moral message – that we could designate as the ideological aspect of children's literature aesthetics. Many of these tales are fables rooted in Greek lore, such as *Aesop's Fables*, whose main characters were talking animals. The unusual feature of having a story being told by talking animals calls for children's special attention, making them absorb more effectively the intended messages that the adults wanted them to acquire.

In his pioneering study on children's literature, John Townsend (1965) has suggested that children have not always been seen as a target audience, mostly because only recently did they come to be seen differently from the adults in the social context (p. 3).<sup>1</sup> Townsend recognises that only when children were accepted as beings with particular needs and interests, did the focus on them as readers of a different nature actually happen.

Before there could be children's books, there had to be children—children, that is, who were accepted as beings with their own particular needs and interests, not only as miniature men and women (p. 3).

Indeed, children's literature only started to flourish after literature for adults had acquired a considerable and established status. The notion of childhood itself changed significantly, or rather 'came into existence', representing the necessary precondition for the development of children's literature (Shavit, 1986, p. 4). Only in the nineteenth century did this change take place; but it was rather a

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<sup>1</sup> John Rowe Townsend (1922-2014) was a pioneering critic of children's literature and an author. He was a journalist and children's book editor of *The Guardian* until 1978. He is best known for his academic work *Written for Children: An Outline of English Language Children's Literature* (1965) [Tucker, 2014, *Independent*].

progressive one, which involved several historical conditions that led to a new cultural perception of the child – its identity and its unique needs. In fact, before the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, children were not considered as being essentially different from the adults themselves. People assumed that they had no special needs and, consequently, there was not an officially established educational system (p. 4). This also explains why there were no books purely for children’s entertainment, but rather books focused on educational values which might have had the social control of children as their core purpose (Thacker, 1956, p. 2). In addition, there was a prevailing theological approach to education that, along with the harsh conditions of life, made the situation even more difficult – as will be mentioned further ahead in this study.

In ancient civilizations, such as the Greek and Roman ones, children’s needs and interests were not even recognised, and children were only trained for adult life. Plato defended in *Book VI of The Republic* that education should take the form of play, but he did not favour the myths and legends of his day to entertain or educate children. He considered that stories about gods and heroes would fall into disrepute and could encourage bad behaviour (Townsend, 1996, p. 3). In England, from the Roman withdrawal to the Norman Conquest, and for many years afterwards, children could get an education led by the monks in the monasteries. Books were scarce, and writing books aimed at entertaining children was not even taken into consideration. In medieval times and early Tudor dynasty, England’s poor men’s children were unlikely to enter into an educational institution; they were rather more likely to start working for long hours since an early age. The tradesmen’s children and the middle and upper classes ones were integrated into the apprenticeship’s programmes or page service (p. 3).

Notwithstanding, with the Enlightenment new ideas emerged, in particular valuing the rational, which was considered to be knowledge, freedom, and happiness. John Locke, who was a great thinker of the period, published *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), in which he revealed a change on how he saw children and childhood. He created a theory, named ‘tabula rasa’, which states that “the mind at birth is as a blank page on which lessons were to be impressed” (p. 12). Locke advocated that children should be educated with much milder methods and that there should be more pleasant books for children, suited to their capacities, instead of books which filled their mind with useful trumpery (p. 12).

Following a similar vein, despite some differences, was Jean Jacques Rousseau in his book *Émile, or On Education* (1762). Kramnick (1995) refers to Rousseau’s words advocating that children had to be taught how to reason naturally:

The noblest work in education is to make a reasoning man, and we expect to train a young child by making him reason! This is beginning at the end; this is making an instrument of a result. If children understood how to reason they would not need to be educated (as quoted in Kramnick, 1995, no page).

If Enlightenment privileged reason based on knowledge, freedom, and happiness, Rousseau's proposal on education for children was adjusted to their special needs, which recognised them as being at a special stage of life with particular methods of seeing, thinking and feeling. This probably marks the very change referred to in this research; Rousseau proposed a civic education based on reason, but one which is not intended to educate them as men; he says that we cannot forget our human condition; as humanity has its place in the general order, so childhood, too, has its place in the span of human life, and we have to separate concepts – man in manhood and the child in childhood. He defended an education grounded on simplicity, naturalness, the language of the heart and the ideal of the Noble Savage.

John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau can be seen as the founders of a new thinking concerning children and childhood, as well as their respective education; both mark the beginning of a change in education, which would naturally be reflected in the production of children's books. As suggested by Zohar Shavit (1986), supported in Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), in the seventeenth century, two new cultural institutions came into existence: the school system (a new system of education with specific pedagogical concerns), and a new readership which in turn originated a market for children's books (p. 3, 4). People firstly acknowledged that children had to have clothing, tools and activities which were different from those of the adults. Secondly, they recognised that a child reader differed from the adult reader, given the child's different capacity to understand, and specific educational needs. Naturally, the perception of these needs and capacities changed gradually in time, which would in turn change the character of the texts for children by the same token.

## **1.1 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND AND ITS MAJOR REPRESENTATIVES**

The second stage which marks the dramatic shift in the perception of the child, and of children's literature, is the Romantic period (from 1785 to 1830), being characterised by the power at heart of the relationship between author and reader, from its roots in the radical shifting of Romanticism's ontological and aesthetic ideas. They are the conception of the human child connected to an idea of 'innocence' and purity and as "a revelation of the 'true nature' of self," distancing itself from the theological idea of taking "control of the inborn sinfulness of mankind" (Thacker, 1956, p. 4). Consequently, the role of the author/artist changed as well, accompanying the course of this aesthetic, in which he or she became possessors of a superior knowledge which valued the power of the imagination. This fact thus conveyed

a new meaning to the concept of authorship, and the shift in terms of content in texts written for children, with new and daring fictional worlds, can be seen as motivated by this historical and cultural change (p. 4).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a growing separation between children's literature and the literary mainstream became more and more evident, having an implication on the convergence of "the ideas and stylistic innovations" (p. 5).

William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, of 1789, illustrates a change in the perception of the child, despite the fact that the work played a moralistic and a political role as well. This perception assumed that childhood was a state of protected innocence rather than original sin, in spite of not being immune to the fallen human world and its repressive institutions. As we read the poems of the work, we are introduced to the idea that adults are able to learn from children. The position of the child and the way her/his trials and tribulations are told to the reader aims to cause questioning and instil a new insight on the readers' mind. The revolutionary change is shadowed by a shift on *whom* is telling the story: children present their way of seeing and responding to the world "in the most profound sense, by taking it upon ourselves, by it *becoming* a part of ourselves" (Philips, *British Library*). This thus made readers become aware of children's concerns, fears and how they assimilate and process the world of the adults.

The Romantic aesthetic has thus had an important role in the change of both the concepts of authorship and childhood. The first, because the author, who was writing for children (as well as for the adults), accompanied the social change in which they were immersed, and which was inevitably reflected on what he produced. The latter is due to the new enlightened perceptions of the child within their social context, as aforementioned. Interestingly enough, the late nineteenth century is marked by an adult readership who deliberately sought their childlike disposition, which was "increasingly threatened by religious doubt, brought about by social change and the growth in science as the 'new religion'" (Thacker, 1956, p. 45).

Charles Dickens's work in the Victorian period, despite his obvious commercial interests, illustrates these changes on the role of the author and childhood. Many of his stories portray a concern with how children coming from a very poor background were socially understood and treated. *Oliver Twist*, first published as a serial in 1837–9, tells us about a little orphan who grew up in contact with the criminal

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<sup>2</sup> "The authoritarianism of the Victorian expansion of the literary domain, the disruptions of the *fin de siècle* and, finally, the search for the new and the alienation that define Modernism and Postmodernism" (Thacker, 1956, p. 5) are the most striking changes which can be interpreted as reflections of, and responses to, the Romantic aesthetic.

world. Critics often pinpoint the fact that Oliver, as other Dickens's characters, was as pure and innocent as unrealistic, mostly because Oliver almost assures the reader that he was not affected in the least by the criminal background in which he has grown up. On the other hand, there is an obvious social concern for and criticism of the way disadvantaged children were generally neglected. It mirrors the author's special concern with representing the new social and moral conditions, among others, which illustrate a change in the concepts under analysis. Thus, children were no longer presented as characters that 'have to' fill in the precepts of a Victorian education and behaviour – they "existed" to in a way disrupt these same values.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) emerged in the literary landscape of the period as a groundbreaking and innovative Victorian work proposing a new representation of the child, and how this child (a female) could be subversive in her own posture, attitudes, and discourse. The novel had the narrative advantage of Jane's childhood being told from a child's perspective. The author decides to present a critique to the contemporary education of little girls, namely in Jane's far from idyllic passage through Lowood School. When compared with *Oliver Twist*'s experience as described by Dickens, this passage depicts more realistically what a Calvinist utilitarian meant in the life of a low middle-class child. Jane is sent away by her aunt to Lowood School to acquire a "more sociable and childlike disposition" (Brontë: 1996, p. 13), given the fact that she presented an inquisitive and rebellious behaviour which collided with what the common Victorian adult expected from a little girl. "Punishment" would thus be her best remedy, according to both utilitarian strictness and Victorian morality, as experienced by the authoress herself, due to Lowood being "partly based on the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge"<sup>3</sup> (Shuttleworth, *British Library*).

It was common that children were served austere meals at schools, or forced to take cold baths every morning, without the right to sit or loll in easy-chairs, nor sleep on good soft mattresses, just to mention a few examples of severe educational measures, depicted by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (in the passage regarding Lowood School).<sup>4</sup> Some of the death cases, which were the product of

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<sup>3</sup> "There is much reality in the depiction of Lowood given that Charlotte Brontë and her sisters, Maria, Elizabeth and Emily attended the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in 1824-25" (Shuttleworth, *British Library*).

<sup>4</sup> It was commonly accepted that this way would instil discipline, good behaviour and stoicism in children – also "a tenet in the middle-class creed" (Horn, 1997, p. 21). There was the snobbiest barrier between the lower middle- and the upper working-classes, very much visible at schools, despite that "'social mixing' was becoming more widely accepted" (p. 21, 23, 24). Class distinction led to rivalry between children of both social groups: youngsters who lived in shopkeepers' streets would play in the pavement. If some other children of a different social status passed through this street without an adult escort, they would be persecuted, pointed at and shouted at, reflecting the Victorians' contempt towards people from other social groups (p. 25). The attitude was similar as to religious differences.

consumption, as portrayed in *Jane Eyre*, reflect the reality that Charlotte experienced at this school – her sisters Maria and Elizabeth died of consumption, there, during their stay. Lowood’s headmaster, Mr Brocklehurst, can be seen, in part, as representing Brontë’s experience with the Cowan Bridge’s headmaster, Reverend Carus Wilson (Shuttleworth, *British Library*). To a certain extent, these elements present us with an overview of the reality of the education of average young Victorian girls.

*Jane Eyre* was received with harsh criticism due to its alleged lack of femininity, mainly seen in the protagonist’s independent posture when facing life’s adversities. Even as a child, Jane defied the established rules of the Victorian society, facing her aunt, who was an adult and represented these same rules. Jane, the adult, created in turn a buzz around how women should act and behave socially and personally (Shuttleworth, *British Library*). Jane dared to demand equality and respect; she put herself at the same level of a man (Mr Rochester), ‘equal – as we are’, by questioning him “Do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings? (...) Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you, – and full as much heart!” (Brontë, 1996, p. 284).

In line with Deborah Thacker’s views presented in *Introducing Children’s Literature*, there was a cross pollination between the feminine realm and childhood in order to return to an innocent (romantic) apprehension of a fictional world. This Romantic association – the feminine location in the imaginative and creative realms, with the idea of the mother who nurtures the child, provides a challenge to the paternal voice which dominated the Anglo-Saxon world (Thacker, 1956, p. 45). In this feminist regard, Thacker goes further in saying that the *imaginary* state, located in the feminine realm, “prior to the imposition of the *symbolic order*, can be interpreted as the childlike state of being, prior to imposition of a language system” (p. 47). That is to say, the *imaginary* state is feminine as the child at an early age is with his mother, whereas language belongs to the masculine realm and is “endowed with patriarchal power” (p. 47). Nursery rhymes and lullabies can be a form of appealing to the child’s sensibility that allows children to wonder without the impositions of language, e.g., alliterations and sounds.

When trying to locate the first novel in English aimed specifically at children, Margaret Marshall selects John Newberry’s *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes*, published in 1765 – a rather moralistic work, like most of the author’s other novels (Marshall, 1988, p. 5). However, the moralistic, indoctrinating feature (which had the purpose of social control) disables these works to be read by children of today. That is the reason for which it is commonly accepted that children’s literature as we know it today began only a century later, in 1865, with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and also Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (published in 1863).

As the full title of the book suggests, in *The Water Babies: A Fairytale for a Landbaby*, Charles Kingsley applied the tradition of fairy tale to the story; he even opened it with the traditional “Once upon a time” beginning. Kingsley was able to confront problems, with a certain political element, which previous children’s books did not possess. It is a novel written for children, but with a critical tone to the way England treated its poor, and moreover questioning child labour – the protagonist Tom is a chimney-sweeper. Tom can be looked at as a Victorian anti-protagonist; as Siobhan Lam (2007) puts it: “Tom seems almost unable of being educated or religious due to this lack of all the virtuous morality that the evangelical writers much cherished” (no page). Tom’s amorality reflects Kingsley’s intention to go away from the didactic moralistic Victorian tradition; however, he could not avoid his views on faith, morality and education, eventually resulting in “a liberal Protestant version of the older religious tracts for children” (Lam, 2007). Tom embarks upon a series of adventures that, in the meantime, serve to convey some moral lesson; thus, Kingsley does not differ much from any other evangelical writer.

For this reason too, *Alice* comes as the very first narrative directed at children, owing it to its purely entertaining and not strictly instructional, moralistic or indoctrinating features (Marshall, 1988, p. 5) – it did not contain any open moral message, unlike *The Water-Babies* which is thematically concerned with Christian redemption. This does not mean that, since then, children's books were no longer moralistic; on the contrary, we still have them today and there is no rule forbidding them; or classifying them as non-literary, whatever some critics may say. However, *Alice* was the first of its kind, as it represents a reversal in the way literature was written for children, mostly because it is a kind of text and plot which contains, in the broader sense, child characters conceived for entertaining children by recurring to fantasy and dream – elements that are easily found in infancy.

In this new post-Alice tradition, the late Victorian poet Christina Rossetti introduced the kind of writing for children which proved to have the combination between didactic, religious messages and children's pure entertainment. Besides being a successful poet, she also had a particular interest in writing for children in a distinct way – by mixing fantasy with realistic representations to convey some moral lesson. Best known for *Goblin Market* (1862), she also wrote *Speaking Likenesses* (1874), a children’s book often compared with Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In fact, its original title was *Nowhere*, title about which her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti warned her due to its suggestive

association with Carroll's Wonderland and Samuel Butler's Erewhon<sup>5</sup>; he told her that the title was "unlucky because of that freethinking book called Erewhon" (Katz, 1984, p. 14).

Moved by Carroll's influence (as they knew each other), coupled with her wish to produce a commercially successful book and an enthusiasm for illustrated fantasy books, Rossetti wrote the stories offering reflections about the behaviour of three little girls: Flora, Edith and Maggie. Rossetti described the stories as "in the Alice style with an eye to the market" (p. 14). Her choice for the title lies in the didacticism underneath the three stories. "My small heroines perpetually encounter 'speaking' (literally speaking) likenesses or embodiments or caricatures of themselves or their faults," she said. The girls are confronted with "occasionally grotesque and distorted figures" to understand and, then, change particular shortcomings of character (p. 14). At the end of each tale, the girls are either rewarded or punished according to their behaviour.

Knowingly more didactic than Carroll's *Alice* books, Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* reveals her well-known feature, which can be seen in *Goblin Market* as much as in all of her acknowledged work, from which the "conflict between the flesh and the spirit, worldliness and self-denial, and pleasure and punishment" stand out (p. 14). There is a different approach in Rossetti's and Carroll's narratives; Rossetti's carry resentment and pessimism in much more realistic representations, contrarily to the fantastical, happy-ending *Alice* and other post-Alice books (Dedabas, 2011, p. 59).

*Goblin Market* (1862) was originally written as a children's story. In fact, the story embodies innocence and redemption of the soul; and non-sexual intentions and meaning, at least, in an initial reading. *Goblin Market* depicts other alternatives of female heroines, Laura and Lizzy, who embark upon a tempting journey in order to reach purity and being saved from disgrace. Following a fairy-tale style, if considering and analysing it as a children's book, we can perceive some moral lessons underlying Laura's and Lizzie's trials and tribulations. Currently, there is not a consensus as to whether *Goblin Market* should be considered a children's book. And most critics do not acknowledge it as such, mostly because of the incestuous message underlying in Lizzie's approach to Laura: "Eat me, drink me, love me, / Laura, make much of me" (*Poetry Foundation*).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Erewhon: or, Over the Range* is a satirical work on Victorian society by Samuel Butler, published in 1872. Erewhon is a fictional country and there was a clear intention on the part of the author for the title to be read backwards "nowhere" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

<sup>6</sup> In the story, Laura eats the forbidden fruit and Lizzie tries to reconcile Laura's sins adopting an almost angelical position in not eating the forbidden fruit. Lizzie must not sin even though she takes a bite from the goblin men. Goblins seem to represent sin. There is a Christian message underlying Lizzie's attitude. She must eat the fruit and save her sister, remaining pure, the same way Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sins (Phillips, 1990).

Lizzie is an example of the shift in young female heroes in English literature – she actively acts upon the problems she comes across; she pursues temptation clearly intending to conquer it (*Poetry Foundation*). As the last attempt to save her sister from disgrace, she desperately tries to get her the fruit from the goblin men, which promptly refuse to sell it, and attack her. Lizzie resists temptation as she “would not open lip from lip” (*Poetry Foundation*). In the end, she can heal Laura. The reader is, however, left in ambiguity as to what has saved Laura; Lizzie asked Laura to suck the juices squeezed from the goblin men’s fruits in order to being saved, which she did; on another level, it could have been Lizzie’s fraternal love which saved Laura.<sup>7</sup> As a book for children, the moral lesson would be that children should learn to love their siblings, caring for their good in the same way Lizzie has done for her sister.

In conclusion, it is not only the dialectic between the strains of fantasy and didacticism in the post-*Alice* era of children’s writing that proves itself to accompany Victorian adult literature precepts. To a considerable extent, it also proves its changing course itself, which resulted from the interest of the Victorians in childhood and their concern with children, namely via Education acts and measures aimed at protecting the child from child exploitation. That is to say, children’s books were no longer associated with a moralistic, didactic aim only; rather, they started to present a transition from didacticism to pure entertainment, which explains why much children’s fiction of this period shares both characteristics.

## **1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY AND MODERN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Today children's literature is indeed greatly evolved, offering a very vast array of styles that are able to delight and enrich the imagination of children of all ages. Even babies have specific books made for them that are full of colours, shapes and textures, aiming at stimulating the different senses. In its turn, academic research of children’s literature has also, to a certain extent, followed this great expansion and development with a considerable interest, in the last decades.

Currently, the critical study of modern children's literature has suffered the “literary-didactic split,” as some scholars call it, referring to the opposing standpoints of ‘form of art’ (literary) and ‘educational purpose’ (pedagogical or ideological) (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. xi). Another aspect that is often considered is the age of the intended reader, as we can find children’s books and juvenile books and, more recently, crossover books which blend themes that both appeal to adults and children. Regardless of their literary and didactic characteristics, we cannot use them alone to distinguish children’s literature from general

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<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Lizzie presents a somewhat passive attitude; she does not confront directly the goblins in order to get the antidote for her sister’s salvation.

adult literature; and perhaps the pedagogical aspect is more explicit in children's literature; though it may also be found in mainstream literature<sup>8</sup> in a lower grade (p. xii).

In general terms, children's literature opponents and supporters classify children's literature as "simple, action oriented, rather than character oriented, optimistic and with happy endings, didactic and repetitive" (p. xiii). In fact, many children's stories do not present such "deceitful simplicity," proving such assumptions wrong.<sup>9</sup> The fact of the matter is that this conventional set of characteristics, although seen in many contemporary works for children, are not fixed rules to classify children's literature, but rather restrictive ones, as there are several children's books in which we can find temporal and spatial constructions as complex as those found in mainstream literature. And there are many others whose aesthetics contradict the theory that categorises children's literature as simple.

To define children's literature as a genre is not easy as it does not gather a consensus among scholars, in the same way that there is not a consensus in trying to define other kinds of literature. This is due to the fact that children's literature does not present a pattern which is common to all existing texts written for young readers. As we have seen, children's literature is not a homogeneous genre that can be easily categorised. Having come to this conclusion, we can now try and redefine the concept as transversal, as it incorporates a wide variety of features, from which simplicity, action orientation, optimism, repetition or didacticism stand out in some children's texts. However, these features cannot be used to define every single children's text; Maria Nikolajeva suggests that, for example, Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* is anything but simple, and *Alice in Wonderland* might be a literary work more original than most adults' novels (p. 49, 50).

In mainstream or adult literature, which has always been traditionally divided into epic, lyric, and drama, children's literature was not accounted for. Even today, poetry and drama are not much present in the tradition of writing for the young reader, and it is very easy to associate children's literature to prose narratives only. These prose narratives may correspond to the novel in the mainstream (p. 50). Yet, the novel encompasses too many features, which forces us to distinguish contemporary stories from historical novels. Although children's literature shares many features that are present in other literature genres, our focus should rather fall on the differences it shelters in relation to other genres, as it is what makes it a genre of its own. It is transversal and transcendent, because children's literature incorporates a wide

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, in religious matters (Christian church) and in dictatorial regimes which used it "to affect" and control "the masses" (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. xii; xiii).

<sup>9</sup> Table 1 in the annexes illustrates the features which Nikolajeva asserts as "deceitful simplicity" when classifying children's literatures as simple.

variety of different features from very distinct genres. It is transversal, because it comprehends all the themes we can identify in mainstream literature; it is transcendental, because it surpasses every possible move made to defining it, concentrating itself on exploring, subverting and improving children's imaginative abilities, which also please adults themselves.

Today's literature presents an array of coming of age stories, immersed in the fantastic. These stories can also show different features/subgenres that are common to mainstream literature: romance, crime, adventure, thriller, gothic, and science, just to mention a few. The term 'fantastic' may probably call our attention to one of the most outstanding and important features in children's literature, disrupting with what prevails in mainstream literature. Fantasy is then a key word in the definition of children's literature, in which characters may appear in the form of animals, or even toys, assuming human traits or abilities – personifications being the most recurrent figure of speech. Some good cases of the use of fantasy in literature are indeed Dodgson's, C.S. Lewis' or J.R.R. Tolkien's stories.

As regards this major distinctive feature of children's literature, it may be important as well to establish beforehand a distinction between the wider term 'fantasy' and 'fairy tale', the latter of which is a very traditional and specific subgenre in children's narratives. The fairy tales' formulaic opening "once upon a time" reports us immediately to an indefinite past and its spatial construction is based on a parallel (many times magical) world. They always present a formula conveying a moral message, a happy ending, as well as a set of characters and events. We can notice fantasy in fairy tales with the use of magic (magical helpers and events, objects, transformations, and others) and the supernatural, as a sign that we are in front of stories specifically made for children, in spite of having been readapted from ugly ancient versions to more dreamy and colourful ones, now more attuned to children's imagination and innocence (Thacker, 2002, p. 53). The genre designated as 'Fantasy' can be considered as "a narrative combining the presence of the primary and the secondary world, that is, our own real world and some other magical or fantastic imagined world" (p. 54). So, the presence of two worlds colliding against each other – the real and the imagined – is obvious, with no effects of collision in the text; it is rather a relation of conviviality, which results in a more fruitful stimulus to children's imaginative capacities.<sup>10</sup>

According to Peter Hunt (1990), the First Golden Age of children's literature dates from around 1860 to the early twentieth century – with the First World War (*Oxford Academic*, 2012). Hunt defends "a species of literature defined in terms of the reader rather than the author's intentions or the texts themselves" (p. 1), which are "culturally formative" and of an enormous educational, intellectual and

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<sup>10</sup> Table 2 can be found in the annexes, illustrating the way literature deals with fantasy and fairy tale worlds.

social importance (p. 2). By the end of the twentieth century, he adds, children's literature had not yet reached an academic status, which it should, as it was the only way for it to find the intellectual acceptance that would lead to "a good deal of integrating power" and academic respect; and only then could children's literature exist and be theorised without the need for self-justification (p. 8).

At some point in the First Golden Age of children's literature, there has been a reaction against the dominant tradition of realism of the nineteenth century, which marks the transition to the innovations that the new century was proposing with modernism, in order to reconfigure literature. Scholars have recently claimed this transition as distinct from the movements of Realism and Modernism, because the period owns its own cultural and aesthetic concerns. The period is called *fin de siècle*, a transitional period "characterised by disruptions and conflicts" which scholars agree to have been "to spur radical experimentation in art with the advent of Modernism" (Thacker, 2002, p. 73).

The ways in which children's literature enunciate this change are mainly set on popular culture, in a period that the distinction between high and popular culture got shape. By this time, "writers of 'literature' as high culture displayed a fascination with the idea of childhood," particularly seen "in relation to sexuality and the shifting power relationships between men and women" which contributed "to the tome of children's literature" (p. 73). The division between the masculine quest in the public sphere (the multiple businesses in the city) and the growing conflict in the domestic sphere, articulated with women's interests in a new life with more rights, started to be represented in literature through a fluctuating questioning about "the role of the feminine during childhood" and rejecting "the qualities associated with femininity" (p. 74). The manner and extent to which male authors dedicated their works to childhood may denote, to some degree, "the ways in which shifting gender roles threatened perceived certainties both of an earlier era and of a period prior to adult experience" (p. 74).

Deborah Thacker (2002) asserts that writers such as Oscar Wilde, Kenneth Graham or J.M. Barrie, who belong to this transitional period, have produced "a kind of children's fiction that transcends the boundaries of the form and calls attention to the act of writing for children." Unlike the previous predecessors who were interested in a return to the childlike in the adult, these *fin de siècle* writers expressed adult ideas with "a darker, more pessimistic sensibility," characterised by uncertainty, both in reconsidering the past and apprehensive to the future (p. 74). The sense that children could both represent past and future gained strength, mostly because the conception of family was being threatened by a drastic and gradual change, reflected by the shifting power structures surrounding gender and sexuality. The consequences of the liberation of women from family responsibilities could weaken the family structure and, in turn, children's stability. The situation gave rise to an uneasiness that would be

portrayed in literature, problematizing the image of innocence with an uneasiness of expression. In addition, Freud's *Infantile Sexuality* (1910) and its role in the genesis of the neuroses of adults and in the psychology of normal adults came to disrupt Romantic images of innocence and purity of the child, which increased this uneasiness of expression in literature as in all arts (p. 75). The first wave of feminism and its fights/claims paved the way to the New Woman and homosexuality, something which would result in a combination of fear and fascination. This combination was expressed in the fascination with the Gothic, the sensational and the decadent literature.

The ugliness behind a beautiful surface, as in Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* (1888), the notion of sacrifice for love and the redemptive power of love, as in Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses*, prove that social injustice and the loss of innocence were already issues underlying the stories for children of the late nineteenth century literature. Writers explored the various possibilities of the 'wild' hidden behind the "normal" look – interests which were motivated by the advances in psychology. Wilde also wrote children's fiction exploring a social unease related to what society prioritised, giving a darker and more pessimistic view of society, characterised by uncertainty, and apprehensive with the way society was evolving. *The Happy Prince* tells the story of a statue that once was a real prince. His idea was to use the story of a prince who had no contact with the reality of his people as he lived within the walls of his palace. After his death, a gold statue was made in his memory, with beautiful sapphires for eyes, and a ruby encrusted in his sword. His aspect was to highlight the importance society was dedicating to material values (gold and jewels), and the author puts it in view of the concept of beauty. The statue of the Happy Prince embodied happiness as he lived happily. Yet, the statue also symbolised sadness and ugliness, as a product of his perception of his people's misery, which led him to sacrifice his wealth, leaving it ugly (Wilde, 1993, p. 11, 13, 14, 21). This story echoes on how children's literature was changing in the transition to the new century, mostly because Wilde presented the readers with polarised standards, appealing to moral values and the relationship between events in society and in reality.

Deborah Thacker (2002) refers to Edith Nesbit's "authorial interjection" and her use of narrative intrusion to illustrate another important change in children's literature, making reference to the conventions of writing for children, thus reflecting her non-authoritative position as author of books for children. The transitional period of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century is a period which marks a change in the relationship between author and reader; the author gives in to the reader, who is invited to play a more active (critical) role. By showing her awareness about a change with regard to writing children's fiction, she unconsciously foresees the Modernist thinking about the author's and readers' roles (p. 78, 79). "Edith Nesbit established a way of talking to children which was really quite radical, not

patronising, very friendly – and it’s the tone of voice which the twentieth century’s children’s books has adopted more or less,” Peter Hunt said in an Oxford interview (*Oxford Academics*, 2012). Nesbit’s children’s books present vivid characterisations and ingenious plots, in which children have to face an extraordinary character or event through a magic or complex imaginative play. Her works were all but didactic as her aim was to entertain children.

“The Second Golden Age is now,” said John Rowe Townsend in his 1965 *Written for Children*, and Amanda Craig<sup>11</sup> recently said that the second Golden Age is different from the first in that “it reverberates with a new, global moral consciousness” (Craig, 2015). Townsend’s assertion reflects precisely Amanda’s words; it implied a new sense of excitement and possibility which characterised the period (Pearson, 2013, p. 3). The decades that followed the Second World War, from 1950 to 1979 mark the second golden age. There was a transition towards more social realism in children’s literature, along with an acknowledgement that it should reach a wider age range, which resulted in bleaker narratives (p. 3) and, as Amanda Craig (2015) put it, often presenting a struggle between good and evil (*Independent*).

For instance, Tolkien’s stories show a fear of an evil force which is moved by material interests to take over the Middle Earth, opening a breach to our world and to Hitler’s segregating and dictatorial ideals of the Second World War. This had a tremendous impact on children’s and adults’ minds in that it was trying to instigate them to always question authority and injustice. The same goes to C.S. Lewis’s Narnia books. Since Bilbo and Frodo Baggins, and Gandalf to Harry Potter and Dumbledore, all of these are based on myths intended to represent guidance and protection; a sort of spiritual balm, comparable to the Western concept of God, but imbued in fantasy – beautiful and magical, surrounded by danger (Craig, *Independent*). Danger, mystery and myth combine the key elements for commercial success and readers’ interest.

Additionally, and according to Nicholas Fisk, the role performed by editors and publishers of this period, together with that of illustrators, was fundamental in the development of the second Golden Age. An increase on educational interests, which has contributed to the high level of social funding providing “a buoyant market for children’s books in schools and libraries,” along with new ideas of childhood, led editors and publishers to establish the commercial importance of children’s literature, by getting actively involved in discussions about what children’s literature should or could do (as quoted in Pearson, 2013,

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<sup>11</sup> Amanda Craig is a British renowned journalist and writer, and she is also the children’s book critic for the *Times*. She was born in South Africa in 1959, and brought up in Italy and Britain. Her novels are *Foreign Bodies* (1990), *A Private Place* (1991), *A Vicious Circle* (1996), *In a Dark Wood* (2000) and *Love In Idleness* (2003). *Hearts and Minds* (2009) is her latest one.

p. 2). Lucy Pearson (2013) even classifies editors and publishers of the time as “the real makers of modern children’s literature” (p. 2), being Kaye Webb and Aidan Chambers some of those involved in making a change at the commercial, creative and ideological levels within British children’s literature (p. 169). Kaye Webb (Puffin Books) followed the ideas of Margery Fisher and Eleanor Cameron in defending a full access to books and the multiplicity provided by the aesthetic effects, of cultural and social importance; whereas, Chambers (Topliner) agreed more with Robert Leeson and Leila Berg who focused on the ideological and social aspects of children’s literature, insisting on the emergency to make it more accessible and available to people (p. 169, 170).

There are already some claims for a third Golden age of children’s literature whose start dates back to the beginning of the new millennium, but it is virtually impossible to discuss the current state of children’s literature without having to consider the cultural context under which it is being produced. The variety of commodities connected to a book and book publishing, one might say, never ends, having both become more and more inseparable of consumerism and globalization. Jack Zipes, an important academic of children’s literature, has remarked:

When a child encounters a book, often mediated by a teacher, librarian, parent, or friend, the relationship with the book is no longer the young reader and the text, but young consumers and a myriad of products associated with the text that the child will be encouraged to buy and to buy more of the same: video tapes, CDs, DVDs, games, dolls, toys, t-shirts, watches, cups, clothing, food, and so on” (Zipes, 2009, p. 1).

Zipes refers to the amount of books that are now attached to the film industry and are, consequently, accompanied by other artefacts which are closely linked to advertising and informational networks (e.g. TV, cinema and the Internet) that are spread worldwide. This very fact entails that books for young readers between the ages of three to eighteen are now produced and marketed globally to a point that the reading and the reception of literature for children have been reconfigured<sup>12</sup>.

Commercial interests were tremendously responsible for the decline in children’s literature in the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1991, Tom Engelhardt was already foreseeing the capitalist motivations behind the production of children’s books – “the book designed for the consumer child” (Pearson, 2013, p. 7) which conforms to Zipes’s own arguments. By providing or allowing images of violence, brutality, horror and explicit sex, Zipes claims that publishers are limiting children’s critical thinking, by disabling a longer reflective capacity of sustained reading. Needless to say that this prevents children and young

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<sup>12</sup> A recurrent question pointed by critics is whether the young are being victims of the commercial interests of corporations such as Disney, Time Warner, and other Hollywood giants, as well as of publisher houses which associate to those corporations whose final goal lies under capitalist interests. Naturally, the answer to this question confirms that both children and youngsters are very much influenced in their imagination by violence, brutality, horror and explicit sex, which in overall terms defines the Western culture of today.

readers from being creative and sophisticated when it comes to critically opt for new products (e.g., books) marketed for them, as they are constantly manipulated to buy the hip products.

In line with Zipe's arguments, Amanda Craig says that in our Third Golden Age, children are asked "to confront not only the traditional enemies such as school bullies or Dark Lords, but Death itself." The child and young readers are asked to play the active role of the hero by defying adversities, facing dangers, and so on. The spread of Young Adults fiction, also known as crossover fiction (because it appeals to both adults and children) approaches themes such as death and sex, which have become part of children's literature scenario. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Stephenie Meyer's *The Twilight Saga*, John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, or J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series are some of the successes this type of fiction has to offer (Craig, 2015).

J. K. Rowling and the Harry Potter books represent, perhaps, the epitome of the Third Golden Age in children's literature. The author, more or less, followed the path that some children's authors of the Second Golden Age used (e.g., Tolkien and Lewis), by adding fantastic elements and characters to the story, e.g. magic and wizards. The presence of fantasy thus proves to be once again a key element in children's fiction. But she managed to present to young readers different ways to cope with the hostilities of life, be it the banal struggles of coming of age or dealing with their loss of innocence. This is transversal to all children's literature of the Third Golden Age. Fiona McCulloch (2011) says that "it is the child who must navigate its own way though the dangers that unfold, including good *versus* evil, and the anxieties of growing up" (p. 42). The child is no longer protected from reality as it was; often assumes nasty roles, being able to commit the most appalling acts, subverting the expected romantic behaviour. This can be confirmed in Roald Dahl's books, which are often coined with violent and greedy features, not very politically correct characters, who many times appeal to the grotesque, something that derived from a necessity to satisfy children's desire and appetite for violence, greed and disgusting subjects.

By comparing the First and Third Golden ages of children's literature, we can easily find that in the first there was a constant encouragement to the child with the story that was being told – children were made to feel as part of the story. The Third Golden Age does not provide it from the beginning until the end of the story; there is not a *continuum* in this encouragement, and when there is, it is not delivered as it was in the First Golden Age. Amanda Craig even refers to an alarming prevailing "idea of a child self-harming, being ill, dying, or even committing suicide"<sup>13</sup> (Craig, 2015). Besides the fatalistic tendency of

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<sup>13</sup> John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) is perhaps the one novel which comes up to everyone's minds illustrating this. The story about two teenagers who met in self-aid meetings for people passing through terminal cancer and fall in love, definitely appears as the perfect formula to reach a large audience.

writing about human misery and suffering, exploring the reader's emotions, which has been recurrent in today's Young Adults literature, a concern with its commercial success is equally present. This fatalistic tendency to portray human misery and suffering, exploring the reader's emotions has in its purpose to instil a good sense of hope and resilience in the reader – there is always a wish for a happy ending at the end of the story, which sometimes comes as unresolved endings. Despite that, this does not encourage the reader in the same way that children's literature of the nineteenth century did; but never before has the reader had such a wide range of topics as diverse as today, something which did not happen in the nineteenth century, by comparison.



## 2. CONCEPTS AND IMAGES OF THE CHILD AND THE FEMININE IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

As was seen in the previous chapter, childhood was not discovered in the Victorian era. The concept itself had been developed since the Enlightenment and during the Romantic era. The knowledge of child psychology and the increasing importance of children's education, driven by mentors such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, contributed significantly for the development of the concept of childhood as intrinsically distinct from that of adulthood. The Victorians thus inherited the interest in childhood from their predecessors. At this time, and as defended by Nelson, the child and the state of being a child, education, acquired such social importance and emotional impact that it resulted in new representations of the child – the ideal child – in literature, particularly (as cited in Tucker, 2014, p. 69, 70). The Victorians' need for new and idealised images of the child are roughly explained by feelings of nostalgia and their search for a lost innocence, in order to break with the boredom and the anxieties characteristic of this period.

Childhood acquired even a status of relevance, to the extent that Victorians created Education Acts to warrant the protection of children's interests, mostly due to children's exploitation through child labour, by making school attendance compulsory, gradually removing them from adult environments (p. 69, 70).<sup>14</sup> This concern was extended to the nineteenth century's literary production, with a shift in terms of representations of the child, namely the female child. Some images are more realistic, as we may see in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), whose protagonist is not an innocent, passive child; rather, Jane has a strong character, daring to question the social precepts under which the child was treated and educated in home and school contexts, as will be mentioned ahead in this chapter. Other images tend to blend the real and the ideal, as seen in most of Charles Dickens' productions, namely, *Hard Times* (1854); other images are still more 'idealised' or more fantastic, as eventually Lewis Carroll's own.

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<sup>14</sup> In 1870, the first major Education Act is Foster's Education Act, drafted by William Foster. It determined that new school boards could be set up in places where they were insufficient and children between the ages of five and thirteen had the need to have an elementary education. In ten years, in 1880, another important Education Act took place, this time, making school compulsory for children between the ages of five and twelve and children "could be exempted to work part-time in factories, if they had reached a certain educational standard" (Cook, 2005, p. 122).

## 2.1 THE ROLE OF CHILDHOOD – REPRESENTING THE REAL AND THE IDEAL CHILD

The deep changes felt in English society, essentially caused by the Industrial Revolution, led Victorian artists to expose an increasingly real(istic) human being, focused on their immediate world and its most burning social issues. In order to express the anxieties of Victorian society, defined by man's constant conflict with the outside world and himself – a crisis of identity caused by scientific and technological development – writers and other artists conceived art as a means to purge those same anxieties, always with a strong sense of expectation about what might come next (Ewerton, 2011, p. 26). Additionally, censorship prevailed in favour of morals and good customs, which led these same authors to feel constrained to address certain subjects; even more so, when it came to writing for children. During this period, only men had access to the original texts, such as Shakespeare's, due to their tabooed themes. Censored versions were then produced for women, and for children in schools.

Industrial capitalism gave rise to a new social (urban) class in Victorian England, which was engaged in the vast areas of business, assuming dominant positions in professional occupations. This was cemented in a set of beliefs that privileged social mobility, work, talent, effort and initiative, and which contributed to the rise in social status, based on respect and admiration (Gorham, 1982, p. 3). Not surprisingly, family became heaven for the Victorians – a sort of relief from the tensions between the moral Christian values and the values of capitalism, partly explaining the striking separation of spheres, which in turn became a major image in literature and other arts in this period. This fact strongly emphasised 1) the idealisation of home (as a shelter for religious values) and, consequently, 2) the idealisation of the elements that took part of this sphere, such as women and children (p. 3, 4).

If the public sphere was destined to men, as the place for business, politics and professional life, the private sphere was destined to women (and children) as the place for love, emotions and domesticity. If there was then an ideal image for women to conform to, what was the ideal image of the child that prevailed? As children had, in their turn, to be docile, well-behaved and obedient to adults and social norms, one may thus associate this image to little 'angels in the house'. The very fact that the Victorians valued the Romantic idyllic image of innocence of the child is no surprise. The idea of growing up became associated with the development of society, its constant revitalisation: a metaphor of humanity in its infancy (p. 3, 4). It did not take long for the child to assume the symbol of hope, and childhood to become a metaphor for new beginnings.

First and foremost, we have to remind ourselves that the childhood status of today is anything but comparable to that of Victorian times (1830 to 1900). However, it was during this period that an activism concerned with children's wellbeing at work became evident, "motivated in part by a growing

acceptance of the Romantic idea that children are innocent creatures who should be shielded from the adult world and allowed to enjoy their childhood” (Gubar, *Representing Childhood*). Regarding the more privileged Victorian children, there was a huge concern with the constant impetus to be proper and adopt a polite behaviour, often with a minimal contact with their parents. Conversely, poor children’s reality could not be more different; they had to work to help their families, being many times exploited in precarious jobs. Even though poor families had so little and there were also many dysfunctional families in the lower-classes, they were more united and loving than those of the upper-classes.

The interest of the Victorians in childhood made them develop the concept in ways that had repercussions on childrearing. However, not all Victorian children could enjoy education – only the wealthy ones belonging to the upper- and middle-classes. As debated by Tucker, nursemaids usually took care of the smallest, whereas governesses taught the older ones; additionally, and contrarily to the girls, boys over the age of seven were usually “boarders at preparatory or public schools” (as quoted in Nelson, 2014, p. 70).

Childrearing was for many Victorians a matter for specialists, such as teachers and childcare workers, but this only became more of a reality late in the century. In preceding years, children’s education was in the hands of individuals with certain amateur qualities who devoted all their time and effort into teaching them. This was more of a responsibility for housekeepers who supervised nursemaids and, in many cases, children’s upbringing was in the hands of mothers who taught them at home. We can thus conclude that children’s education of the higher classes, in particular that of young girls, happened mostly in the context of the domestic sphere, up until later in the period. Under this social context, and considering the fact that men were seen as the ones who had to provide for their families, the boys’ education became more and more important when compared to that of the girls, who were undervalued not only in this matter, but also in other aspects of social life (Horn, 1997, p. 20).

It was commonly accepted that this education would instil discipline, good behaviour and stoicism in children – also “a tenet in the middle-class creed” (p. 21). There was the snobbiest barrier between the lower middle- and the upper working-classes, very much visible at schools, despite that “‘social mixing’ was becoming more widely accepted” (p. 21, 23, 24). Class distinction led to rivalry between children of both social groups: youngsters who lived in shopkeepers’ streets would play in the pavement. If some other children of a different social status passed through this street without an adult escort, they would be persecuted, pointed at and shouted at, reflecting the Victorians’ contempt towards people from other social groups (p. 25). The attitude was similar as to religious differences.

But what about education at schools in the nineteenth century? It was in 1828 that Thomas Arnold became headmaster of Rugby school and his name is a synonym for the restructuring and reconceptualization of schools.<sup>15</sup> The Arnoldian reforms were aimed at institutionalizing a tighter discipline and a nobler attitude to young boys, by performing curricular reforms, such as introducing new subjects other than Mathematics or the Classics. Furthermore, Arnold would value sports, particularly athleticism in order to control boys' agitation at schools. Public schools existed in small number (e.g. Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Westminster, Rugby, Shrewsbury, or Charterhouse),<sup>16</sup> but were places where bullying practices existed out of institutional control. The adoption of the "prefect" system implemented by Thomas Arnold, treating "senior boys as gentlemen, increasing their power and duties so that they shared responsibility for moral tone and discipline,"<sup>17</sup> highlights the Victorian change in the concept of childhood with the importance that a child gradually gained. Soon Arnold's policies would expand to all schools in England, in a time when new schools were proliferating.

Charles Dickens' identification with Carlyle's critique on Utilitarianism, portrayed in *Signs of the Times* (1829),<sup>18</sup> inspired him to write novels which depicted the consequences of a system that treated humans in a mechanical way, depriving them of emotions, affection, and imagination. Dickens puts these philosophical assets in context with his characters' lives to show the negative effects that they could have on real people's lives. The excesses of the growing capitalism, which were negatively affecting human relationships, were Charles Dickens' favourite subject matter. In *Hard Times*, he critically exposes the conditions under which the working class was living, and how its members were treated by heartless capitalists: Bounderby treats his workers as objects that he exploits according to his interests; Mr. Gradgrind and his school, in turn, give us an overview of a utilitarian/rational educational system.

In Dickens, the representation of the child is an ambivalent confrontation between the real and the ideal, being the ideal his way to weave some social commentary on how society treated its children.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Arnold was born June 13, 1795, East Cowes and died June 12, 1842, Rugby. He was a famed educator and influential headmaster of Rugby School, and he was the father of the poet Matthew Arnold.

<sup>16</sup> Public schools or independent schools were/are the private institutions responsible for the secondary-level students' education, aged between 13 and 18, in the United Kingdom. Students pay a fee to attend these schools, which are independent of the state system. The term 'public school' emerged in the 18th century and "public" means that access was not restricted on the basis of religion, occupation, or home location, and that they were subject to public management.

<sup>17</sup> More information on this subject is available at: <https://www.rugbyschool.co.uk/about/history/>.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Carlyle published *Signs of the Times*, in 1829, in the *Edinburgh Review*. He criticized the impact of the Industrial Revolution, which he blamed for corrupting human individuality and spirituality. He called the period the "mechanical age" because he believed that people were becoming mechanical automatons. Utilitarianism and the *laissez-faire* system were suppressing human freedom and the freedom people were given by this new reality was illusory (Diniejko, *The Victorian Web*).

The character Mr. Gradgrind leads his life with rational rules, making this philosophy one of his school's premises, through which he instructs the children who attend it. The conversation between the schoolmaster and a speaker at the beginning of chapter one illustrates the strict educational precepts:

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir (Dickens, 1994, p. 1)!

Dickens' intention was to prove this educational approach as harmful, transforming life unbearably, when an education was given without showing compassion or stimulating the imagination of the child. Sissy Jupe appears as the character who contradicts almost all others in *Hard Times*. She is kind and loving, even when she is forced to learn Gradgrind's philosophy. As she is so emotionally stable, this philosophy does not affect her and she never abandons her optimism. She grows up freely in her father's circus, to which she is naturally tied up; something which also paves the way for her to be 'the carrier' of imagination and creativity. She presents difficulties in absorbing what Gradgrind's school tries to teach her because all of it was too abstract and mechanical. Sissy's lack of identification intends to contradict the Utilitarian methods under which the school was being ruled. Despite sounding logical or objective, Gradgrind's policies did not make any sense to her or to the author himself. Thus, in the end, Gradgrind's children are themselves shown by Dickens to be the unfortunate victims of the system that their own father implements and imposes on them.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.2 Some Myths and Idea(l)s of the Feminine in the Period.**

It is a fact that throughout the centuries, men and women were destined to occupy social positions which were not constructed on an equitable basis. Male representatives have traditionally been associated with an entire power force and superiority, be it physical, intellectual, financial or moral, to the detriment of women. Patriarchal-based societies, such as the Victorian one, have come into existence through the idea that only men could assume the role of family providers. Out of this ideology, men gained control in all areas, and they assumed the role of nurturers and masters of all the family members.

This sub-chapter intends to deal with issues of gender that contributed to the creation of the idealised woman figure, and show how these images, social expectations and prejudices were passed on to little boys and little girls since an early age. While seeking to strengthen the sacred role of women as

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<sup>19</sup> Due to the lack of a loving parental supervision, the son, Tom Gradgrind, becomes involved in illicit activities and ends up as a criminal. The daughter, Louise Gradgrind, is forced into a marriage of convenience and faces the danger of being seduced by a rogue.

home guardians, the idealisation of the female figure as the 'angel in the house' was not enough to appease the anxieties of those living the social transformations of the period on a daily basis. Not only were women increasingly required in the labour market, mainly seen in the working classes, but they also wanted improvements in their living conditions and prospects. The image of the confined woman in the domestic sphere became, therefore, increasingly artificial and far from the emerging reality of this period<sup>20</sup>.

Not surprisingly, all these problems had a strong presence and expressiveness in the literature of the period, pioneered by great writers and poets of the time, as is the case of Lord Tennyson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*, first published in 1832 and revised in 1842, begins with a *Lady* incarcerated in a tower, for unknown reasons, doing the only things she is permitted – confined to an interior space, weaving and singing. Surrounding her, there is a classed society of the countryside: field workers, market girls, an abbot, a page and knights who disregard her existence. She cannot look directly through the window, or a curse will fall upon her. It seems a straightforward tale of sexual morality, intended to give a dramatic view of the relationship between the Victorian patriarchal ideology and women, without directly stating it. When the Lady sees sir Lancelot, the most charming of knights, she decides to break the rule by looking directly through the window, forsaking the passive position, which stated that women must obey social rules, and abandoning the tower. Her punishment is eventually death. Without having a prior knowledge of Tennyson, one wonders if he was trying to state that women had to be punished when they transgressed social expectations, or if he was in fact criticising these social punishments and the way women were deprived from the public sphere. Probably he wanted to propose a change and he dramatized women's condition as to pave the way for a new and liberating society (Prettejohn, 2000, p. 223 – 231).

Most of the stereotyped images of gender roles, which were perpetuated in many of the literary productions of the Victorian period, highlight the paradoxical inconsistencies of the ideal female image. There was a blockage in women's access to professional careers outside home, which ultimately had

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<sup>20</sup> The second half of the nineteenth century was particularly marked by an uproar against these biased images with women's claims for more social rights, which they would gain gradually. For instance, in 1839 women were allowed to petition for custody of children under seven years of age with the Child Custody Act; in 1848, a school for young girls and women, Queen's College, was established in London for the first time; in 1870, the Married Women's Property Act was approved, giving "women full rights over inheritances and money earned after marriage," even though, all property that was in their name before marriage still became legally of the husband; the next year, women won the right to vote in municipal elections, but not in national elections; 1882 was the year the Second Married Woman's Property Act gave "women ownership over all property acquired by their own efforts;" in 1883 the Third Married Woman's Property Act came to give them control of their own property, and 1898 marks the rise of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (*Duke University Library*).

implications on their access to other areas circumscribed to the public sphere. Given this polarised reality, social convulsions would soon give rise to social movements claiming rights and equality for women, e.g., the same rights and duties as men's: the right to vote, the recognition of their intellectual capacities and the access to education, just to mention the most relevant (*Encyclopedia.com*).

Closely linked to the idealised image of woman, the education of girls based itself on the prevailing premise "boys first." Girls had to accept it as part of normality, something that we can see in the testimony of a Victorian girl, coming from a wealthy background, when talking about her daily life at home:

I came last in all distribution of food at table, treats of sweets, and so on. I was expected to wait on the boys, run messages, fetch things left upstairs, and never grumble, let alone refuse ... I was never taken to anything more exciting than a picture gallery, not even to a pantomime at Christmas ... My father's slogan was that boys should go everywhere and know anything, and that girls should stay at home and know nothing (Stuart, 1982, p.111, 115, 148).

In another testimony, we can see a list of "do's and don'ts" given to a little girl – Margaret Gladstone – by her older half-sisters who, subsequently, became responsible for her education, after her mother's death some years after her birth:

*Walk.* Take short, firm steps, keeping the body upright & steady ... go along in a straight line not wagging from side to side of the path or pavement. Do not swing more than *one* arm at a time... *Behaviour at table.* Do not begin to eat before other people. ... Do not take large mouthfuls. Chew your food thoroughly (at least 20 bites) before swallowing. ... Never take a second mouthful before you have finished the first. Do not *finish* to the last crumb or spoonful, or scrape your plate. When *finished* do not clutch your knees. *General remarks.* Do not read much. Do not eat too much butter or jam (Horn, 1997, p. 26).

These were some of the general principles and gender attitudes underlying the upbringing of Victorian girls. It was common that children were served austere meals at schools, or forced to take cold baths every morning, without the right to sit or loll in easy-chairs, nor sleep on good soft mattresses, just to mention a few examples of severe educational measures. These were realistically depicted by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (in the passage regarding Lowood School in the novel).

Charlotte Brontë chose to explore the implications that a difficult childhood could have on these future lives. She explored, in particular, the child's loneliness and isolation in the hostile and grim Lowood School. Her protagonist, Jane, is an uncommon girl with a strong personality; she always defends her opinions and positions on all matters. When she is sent to Lowood, she is confronted with very strict social norms that are severe with little girls, especially those who were disobedient and inquisitive. This school system, by virtually depriving children of childhood, is exposed; Charlotte uses her *logos* to critically depict a rigid utilitarian and purist/religious education for girls, and its brutal practices as the means to achieve a deliberate end: pure and submissive women, gifted only in home context activities.

Helen, Jane's friend at Lowood, assumes a submissive resigned attitude as to the teachers' austerity; she tells Jane that Miss Temple's mildness is not very effective for them to be good. Jane says

to Helen: “Well, then, with Miss Temple you are good?” to which she replies: “Yes, in a passive way: I make no effort; I follow as inclination guides me. There is no merit in such goodness” (Brontë, 1996, 68). Helen believes in Christian forgiveness and endurance; still, Jane does not share this opinion and replies:

A great deal; you are good to those who are good to you. It is all I ever desire to be. If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should – so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again (p. 68).

There is a clear influence of religion in children’s education and thinking, which Jane fights against, by subverting social idealised norms as to women’s (and little girls’) behaviour. This fact was no more than Charlotte Brontë giving voice to children (and women), which reflects the Victorian’s growing tendency to protect them. The underlying message is that children had to question, to learn how to judge the adult’s attitudes towards them, and the adults had to rethink their position and actions in reverse.

Mr. Brocklehurst, director of Lowood Institution, believed that girls had to receive an education which guided them to be moderate. His episode with Julia Severn, ordering her curly hair to be cut off because, according to him, she dared to defy every precept of such an “evangelical, charitable establishment,” in “conform[ing] to the world so openly” (Brontë, 1996, p. 75) shows the extent to which puritan beliefs had such a strong influence at schools. Indignant (but moderate), Miss Temple tried to dissuade him of it, arguing that Julia’s hair was natural. He contested:

Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature: I wish these girls to be the children of Grace: and why that abundance? I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly. Miss Temple, that girl’s hair must be cut off entirely; I will send a barber to-morrow: and I see others who have far too much of the excrescence – that tall girl, tell her to turn round (p. 75, 76).

He believed the girls should be modest and plain, which was the same as saying that the girls (future women) had to repress their own nature in order to be socially accepted. In this sense, Jane was already unfolding the feminist speech for which the novel is very well known. Secretly or subtly, the author was giving voice to women’s claims for equality of gender.

Using a different literary approach and form (an epic verse novel), Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856) criticised women’s severe education on feminine attainments, as it harmed their intellectual capacities. In book five, Aurora is proposed to by her cousin Romney Leigh. However, Romney, reflecting the prevalent Victorian position, underestimated her intellectual capacities to prosper in the public sphere. Romney asserts that women do not have the passion, intellectual capacity, or redeeming qualities to become true artists. Because he is so sceptical about Aurora’s poetic ability, and too much immersed in his philanthropic work, she rejects him. Her aunt disapproves her decision, warning her that she will end up with nothing to inherit because he is the male heir of the estate. When Aurora’s aunt dies,

Romney offers her money to help her, which she promptly refused, preferring to fight for her career as a poet. EBB's story was already unveiling the feelings of the time regarding women's social status, which would be strongly debated by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor.<sup>21</sup>

In book one, EBB approaches the education of women by presenting the subjects Aurora's aunt thought to be the best education in order to remove her inquisitive temper and her individuality. Hence, she had to read books which made her learn how to be a good woman, "learn lists of useless facts, and perform obtuse tasks like spinning glass and modelling flowers in wax" (Avery, *British Library*). It was only when she got access to her father's library that she felt her mind 'opening up as a volcanic eruption' (*British Library*):

As the earth  
Plunges in fury, when the internal fires  
Have reached and pricked her heart, and, throwing flat  
The marts and temples, the triumphal gates  
And towers of observation, clears herself  
To elemental freedom – thus, my soul [...] (Browning, 1978, p. 64).

In *Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill would attack the legal position of women in marriage contracts, which he saw as a kind of slavery because "[h]ardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and all minutes" (Mill, 1970, p. 159), women had thus to be constantly watching over the family's well-being. Property and income, all belonged to the husband by legal laws, even if women were the ones who brought it to the marriage.<sup>22</sup> The same happened as to children; a mother who abandoned home would lose any right to her children. Mill based his claims on the idea that there ought to be a legal recognition and equality to marriage contracts.

It was thus through *Aurora* that EBB claimed what later on John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor would argue for in their essays. Barrett Browning created a strong protagonist to say that women did not need to be passively waiting for things to happen. This can be seen in Aurora's statement, in which she seems to suggest that she would prefer to die, rather than being passive, unable to act for fear of some social reprimand:

But learn this: I would rather take my part  
With God's Dead, who afford to walk in white

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<sup>21</sup> John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was probably the most influential philosopher of nineteenth-century England. He expressed advanced ideas about society, morality, economy, and politics. His views are mainly based on empiricism (rooted in John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume, and Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism) and of a liberal political outlook of society and culture (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Harriet Taylor (1807-1858) was an English philosopher best known for her feminist views. Advocating for women's rights, she wrote the essay *The Enfranchisement of Women* in 1851. John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor had a twenty-eight-year relationship, the reason for which her essay was published under Mill's name.

<sup>22</sup> The husband was called the lord of the wife by the old laws of England (Mill, 1970, p. 158).

Yet spread His glory, than keep quiet here,  
And gather up my feet from even a step,  
For fear to soil my gown in so much dust.  
I choose to walk at all risks (Browning, 1978, p. 77).

The ideal of the feminine was at this time based on a 'majestic childishness', as Deborah Gorham (1982) argues in *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* – "a sign of the extent to which she was removed from the vicissitudes of the public sphere" (p. 6). She indeed uses John Ruskin's term "majestic childishness" of the ideal of woman by referring to that perfect loveliness of a woman's countenance which "consist[s] in the majestic peace present in the memory of happy and useful years" (Ruskin, 2001, p. 81).<sup>23</sup> We have thus come to the point in which we may conclude that the ideal woman and the ideal child share similar characteristics: women had to retain a "childlike simplicity" precisely because they had been reserved to the domestic sphere. Women should possess a youthful promise in being, or behaviour, which would be translated into an eternal youth. Nevertheless, regardless of the fact that the Victorian idealisation of womanhood emphasised certain childlike qualities, especially in maturity, women also had to have a womanly strength to face the challenges and hardships of the domestic environment.

John Ruskin's most emphasised description of the ideal woman is what he calls "womanly beauty", referring to womanly strength that could only be attained with man's stimulus, i.e., by creating the right ambience, treating her tenderly, providing her with the right education, "not by power, but by an exquisite *rightness*" which would contribute to "the completion of womanly beauty" (Ruskin, 2001, p. 79). Both men and women had to possess "vital feelings of delight," which were necessary in man's stimulus of women's good nature in order to make her lovely and beautiful (p. 80).

Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* (1854) had also emphasized the idea of separate spheres as to social (feminine and masculine) roles. Domesticity was the topic gathering most controversy in Victorian society, especially because of its constraining conceptions of the idealised woman (epitomised by Coventry), in which the "express purpose of providing a place of renewal for men, after the rigorous activities in the harsh, competitive public sphere" was present (Gorham, 1982, p. 5). Women were expected to be dependent and submissive to men, assuming angelical qualities of innocence, purity, and self-sacrificing attitudes; or, as Ruskin designated it, the feelings of delight, tenderness, a natural innocence and virtue, which were the conveyors for attaining the ideal woman (Ruskin, 1871, p. 95, 96).

Patriarchal ideology 'decided' that women had to be protected from the rigours of the public sphere, as they were thought to be frail and vulnerable, and, to top that, they had home duties exclusively

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<sup>23</sup> "Majestic childishness" was a term first used by John Ruskin in his *Sesame and Lilies (Of Queens' Gardens)*, first published in 1865.

destined for them which they should fulfil. Only men were thought to be able to manage the hardness of the public sphere, and if women were exposed to this hardness, they too would be hardened like men, disabling them to perform their duties. If this happened, women would not be able to gather the desirable warmth in the home context, which men needed in seeking refuge from the hardships of public life. This ideology was something against which Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) so incisively struggled, saying that

[t]he works of women are symbolical.  
We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,  
Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,  
to put on when you're weary (...)  
This hurts most, this – that, after all, we are paid  
The worth of our work, perhaps" (Browning, 1978, p. 52).

Browning's verse novel and fully realised heroine was indeed a response to Alfred Tennyson's mock-heroic epic *The Princess* (1847). Here, Tennyson had approached the theme of the woman's cause, presenting the Victorian reader with an opposed ideal, perhaps mythical, but certainly futuristic perspective of women. It presented a story about a princess, Ida, who was decided to dedicate her life to open a women's university, having refused to conform to social expectations and marry. The Prince to whom she had been promised was, however, determined to thwart her of her feminist ideals. Eventually, she was able to found a women's university where men were not allowed to enter – the same actually happened to women, to whom the first academic access was only granted in 1853, at Queen's College. Princess Ida's drastic choice of valuing a university for women over marriage represents her claim for gender equality, contradicting the tendencies of the time which said that women were made to marry and live for their husbands and children, preventing them from pursuing an academic education. In the same way that Romney finally came to the conclusion that women had intellectual value, seen in Aurora's poetic achievements, to succeed within man's (literary) world, so did the Prince recognise that "the woman's cause is man's," and surrendered to Ida's just claims, while managing to convince her to finally marry him (Isaacs, *Victorian Web*).

However, it was not only within the literary world that many voices were claiming for a change aimed at empowering women (socially and intellectually) – the same could be seen in other Victorian artistic manifestations.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood presented variations of the ideals of the feminine, both in poetry and in paintings, which helped to deconstruct the already existent representations and build up new ones. Its members, namely D.G. Rossetti, were fond of representing women's facial (and bodily) expressions to portray filtered images of women according to their ideals of *femme fatale*, victim, or saint. The depiction

of women in the Victorian art of the first half of the nineteenth century was of sweet, delicate appearances to embody modesty and submissive characters. When the Pre-Raphaelites first appeared in the artistic and literary scenes, in 1848, they disrupted with the previous aesthetic and performed a plane cut with the passive angelical woman. They chose to portray women assuming secure, rather active postures that even today appear assertive, confident and strong. This very fact horrified the Victorian audience because of the break with the idealised image of the “angel in the house.”

Still, the Pre-Raphaelites were naturally influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they lived, and this can be seen in some of their works. If we analyse Edward Burne-Jones’s companion watercolour paintings, *Clara von Bork* (1860), and *Sidonia von Bork* (1860),<sup>24</sup> we can confirm the polarized attitudes that existed in relation to the image of women. The first represents the epitome of the sweet and gentle woman – a pious Madonna, the second portrays a New Woman that resembles the Magdalene, seductive, devilish, sexually attractive, but completely wicked – thus limiting them to the imprisonment of “dutiful behaviour” or “doomed to suffer destitution and misery” (Prettejohn, 2000, p. 208). In 1850, William Holman Hunt, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, took the images and passages contained in Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shalott* and represented them in the roundels that surrounded the cracked mirror at a central position reflecting sir Lancelot. Unlike Hunt, Elizabeth Siddall decided to represent the defying moment when the Lady of Shalott looks out of the window, in her 1853 painting of the poem,<sup>25</sup> giving more emphasis to a strong woman who was “in control of her own actions” (p. 227).

As seen in the several representations by different artists from different arts, approaching the myths and concepts that surrounded Victorian women, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, who were fully aware of those images, played a fundamental role in the Victorian political arena to fight against these repressive patriarchal ideas. Mill, inspired by Taylor’s ideas, stated in *The Subjection* that “the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself,” indeed “one of the chief hindrances to human improvement” (Mill, 1989, p. 119). He suggested that this had to “be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other” (p. 119). In

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<sup>24</sup> *Clara von Bork* and *Sidonia von Bork* are two characters in Johann Wilhelm Meinhold’s romance, *Sidonia von Bork, die Klosterhexe, or Sidonia the Sorceress* in English, written in 1847. In the romance, both women are punished: Clara dies victim of Sidonia’s evil, and Sidonia is burnt at the stake for all of her crimes and witchcraft (Prettejohn, 2000, p. 208).

<sup>25</sup> Siddall’s painting introduced a new element, never mentioned in the poem, a crucifix, suggesting either that women had to consider their religious faith before taking a transgressive decision, or a social critique to a negative religious influence on people’s (women’s in this particular case) lives. Alternatively, Siddall could be corresponding the Lady’s self-sacrifice in the boat to Christ’s own self-sacrifice, even though her self-sacrifice fails to achieve redemption (Prettejohn, 2000, p. 228).

*Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), Harriet Taylor had indeed compared the abolition of slavery with the abolition of women's slavery, by appealing to men to recognise that women had to be released from domesticity and get a full access to public life.

Mill, in turn, claimed that women's subordination was an injustice which caused a negative influence in family dynamics and structure, creating a negative moral impact on people's lives. The condition of women prevented their intellectual and moral development, and access to the many social areas; and this affected all members of society – not only women and children, but also men – within the family context. Mill's main interest was to propose a change in women's upbringing, with a freer access to education, in order for women to become stronger in mind to, then, feel secure to assume other social roles.

It is important to state that, like other writers of the period, Lewis Carroll would, at this time, be quite aware both of the literature produced on the Woman Question and of these advanced proposals for legal reform, even if it is difficult to find evidence of his position on the subject.



### 3. LEWIS CARROLL'S STORIES AND VERSE IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS LITERARY CAREER

#### 3.1 The Development and Critical Fortune of CLD's Work

The now well-known name of Lewis Carroll is really a pseudonym for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson; Lutwidge, from his mother Frances Jane Lutwidge, and Dodgson from his father Charles Dodgson. It is interesting how Carroll used his own imagination and taste for wordplay to create the name for which he would be globally known, by making the Latin correspondence to his real name, anglicising it, and then reversing their order. Lewis thus stands for a mixture or combination of 'Ludovicus' and 'Lutwidge'; and Carroll stands for 'Carolus' and 'Charles' (Collingwood, Moses, & Bowman, 2014, no page).

The younger Charles Dodgson indeed stood out in various different arts, particularly in photography and literature (he wrote poetry and also narrative texts), and in the area of mathematics, having been a teacher at Christ Church, Oxford. It is said that Lewis Carroll's taste for nonsense, his most striking feature, came from his father, something which can be found in some of the letters his father sent to him and his sisters. One letter that his father sent to him proves it very clearly – they both liked to play with words humorously:

My dearest Charles,

I am very sorry that I had not time to answer your nice little note before. You cannot think how pleased I was to receive something in your handwriting, (...). As soon as I get to Leeds I shall scream out in the middle of the street, *Ironmongers, Ironmongers*. Six hundred men will rush out of their shops in a moment – fly, fly, in all directions – ring the bells, call the constables, set the Town on fire. I WILL have a screw driver, and a ring, and if they are not brought directly, in forty seconds, I will leave nothing but one small cat alive in the whole Town of Leeds (...). Then what a bawling and a tearing of hair there will be! Pigs and babies, camels and butterflies, rolling in the gutter together – old women rushing up the chimneys and cows after them – ducks hiding themselves in coffee-cups, and fat geese trying to squeeze themselves into pencil cases. (...) At last they bring the things which I ordered, and then I spare the Town, and send off in fifty waggons, and under the protection of ten thousand soldiers, a file and a screw driver and a ring as a present to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, from his affectionate Papa (Wakeling, 2015, p. 6).

From this letter, we can perceive an exaggeration of reality, which is fictionalised by recurring to fantasy and imagination. His father was a 'mad hatter'<sup>26</sup> himself, in the way he played with reality and the different 'characters' of the Town of Leeds, in order to show his own boredom during his stay at a different town, probably on a work trip. Nonsense and the absurd are recurrent features in this letter, as in other

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<sup>26</sup> The expression 'mad hatter' is linked to a character's personality and behaviour in *Alice in Wonderland*. He is an eccentric character, both in behaviour and dressing as seen in the illustrations, who first appears in chapter 7, "The Mad Tea Party" (Carroll, 2001, p. 72).

letters of Carroll's father. No wonder the son would inherit this characteristic and eventually transpose it to his literary production.

Lewis Carroll was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1832 near the village of Daresbury, Cheshire, England. The son of a conservative clergyman of the Anglican Church, he was the third of eleven children and the oldest of the boys. He had already got two older sisters, Frances and Elizabeth, and the following years to his birth would present him with another two, Caroline and Mary (Wakeling, 2015: p. 1). Naturally, girls would become the company he would know since his birth, something that might explain his later preference for and identification with little girls. Nonetheless, he would have other siblings that came later on to complete the entire family: Skeffington, Wilfred, Louisa, Margaret, Henrietta and Edwin (p. 1).

Till the age of twelve, he was educated at home, age when he would be sent to a private school near Richmond and, in 1846, he moved to Rugby School, place where he discovered his talent in Mathematics – which he had inherited from his father – having both of them excelled in it and won prizes. In spite of this, Carroll apparently did not have a very good experience at this school in other respects, according to the few remarks he made on the subject when referring to those years.

I cannot say ... that any earthly considerations would induce me to go through my three years again ... I can honestly say that if I could have been ... secure from annoyance at night, the hardships of the daily life would have been comparative trifles to bear (as cited in Leach, 2004, *Victorian Web*).

As other speculations that surround Lewis Carroll's life, there are some theories defending that this speech may denote some form of sexual abuse. The phrase "Annoyance at night" has led some scholars to this conclusion, though nothing was directly stated by Carroll himself (Leach, 2004). Nevertheless, what is very present is his disappointment regarding those school years, something that might be easily explained as bullying, from which he appears to have been a victim, even if, academically, he was an excellent, very promising student (Leach, 2004). It cannot be ignored, though, that he endured certain physical disabilities, one of which being deafness in one ear, and another one stammering, something likely for young teenagers to make fun of in a cruel way (Green, 2016).

It was during his childhood that Carroll developed an interest in literature, having read many influential authors, such as William Shakespeare, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens and Lord Alfred Tennyson. At an early age, he started developing his own writing skills, having written short stories and poems for his family magazine – *Mischmasch*, which Carroll wrote, illustrated and edited with his ten siblings. These early short stories and poems, which he later on sent to publication in various magazines, were already revealing of his humorous and mocking facet in writing (Collingwood, Moses, & Bowman, 2014). Although timidly, his work started finding its own place in the British literary market, such as *The*

*Comic Time* or *The Train*; his first romantic poem, *Solitude*, was published in 1856, becoming his first literary success.

In 1849, Carroll left school and made a two-year pause before enrolling into Christ Church, Oxford, in 1851. Soon after, his mother died at the age of forty seven; so, he had to momentarily stop his pursuit of education, which indeed was often challenged throughout his life. These adverse circumstances would strongly affect his health, both physically and mentally. In 1852, Carroll won the title in an Honours Moderation and, immediately after, he was attributed a studentship. In 1854, he earned his Bachelor's degree with a first class honours in Mathematics, and a second in the Classics; and, three years later, he would obtain his Master's degree. This talent and excellence earned him a position as a Mathematics lecturer at Oxford (Christ Church), in 1856; position he occupied until 1881, having remained in the Residence until his death.

During his stay at Oxford, Lewis Carroll met the new Dean of Christ Church, Henry Liddell, who had assumed this position in 1855 and of whom he became a good friend, as well as of all his family (Wakeling, 2015, p. 31). Carroll's identification with and appreciation for children became evident at this period and it was easy for him to become attached to the Liddell's children – Harry, Lorina, Edith and, of course, Alice. He spent a lot of time with them, often entertaining them with stories and jokes, or embarking with them on expeditions, or even taking numerous photographs of them (photography was the latest novelty for the Victorians, something for which Carroll developed a very particular interest).

According to the precepts of his time, he would have to embrace priesthood in order to be able to stay at Christ Church, during the four years of completing his honorary master's degree, which he was given internally (p. 31). The problem was that the studentship he had been attributed demanded him to remain unmarried, so that he could proceed to holy orders, something which he discreetly fled from for unknown reasons. On December 22, 1861, Carroll was ordained a deacon in the Church of England; yet, he declined to embrace priesthood arguing that he felt unsuited for parish work and its corresponding liabilities (Green, 2016).

Alice Liddell was closer to him than any of the other Liddell children, and she was the first to hear the story she herself had inspired – the original title of the first manuscript was *Alice's Adventures Underground*, which Carroll would change to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when he decided to have it published. Little Alice Liddell had begged him to write the story, something he did in 1864, having presented her with the first handwritten manuscript shortly after. The book was published a year later, in 1865, and has become the milestone success in his career and in children's literature. Although the idea

that Alice Liddell was the real protagonist of his book was progressively spread, Carroll did not encourage that truth to be acknowledged.

*Alice's Adventures Underground* presented several differences from the facsimile *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Characters such as the Mad Hatter or the March Hare, or 'The Mad Tea-Party' chapter, did not exist in the original manuscript, just to mention some of the novelties he introduced. What's more, the story involved many private jokes which were circumscribed to the Oxford circle, some of which he withdrew on the grounds that no one outside of this circle could understand them. Carroll also used allusions to his friends and acquainted ones – their lives and peculiar traits. For example, the duck is the Reverend Duckworth, the Lory is Lorina Liddell and the Dodo is Lewis Carroll himself. Carroll, who suffered from stammering, pronounced his name as "Do-Do-Dodgson," so he decided to play with his disability by covertly bringing it to the story (Carroll, 1970, p. 44).

In 1869, Carroll published *Phantasmagoria, a Collection of Poems* and, in 1872, the sequel to Alice's story, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, was published. *Phantasmagoria* is a verse narrative in seven cantos, in which the reader is put in the middle of a discussion between a Phantom and a man called Tibbets. The ghost assumes similar attitudes and views to humans; the only difference is that it lives in a parallel world and has to haunt the world of humans. The ghost must obey the rules of the ghosts' society and respond to the "Royal Whiteness" (the king of ghosts); if they disobey any of the "maxims of behaviour," which have to do, to a certain degree, with formality and social respect to the other, they will be punished. *Phantasmagoria* presents a transversal feature in Carroll's poetry: an emphasis on form which relegates content to a second plan. Nevertheless, a double reading can still be made of this poem: a reading for children, which has to do with specific didactic messages of social conduct, and a reading for adults, which might make them reflect on other social and moral aspects.

Carroll's methodical nature combined itself with his concern for the reader. This made him introduce an epigraph in verse and a preface to each *Alice* story to illuminate the most important aspects. In *Alice in Wonderland*, the reader is introduced to Carroll's allusion to the origin of his story. He tells how he invented the stories of a fictional little girl named Alice to satisfy three real little girls: Prima, Secunda and Tertia, who are a reference to the Liddell girls (Lorina, Alice, and Edith, respectively). The epigraph also tells us about the days that they spent rowing along the river, thus classifying the story as episodic, also corroborated by the fact that the "the tale of Wonderland" grew "slowly, one by one" (p. 20).

All in the golden afternoon  
Full leisurely we glide;  
For both our oars, with little skill,  
By little hands are plied,  
While little hands make vain pretence  
Our wanderings to guide (Carroll, 1996, p. 19).

Finally, in the epigraph's last stanza, *Alice* is presented as a "childish story", one to have lain "where Childhood's dreams are twined in Memory's mystic band" (p. 19).

*Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* presents another epigraph intended to set the new story's mood. It is another of Carroll's original poems which he made on purpose for the opening of the book. Yet, this time, it seems to portray his concern about the loss of innocence associated to the process of growing up. In the story, Alice indeed does "grow up" into a queen, which can be interpreted as the transition into adulthood.

Child of the pure unclouded brow  
And dreaming eyes of wonder!  
Though time be fleet, and I and thou  
Are half a life asunder,  
Thy loving smile will surely hail  
The love-gift of a fairy-tale (p. 119).

In his choice of words, "melancholy maiden," one may wonder whether it is related to real-life Alice and her loss of innocence, or not; nevertheless, one can be certain that it is his reflection about children and their loss of innocence while growing up, which is to say, transiting from "childhood's nest of gladness" to "melancholy maiden" (p. 119-120). Still, Carroll managed to reinforce the idea that his story was aimed at preserving the feelings of childishness, by opposing summer to winter. Summer symbolises childhood, and winter adulthood by opposition. When children become adults, they turn into gloomy human beings; therefore, childhood feelings must be nurtured during adulthood – might be his utmost (very Romantic) message.

The passage in the second stanza "Enough that now thou wilt not fail / To listen to my fairy-tale" (p. 119-120) also shows Carroll's understanding of his stories as fairy-tales. However, and with all the studies that have been made by scholars on the fairy-tale subject, we can now say that his *Alice* stories are fantasy stories, not fairy-tales. Some reasons for this are that they present fantasy features and make-believe in them.<sup>27</sup> However, there is not the sharp definition between good and bad characters of fairy-tales in the *Alice* books, as all of them (the characters) only contribute to Alice's confusion in a greater or lesser extent.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the members belonging to royalty do not present the idealised qualities of fairy-tales, i.e., they are not particularly beautiful or handsome, nor are they angels alike; on the contrary, the

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<sup>27</sup> There are some magic helpers (e.g. the *Drink Me* bottle and the *Eat Me* cake) which help Alice to achieve her purposes and there are transformations (e.g. Alice's size alterations and the Duchess's baby which transforms itself into a pig).

<sup>28</sup> Even though the Queen of Hearts/Red Queen seems to be devilish, she never exceeds the line of threat and coercion.

Duchess is ugly and the Queen is anything but tender; besides, there is not a particular problem or conflict to be solved, as Alice only travels throughout Wonderland trying to understand it.

Another hint that proves his concern for his audience is the preface that he later added to his *Through the Looking-Glass*, providing an explanation to 'the chess-problem' that puzzled some of his readers. The 'chess-problem' had to do with the moves of the three Queens. He explained that "when the three Queens have entered the 'castle', they have moved to the eighth row, where pawns become queens" (Carroll, 2001, p. 137),

"but the 'check' of the White King at move 6, the capture of the Red Knight at move 7, and the final 'checkmate' of the Red King, will be found, by anyone who will take the trouble to set the pieces and play the moves as directed, to be strictly in accordance with the laws of the game" (Carroll, 1996, p. 125).

Carroll recognised that he had to please his readers, by satisfying their best interests and curiosities, or to help them in a better understanding of what he was writing. This concern shows that Lewis Carroll already had an acute awareness of his audience, something of a growing tendency at the time.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, *Through the Looking-Glass* showed a new structural organisation, whose explanation the author also felt compelled to give, not only in the preface to the story, but also as a scheme which he called *Dramatis Personae* and which he introduced at the beginning of the book. This was also aimed at helping the reader's relation with the characters from the previous book. The story was based on a chess game, and the characters correspond to chess pieces whose movements are in accordance with those of the characters in the story. In the preface, Lewis Carroll explains some of the most confusing movements performed by his characters which might present some conflict with real chess rules. Furthermore, he teaches how to pronounce the new words contained in the poem *Jabberwocky*, which is included in the story, so that he could eliminate "some differences of opinion as to their pronunciation" that had arisen (p. 125).

Alice, who may be the first female lead in children's literature, undoubtedly represents Carroll's most important phase. One of the reasons for this importance lies in the fact that he explored childhood, imagination and language, through nonsense and the absurd, in a way that no other writer had done before, having even been able to create new English words which would be culturally absorbed in the coming years.

To complement his many talents, Carroll, who had developed a great interest for photography, sought for more learning techniques in his uncle, and later on in a friend, Reginald Southey, who became

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Dickens, who was one of his most famed contemporaries, also showed this awareness in pleasing his audience.

his mentor. His photographic work consisted essentially of taking nude pictures of children, namely little girls. This fact is considered to be very polemic and indeed earned him countless rumours and controversies that last until today. Yet, it should be mentioned in his defence, Lewis Carroll also enjoyed photographing old men, dogs, statues, dolls, paintings, and trees. Additionally, he took pictures of famous adult people, such as Lord Tennyson, J.E. Millais, the Rossettis, and Julia Margaret Cameron, people with whom he was intimate or close. His commitment to photography gave him some projection, to the point of being considered one of the best photographers of his time, having inspired later modern art photographers; however, for unknown reasons, he would abandon this art a year before he left his position as a lecturer at Christ Church.

Besides his many mathematical books, which he produced throughout his academic career,<sup>30</sup> Carroll managed to write nonsense poetry as well. In 1876, he produced what is perhaps the greatest of his poems, the epic *The Hunting of the Snark*, which consists of a trip performed by a crew of ten men, aimed at tracking down a mythical creature. The poem is an allegory, as later on Carroll unveiled that the story was about the quest for love, although this is never revealed until the last stanza, and the dramatic events seem unfit for the theme of love (Wakeling, 2015, p. 36). Edward Wakeling (2015) establishes a parallel between what was happening in Carroll's life and its influence on his writing of the poem. He was taking care of a relative, his cousin Charlie Wilcox, who was seriously ill, suffering from consumption. The last line, "For the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see," may reflect this feeling of impotence in facing his cousin's illness, and the darker parts of the poem may be a reflection of this same frustration (p. 36).

In 1883, the work *Rhyme? And Reason?* was published, in which he gathered some of his verse, such as *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems*, but this time with illustrations by A. B. Frost (p. 96). The title may suggest Carroll's questioning if the poet really needed to consider both form (rhyme) and content (reason) to create good poetry. Was it really necessary to make sense in order to create poetry of good quality? Or, could a poet create poetry without giving much importance to its content? Judging from his overall literary work and style, it becomes clear that Carroll's form of nonsense deliberately disrupts with meaning itself.

'I'm EMInent in RHYME!' she said.  
'I make WRY Mouths of RYE-meal gruel!'

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<sup>30</sup> Apart from using riddles to teach mathematics to his students, as he did with his friends in order to test them (Wakeling, 1992, p. 17), Carroll also published several mathematical books throughout his academic life. For instance, he published *Curiosa Mathematica* – the first of an incomplete series published for him by Messrs MacMillan during 1888, entitled *A New Theory of Parallels* (Carroll, 2008, p. 285). The work is divided in two parts – Book I and Book II. The latter leads the reader to a conclusion in which Carroll "places a proof (as far as finite magnitudes are concerned) of Euclid's Axiom (p. 285). Carroll had already written *Euclid and his Modern Rivals* (1879), another mathematical book, on Euclid's theories about geometry before (p. 220).

The poet smiled, and shook his head:  
'Is REASON, then, the missing jewel?' (Carroll, 1996, p. 919)

This short and amusing poem dedicated to Miss Emmie Drury shows her superficial reflection about style, which was based on 'wry mouth of rye-meal gruel' (a pun with the same-sound words 'wry' and 'rye'). By shaking his head, the poet might be questioning the relevance of giving either too much or too less emphasis to content in order to write good verse.

*Poeta Fit, Non Nascitur* might in part explain this questioning, as Carroll expresses his idea about what makes a poet. Although the poem is not a clear case of nonsense, he used the Latin proverb "*Poeta Nascitur, Non Fit*" and inverted it to convey his message: a poet is made not born. In fact, he provides some advice for a reader who may want to become a better poet:

First learn to be spasmodic –  
A very simple rule"  
(...)  
"For first you write a sentence,  
And then you chop it small;  
Then mix the bits, and sort them out  
Just as they chance to fall:  
The order of the phrases makes  
No difference at all (Carroll, 1996, p. 749).

On the whole, we can perceive a disruption with the Romantic notions on what a poet should be. "Spasmodic" reports us to a particular poetic form or movement of the time, which was characterized for being intense and embodying sensations and emotions, which may be seen "as a logical extension of the Romantic preoccupation with the poetic feeling" (Tate, 2010, p.15). Carroll might be asserting that the poet has to be emotional and "speak his mind enthusiastically" when writing poetry, "with no humdrum in him, nor any shillyshally" (Carroll, 1996, p. 749). However, it might be the case that he was being ironic, by suggesting that some of the poets of his time were speaking their minds in a monotonous way. This is when his use and domain of language is puzzling, because nothing is directly stated, only implied.

He also offers some technical opinion in terms of form – first, to write a sentence, an idea and, then, shorten it (chop it small) and play with words and rhymes as he did with the word "immature." He split the word in order for the prefix "im-" to rhyme with the word "him," and for the word "mature" to assume a completely opposite meaning from what is written:

Your reader, you should show him,  
Must take what information he  
Can get, and look for no im-  
mature disclosure of the drift  
And purpose of your poem (p. 750-751).

That is to say, in contrast with the silly poet, the “mature” poet has the ability to chop the sentences without losing the intended meaning of his ideas regarding the poem’s content.

Following *Rhyme? And Reason?* was his *A Tangled Tale* (1885), a series of chapters combining mathematical puzzles (which he called ‘knots’) which he wrote to *The Monthly Packet*, with a story about a family, each chapter presenting different situations and different puzzles. The first chapter tells us about two knights, one much younger than the other; they are descending a mountain at six miles per hour and many mathematical calculations are raised for the reader to solve. This shows how Carroll uses the narrative to pedagogically capture the reader’s attention to Mathematics (Wakeling, 1995, p. 57).

In 1889, he wrote another, and last, work; this time, Carroll made an unprecedented incursion into the novel, whose title is *Sylvie and Bruno*, and its sequel, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, would appear in 1893. Unfortunately, the public reception to the story of these two new fictional characters would be lukewarm, if not somewhat indifferent and eventually critical. Indeed, Carroll could not prevent the public from comparing this apparently conventional narrative with his previous *Alice*, to the detriment of the first.

In *Sylvie and Bruno*, Carroll managed to present different stylistic and structural approaches when compared to *Alice*, mostly due to its double plot, making it impossible to perceive what the narrator has seen and what he has imagined (Jackson, 2009). On the one level, he conveyed “political uprisings in a Fairyland world called Outland, with many nonsense elements and poems, aimed at depriving Sylvie and Bruno of their rightful rule” (Gubar, 2005, p. 372); this part of the story indeed presents some stylistic similarities to *Alice*. On another level, he depicted a romance between two real people, Arthur Forrester and Lady Muriel Orme, in the real (Victorian) world (p. 372). He uses these adult characters to discuss on religious, philosophical and moral issues, which, according to some critics, represent a reversal or complete change of direction in his narrative work (p. 373).

In the preface that he later added to this book, Carroll stated some of his ideas about producing a literary work, as well as the changes that he urged to perform, showing his concern with writing something new which he had not done before. He believed that the ‘genesis’ of a book was that “the story had to grow out of the incidents, not the incidents out of the story” and that writing a story was not simple and straightforward as writing “a letter, beginning at the beginning and ending at the end” (Carroll, 1996, p. 246).

I believe that I could, myself,—if I were in the unfortunate position (...) of being obliged to produce a given amount of fiction in a given time,—that I could ‘fulfil my task,’ and produce my ‘tale of bricks,’ as other slaves have done. One thing, at any rate, I could guarantee as to the story so produced—that it should be utterly commonplace, should contain no new ideas whatever, and should be very very weary reading! (p. 246)

The task of producing a ‘tale of bricks’ was not personal, it did not come out of reflection and would probably fail to inspire the reader – it was a mechanical act, and it would take some time for the author to produce new ideas, for he or she would have to “jot[t]ed] down, at odd moments, all sorts of odd ideas, and fragments of dialogue, that occurred (...) with a transitory suddenness that left me no choice but either to record them then and there, or to abandon them to oblivion” (p. 245).

In explaining his shift in style, Carroll states that perhaps the hardest thing in literature is to be original, referring that he did not know if *Alice in Wonderland* was an original story, but, at least, he did not try to imitate any other existing work. He claims that “[t]he path that I timidly explored (...) is now a beaten highroad” with a dozen storybooks on an *Alice* identical pattern, which discouraged him “to attempt that style again” (p. 247). Despite the change, his main goal was the same as in *Alice*:

written, not for money, and not for fame, but in the hope of supplying, for the child whom I love, some thoughts that may suit those hours of innocent merriment which are the very life of Childhood: and also in the hope of suggesting, to them and to others, some thoughts that may prove, I would fain hope, not wholly out of harmony with the graver cadences of Life” (p. 247).

As in *Sylvie and Bruno*, in which he tried to avoid repetition of what he had done with the *Alice Cycle*, Carroll may also have been rethinking his position regarding his poetry. *Three Sunsets and other poems* would be his last work, one in which he was working at the end of his life, and which would only be published posthumously in 1898.

Lewis Carroll's first biography, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (1898) appeared some months after his death, despite the efforts performed by his family in destroying most of the documented papers left by the author (Wakeling, 2015, p. 35). It is needless to say that they were against any biographical publication about Carroll. According to Karoline Leach (2000), the image portrayed by this first biographical work was one “of a Victorian clergyman, shy, and prim, and locked to some degree in perpetual childhood” (*Victorian Web*). She even compares him to Janus, the two faced Roman god – one face looking to the future and the other looking to the past – mostly due to the fact that “he had no life,” living somehow disconnected from the world and normal human contact, having only been able to be a chaste monk who was “to die a virgin” (*Victorian Web*).

The portrait of a man who had an effusive interest in pre-pubescent little girls, who sought emotional refuge, comfort and company in them, is very present in some scholars' minds. In the BBC's documentary, *The Secret World of Lewis Carroll*, we can clearly perceive that there is no consensus amongst Carroll experts regarding his true character or personality. Apparently, Carroll “once asked Alice for a lock of her hair” and the question is posed: “Was that a lover's token” (Beaven, 2015)? Edward Wakeling, the editor of *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, believes that nowadays a lock of hair is a love token, but

then it did not mean the same. He states that the character of the man (Carroll) enjoyed indeed the company and friendship of children, young girls in particular, but that there is no sense of a love interest in this particular event.

Conversely, he is seen by many as a 'paedophile' who struggled against his 'sexual appetites'. For Morton N. Cohen, author of *Lewis Carroll. A Biography* (1995), Dodgson "was emotionally involved," and he refuted the idea that the writer only had a paternal interest in little girls. Vanessa Tait, who is the great granddaughter of Alice Liddell, believes that he was in love with her, but he never admitted that to himself (Beaven, 2015). The fact that Carroll took pictures of little girls was not shocking to Victorians, as taking photographs of middle-class children was very common, and a piece of acting out (Beaven, 2015). Julia Margaret Cameron, who was his contemporary and a photographer as well, also took nude pictures of children (Beaven, 2015). The fact is that, back in the Victorian period, images of naked children were more widespread, even though some of the images, such as the one which Carroll took of Alice Liddell, who appears dressed as a beggar maid with a ragged dress falling off her shoulder,<sup>31</sup> are quite disturbing. Nevertheless, perhaps these doubts are a sort of an imposition of our postmodern sensibility back into the Victorian era. We will never know for sure, as there is no evidence whatsoever proving Carroll's own guilt on this particular subject.

Carroll would die of a severe influenza on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1898, and his body lies in Guildford; in that same year, his nephew Stuart Dodgson Collingwood published his (Carroll's) first biography, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*.

### **3.2 Major features of Carroll's narrative work – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and *What Alice Found There***

The success of the *Alice* books is considerably and consistently based on the innovative features that they presented, particularly in their time of creation. Fantasy, nonsense – mostly seen in the way that Carroll played with the English language (its riddles contrasting with logic), but also in his construction of the plot (resulting in the most surreal and absurd situations), are the most outstanding narrative strategies that made himself and his work notable. The author managed to create nonsense through

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<sup>31</sup> See the photograph in the annexes, figure 16.

conversations between the characters in *Alice*, which in turn provided him the room for making his readers wonder. Wonder about the Victorian *status quo*, such as children's education and the social condition in which children were living (e.g. child labour), also with a great emphasis on girls' education and its impact on the separation of spheres, the hierarchical distinctions in terms of social class and the abuse of power, just to name a few. Carroll does it by mocking with the social conventions of class and gender, and one has to rethink about the underlying messages of his satire, whose indisputable meaning has to be interpreted. He is however able to do it by keeping the adult's reading well-hidden from that of the child, which conversely is aimed at stimulating their imagination.

### **3.2.1 Innovative representations of the child in the cycle of *Alice***

As we begin reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it becomes immediately clear that Carroll showed a very special concern for children. He focused on their special needs as readers, having even suggested his ideas about how he thought children's books should be conceived/written, e.g. when at the very beginning of the story Alice shows signs of being bored because her sister is too serious in reading a book that "had no pictures or conversations" (Carroll, 1996, p. 23). This beginning suggests that his views probably focused not only on content, but also on the way those contents were presented and organised in a book for children. If nowhere else, proof of that lies in the attitude that Alice assumes while sitting on the riverbank.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* significantly starts with this apparently insignificant episode: little Alice feeling bored of being with her sister and sitting on the river bank with nothing to do. As her sister was occupied reading a book, at which Alice peeped now and then, consumed by boredom, Alice suddenly poses an intriguing and challenging question: "what is the use of a book (...) without pictures or conversations"? (p. 23) Carroll clearly opens up his wonder-story with a statement which claims a position as to how children's books should be written, unveiling the change in the Victorian mind-set about childhood. He, who had always been in contact with children, knew very well how they felt about the books that existed for them, and how they wanted them to be. Until then, most books did not cover children's particular necessities (as discussed in chapter 1) and were produced in the same way as the adults', including educational and moral purposes. With this prior knowledge, the author decided to cover those needs by including several narrative strategies intended to capture the children's attention to the story and to stimulate their imagination: the use of illustrations accompanying the story, so that children could better understand it; dialogues between characters, so that the stories looked more real and vivid in the mind of the child, and a humorous language.

Alice – who allegedly represents Alice Liddell, for whom the story was firstly told and possibly created – surely represents all children. This is so because Carroll perceived the Victorian misconceptions of childhood, and wanted to weave a new and more enlightened commentary about it. The author combines literature with illustrations to disseminate the emerging nineteenth-century concepts of childhood among adults – renewed values about the child aimed at representing them in literature not as little adults, but as children who are at a crucial stage of personality formation. Carroll portrays new contours that best resemble the imaginative abilities of children to cope with the reality of difficult situations in which they could find themselves, no matter how fantastic they might be, seen in his protagonist Alice. Ultimately, it helped children to establish self-identity as children within the adults' world (Rougeau, 2005, p. 4). In other words, Carroll acknowledged that the child has a completely different world configuration from that of the adult in terms of experience, so he adjusted literature to their configuration of the world.

In Carroll, the representation of the real child echoes the conservative author, who was a teacher acquainted with the practical issues of preparing future adults. Conversely, there is a strong presence of the imagination, through a fantastical world and mysterious characters with confused relationships between them, intended to satirize Victorian society and to contradict his own Victorian beliefs or, at least, his experience on a daily basis, and from which he could not detach himself. It is through the stimulus of imagination, through fantasy and humour, that Carroll proposes transgression within the situations experienced by the characters. In addition, the author recurred to the ancestral technique presented in fables – a talking animal, thus increasing the childish imagination by appealing to the suspension of disbelief.<sup>32</sup> However, transgression can only be understood by the adult reader, as the child-reader reads the stories in a more direct/ludic way, i.e., she or he only infers what she or he is told and does not read the implied, not stated, messages (subliminal approach).

Alice is pure and innocent, in part in line with the Romantic ideal of the child, and as a strategy to represent children's expected behaviour in the nineteenth century on a daily basis. The odd world into which she enters forces her to deconstruct her own perceptions about the real world (e.g., the expected behaviour on a normal circumstance in the Victorian reality), which in turn makes her lose her identity, thus entering in a quest to seek her own sense of self. In opposition, Alice, who carries the goodness of a well-behaved Victorian child, also carries rebellion, triggered by the amount of defying situations which she has to face, which question and disrupt her Victorian values.

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Harris calls it the suspension of objective truth which children suspend, providing non-literal descriptions to their plays (Harris, 2000, p. 17) – in this case by the information given in/by Carroll's stories.

Unlike Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll only had contact with children of the middle- and upper-classes and did not have a clear awareness of how children of underprivileged classes were and lived. However, he recognised children's imaginative abilities through 'pretend' plays, in the sense that they depart from the real world to expand on their pretence, for which they carry a great amount of their conceptual knowledge. The younger they are, the more it becomes clear that their pretence is a distortion of reality, seen in the creative use they give to different objects, providing them with ways to explore reality's possibilities (Harris, 2000, p. 8). Harris' perspective (2002) conforms with Dorothy and Jerome Singer's (1992), in turn supported by Daniel Berlyne's and Corinne Hutt's suggestion that a "pretend play is a result of innate curiosity and, at the same time, of the exploratory drive (...) as an attempt to assimilate strange objects into their consciousness" (p. 45).

In turn, the child reader uniquely interprets these stories, which force her or him to both imagine and relive Alice's experiences. For example, in *Alice in Wonderland's* Chapter Four, *The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill*, the almost graphic details depicting the moment that Alice grows uncontrollably larger inside the rabbit's house (also accompanied with an illustration) entail her own fear of the unknown. Although the child does not feel it in a real way, the description of Alice's experience allows the child-reader to vividly imagine/experience and to become sympathetic with Alice in the moment that "she found her head pressing against the ceiling, (...) lying down with one elbow against the door, and the other arm curled round her head (...) one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney" (Carroll, 1996, p. 42, 43). Accordingly, the child is represented on the basis of children's ability to imagine and experience with their innermost fears, which allow them to freely develop on their emotional reactions like anger, concern or disappointment, being this more commonly seen in children at the age of five and onwards (Harris, 2000, p. 58, 59).

Paul Harris (2000) argues that many children invent 1) imaginary friends with whom they play for weeks or even months, 2) make-believe worlds, which they easily distinguish from the real world, "even if they attribute the same causal structure to each" (p. 58). It is, though, undeniable that such make-believe worlds, wrapped up in fantasy, can shelter both their hopes and fears, which leads them to often confuse fantasy and reality. This confusion within make-believe worlds can result in children's emotional reactions, which can be revealed either through their distress at a meeting that fails to happen, or their fear of that same encounter (p. 58). The same way, it is also undeniable that both Alice and the child-reader are forced to deal with unpleasant characters; nevertheless, they also find amiable companions in Wonderland, such as the Mad Hatter, who allows Alice and the child-reader to release their negative feelings, but maintaining the distress that contributes to the confusion of her own identity.

The Mad Hatter's puzzling remarks do not conform to the normal behaviour of people from the real world, which Alice keeps on the back of her mind, as a child of Alice's age does.

*Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* starts with Alice, who is alone with her cat, Kitty, reprimanding it for its behaviour in the same way an adult reprimands a child, as if the cat was her own child. In itself, this was Carroll's strategy to represent children's imitation of adults in order to create a sense of identification (sympathy) in both the child and adult readers:

'Oh, you wicked little thing!' cried Alice, catching up the kitten, and giving it a little kiss to make it understand that it was in disgrace. 'Really, Dinah ought to have taught you better manners! You ought, Dinah, you know you ought!' she added, looking reproachfully at the old cat, and speaking in as cross a voice as she could manage [...] (Carroll, 1996, p. 128).

The description continues to finally illustrate the moment before Alice passes through to the other side of the mirror, when she embraces a 'let's pretend' game in which she shares her thoughts with Kitty about what could be on the other side, as if sharing them with a child friend. This representation portrays another moment in which Carroll reveals a recognition of children's imagination, which reflects his ability as a writer of children's books:

'Let's pretend that you're the Red Queen, Kitty! Do you know, I think if you sat up and folded your arms, you'd look exactly like her. Now do try, there's a dear!' And Alice got the Red Queen off the table, and set it up before the kitten as a model for it to imitate: however, the thing didn't succeed, principally, Alice said, because the kitten wouldn't fold its arms properly. So, to punish it, she held it up to the Looking-glass, that it might see how sulky it was—'and if you're not good directly,' she added, 'I'll put you through into Looking-glass House. How would you like that?' (p. 130)

On a cold and snowy autumn day, Alice embarks on an imaginative, didactic game, in which she assumes the authoritative and correcting role of the adult in relation to her misbehaving kitten. Imitation is central to this game, and as Ronald Reichertz (2000) argues: by "[i]mitating adult treatment of her own behaviour, Alice uses a positive model to try to get her kitten 'become' the Red Queen, and when her kitten refuses, Alice attempts to correct its 'sulky' behaviour, by holding it up to a mirror, in which the kitten's own image is a negative model" (p. 53). This fantasy game in which Alice enters introduces and establishes the fantasy that is to come with the development of the story. On a different level, this pretence game also works to introduce "the logic of a looking glass book for children;" Alice's words propose an expansion of the theme of reversal mirrored through its meanings (p. 53).

Looking-glass books for children are known for their use of narrative "as an exemplary mirror that teaches through either positive models or admonishment" (p. 53). These works employ mirror images and develop "a typology that includes informational, exemplary, prognostic and fantasy mirrors" (p. 53), i.e., the use of narrative as a mirror to correct and strengthen behaviour, being therefore didactic and

moral.<sup>33</sup> The demands that the concept of what it was to be a child, and of childhood, in the nineteenth century, inspired Carroll to propose a new entertaining approach that values children; an approach that would mark the Golden Age of Children's Literature. Alice's representation of the "Let's pretend" game can mean two things: 1) that she makes use of mirror images as a modelling and corrective agency to her kitten; 2) it justifies the title of the second book and its first chapter *Looking-Glass House*, which Carroll imported from the tradition of looking-glass books, combining with "the use of a physical looking-glass to create a double ground for reversal" (p. 58). Nevertheless, he cut with the predicaments that classify looking-glass books as didactic and moral, directing his *Alice* books to an entertaining vein.

Alice's innocence, as seen in this childish imagination, may be explained by the curiosity about the real world which originally took her to the Wonderland and Looking-Glass land. But both innocence and curiosity have also led her to loneliness, making her feel lost when she realises that she cannot establish a normal connection with the other characters, who are either friendly or cruel to her. The fact that she fails to create a familiar basis of identity with these worlds' characters and structure, leads her to an inability to establish her own identity. Despite her age, Alice is depicted as the most 'adult' or responsible character trying to present and apply the real world's precepts in those fantastic worlds, which in turn present a childishly grotesque organisation and events.

The grotesque is in fact the darkest feature in Carroll. Looking for a meaning to the word and according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995), grotesque refers to something or someone "strange or unusual," ugly or unnatural, which can be often "shocking or offensive" (p. 627), and the *Oxford Living Dictionaries* online defines it as something or someone "comically or repulsively ugly or distorted, incongruous or inappropriate to a shocking degree." Through the Duchess's baby and Alice's physical changes, the Cheshire cat's vanishings, or the metamorphoses that occur when Alice moves a square in *Through the Looking-Glass*, just to mention a few, Carroll introduces the grotesque in his story – conferring another feature to his fantasy style.

The banquet held in Alice's honour holds a bizarre development and some grotesque transformations:

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<sup>33</sup> Looking-glass books come from a tradition of religious books for children from near the end of the seventeenth century which had in its core the purpose of establishing a distinction between good and evil, ultimately incorporating a religious didactic message (Reichert, 2000, p. 54). Habitually, this type of books "employ mirror imagery as 'title-metaphor' and develops a typology that includes informational, exemplary, prognostic, and fantasy mirrors" (p. 53). Even though the didactic intention/attitude contributing to the creation of the "good" child has changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the title formula continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (p. 53).

The candles all grew up to the ceiling, looking something like a bed of rushes with fireworks at the top. As to the bottles, they each took a pair of plates, which they hastily fitted on as wings, and so, with forks for legs, went fluttering about in all directions: 'and very like birds they look,' Alice thought to herself, as well as she could in the dreadful confusion that was beginning (Carroll, 1996, p. 228, 229).

*Queen Alice* is a rich chapter in terms of grotesque transfigurations – the dishes and desserts gain life and are introduced to Alice's guests and Alice herself; bottles, plates and forks merge and flutter about like birds, and the Red Queen in the end "dwindle[s] down to the size of a little doll" (p. 229).

The frequent body transformations experienced by Alice herself may be a reference to the transition to adolescence, half way of becoming an adult, which implies the development of sexuality, and the first contact with adult hypocrisy and corruption. As defended by some scholars, Lewis Carroll often lost interest in his girl friends when they reached puberty (Horan, 1999, p. 172), and it may well be the case that he was (un)consciously showing his dissatisfaction about Alice Liddell's and his other child friends' growth, through Alice, as he worshipped the ideal of the innocent and naive child.

Another child, who indeed disrupts with all normality of a right physical development is the Duchess's grunting baby, who eventually transforms itself into a pig. The only child being normally represented as such is Alice, who does not belong to Wonderland, although once there she cannot maintain her normal appearance and enters into the series of physical transformations, some of which occur to attend to her most immediate needs, e.g., to pass through the little door to enter Wonderland. The Duchess treats her own child in an unorthodox way; she tells Alice that she must beat the baby to keep it from sneezing, as a result from the huge amount of pepper that the cook throws up to the air. Taking pity on the baby, Alice takes it with her, to later realise that it transformed itself into a pig. After putting the creature down, Alice positively remarks that "[i]f it had grown up (...) it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig, I think" (Carroll, 1996, p. 64).

But if children, in the sense of a fully defined character-type with its distinctive features, are not as much present in Carroll's work as one might expect – at least, numerically, the whole construction of the Alice stories indeed suggests a very effective approximation or adaptation to the Child's typical universe and rationale. This is also evinced by the hypothetical replacement of Alice's name by a male one, e.g. Peter; one indeed suspects that the story might perhaps maintain consistency in all its aspects. The descriptions of Alice that are provided by the narrator are based on what she feels and thinks as a young individual, and not on her specific physical description – what she wears, or how her hair is done, or still the pitch of her voice, which might be too revealing of a certain gender-type. This fact may suggest that Carroll had in mind the creation of a 'sexless' protagonist, one very much based on the universal features of the Child and childhood.

### 3.2.2 Representing the feminine (the girl) – Issues of gender in the cycle of *Alice*

The hypothetical act of replacing Alice's name by one of a boy could, however, be considered flimsy and incoherent, if not far-fetched and illogical, given some unavoidable evidence that cannot be circumvented or even denied. First of all, Carroll indeed gave his protagonist a female name, which reflects his firm intention about the character's specific physical and psychological identity; secondly, Tenniel's illustrations of the stories clearly depict the protagonist's gender through her physical aspect; thirdly, and most importantly, Carroll was known to truly venerate little girls and to have "a low opinion of little boys"<sup>34</sup> (Carroll, 2001, p. 87).

It is true that there is a relationship between innocence and children within the fictional realm of *Alice*; however, there is another relationship linking the innocence of the child to the feminine realm, familiar to the Romantic poets, as Deborah Thacker (2002) argues. The Romantics focused on "the mother as nurturer and the domestic world of childhood as an essentially feminine location" (p. 45). According to Gilead (2002), the Victorians appropriated these Romantic tenets and used them in literature, through characters, particularly in narratives, in a frantic quest to diagnose and find the cure for social malaise (as quoted in Thacker, & Webb, 2002, p. 42). In the same way that the characters of Victorian novels had a healing role in social illness, the child-reader assumed a redemptive role, in the sense that through her/his recognised ability to understand the given messages s/he could provide some rescuing to the troubled Victorian adult (Thacker, & Webb, 2002, p. 42). However, this is not so with Alice. Even though she somehow manages to possess a redemptive feature through her innocence, she subtly defies (or questions) the roles of social power and hierarchy, as well as other social roles assigned to women, such as motherhood, even if within the context of fantastic worlds.

Many may be those that rise up against reading *Alice* as a claim favouring gender equality. However, Alice's rebelliousness is doubtlessly a sign of a young woman's response to the latent Victorian repression in what concerns women's position in society. Despite his conservative social position, Carroll was aware of the current issues of his day; fact which may have indirectly influenced or inspired the way he created Alice's personality, by resonating some of his own ideas about women, in contrast to the Victorian ideas on their education since an early age, outdoors working positions and general social status. Alice's rebelliousness comes through as a social confrontation to the way the Victorians educated little

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<sup>34</sup> Apparently, Carroll only made friends with little boys when they had sisters that he wanted to meet. In *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, the situation of transforming a little male boy is repeated when the hideous fat boy named Uggug turns into a porcupine (Carroll, 2001, p. 87).

girls to become obedient and submissive. This view suggests an oppositional but, nevertheless, close relation between fantasy and repression in *Alice*. It is through fantasy that the author criticises very important tenets in society regarding gender roles and the education of children that is specifically directed to little girls, but camouflaging the criticism to protect himself from the Victorian repressing censorship. There are some instances of repression in several fictions: in those Victorian tenets that repressed women and in the consequential repression felt by the author who resorted to fantasy to find the ways to openly speak out some ideas regarding the troubles of his day and stimulating his readers' critical thinking.

Alice indeed recurrently challenges the canons of what it was to be a woman in Victorian society. She is a defying character, in the sense that she behaves inappropriately when she actively faces the situations imposed by the Wonderland and Looking-glass worlds, which were besides anything but the proper attitudes of the everyday life of a child. Carroll represented Alice disguised by the Victorian social conventions followed by the middle-class: she is polite, well behaved, well-dressed and poised, with a charming elegance, a well-spoken girl who knows all of the rules of social behaviour. In *The Queen's Croquet-Ground*, the moment portraying Alice's first encounter with the Queen of Hearts, accompanied with the narrator's description of her behaviour in answering her name to the Queen, demonstrates Alice's politeness: "My name is Alice, so please your majesty," said Alice very politely" (Carroll, 1996, p. 77). In *The Mad Tea-Party*, Alice is appalled with the unorthodox and rude attitude taken by the March-Hare when it offered her some wine without having it on the table. Alice's comment "Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it" (p. 67) reflects her broad knowledge of the rules of etiquette that govern her own world.

Subtly, Carroll uses this Victorian virtuousness to disguise her rebelliousness and to distract the more conservative readers of his purpose: to comment critically, though subliminally, upon the Victorian *status quo*, by establishing a contrast between what was expected from her as a representative of little girls' education, and what her improper behaviour subversively transmitted. Alice dares to question all of the rules (or the lack of them) that the different characters nonsensically present throughout her journey. For instance, she defies Wonderland's rulers to the extent of being rude sometimes, even in her smoothest interventions during the Knave's trial, in which the Queen and King of Hearts do not have any control on her. Alice, who had come to Wonderland possessing a previous knowledge about how a court worked, was critically examining every aspect concerning the trial: the judge's avowals (the King's), the jurors (animals, such as the Dormouse or the March Hare; and the Hatter), and their ethics related to logical legal proceedings. When the king reads her the *Rule Forty-two*, saying that "anyone with more than a mile high should leave the room," Alice confronts him, defying his authority as judge and as king, arguing that

he had just invented that rule. In doing so, Alice disrespects hierarchy – so important in her real world, by questioning the king’s suitability as a judge, the maximum figure of respect within the court. It is in episodes such as this one that the reader notices that the fantastic worlds of Alice constitute for Carroll an (even though excessively grotesque) representation of the society to which he belonged, which he mocks. With Alice’s rebelliousness, Carroll might have wanted 1) the reader to critically analyse the flaws of society, which 2) reveal his true but secret thinking about the English society of the nineteenth century.

In this light, the subversive character of Alice is consolidated when she rejects and frees herself from feminine stereotypical notions: she rejects being a replication of her sister, who (re)presents a flat vision of women – well educated, but remaining unable to act. Contrarily, she acts on her own and enters into the unknown rabbit-hole to question and say no, whenever she disagrees. By reading one of those books without pictures or conversations instead of doing what she pleased, her sister conforms to social gender roles. Alice’s remark and decision to follow the White Rabbit foreshadows the disruptive and active female hero she in fact is. Once in Wonderland and Looking-glass land, she questions motherhood and all that that circumstance implied in the life of a Victorian woman. Indeed, most characters behave as children and Alice is frequently asked to perform the role of a mother. But at the same time that Alice possesses some maturity and acts as an adult, or a mediator of the stressful situations under which immature characters are immersed, she also unveils a rejection to the nurturing role of mother. She does not act according to what might be expected of her as a mother; she merely assumes a critical attitude in the analysis of Wonderland’s *status quo* and acts as the problem solver (Lloyd, 2010, p. 9, 10).

In chapter VI, *Pig and Pepper*, Alice is at the Duchess’s door without any idea of what to do in order to enter the house and asks the Frog-Footman what to do, to which he answers: “Anything you like” (Carroll, 1996, p. 60). Megan Lloyd (2010) argues that Alice’s inability as to whether she should wait and obey conventional social rules, and her decision to break in the Duchess’s house, triggered by the Frog-Footman’s answer, made her realise that she had the power to do anything within herself (p. 10, 11). Wonderland means a world of possibilities to Alice (and, consequently, to women) as her story includes some episodes (such as this one) which present an indifferent perspective toward the primary function attributed to women in Victorian England – motherhood. Alice shows a great deal of detachment about maternity and all that it entails, e.g., commitment to the family, and the suffering and abnegation that comes with it (p. 10, 11). She does not present a motherly nature in dealing with the Duchess’s baby, which underlies her distance to the idea of forming a family in her future adult life, and there is another instance of this disconnection in the episode with the mother pigeon, in which she does not sympathise with, or even understand the pigeon’s great anxiety.

In chapter V, *Advice from a Caterpillar*, the episode between Alice and the Pigeon depicts her first contact with motherhood. Megan Lloyd (2010) believes that the pigeon represents “a mother who expresses the suffering that comes with that role” (p. 11). Their meeting took place when Alice “managed to swallow the morsel of the left-hand bit” of the Caterpillar’s mushroom that could prevent her from shrinking so rapidly (Carroll, 1996, p. 55). Alice’s neck had grown so much in length that she was able to be above the trees. In fact, her neck was so long that she could move it in zigzag like a serpent. Feeling that its eggs were under threat, the mother Pigeon adopted an attack position to protect them, beating Alice “violently with its wings,” (p. 55) as it confused her for a predator:

'Serpent!' screamed the Pigeon.  
 'I'm *not* a serpent!' said Alice indignantly. 'Let me alone!'  
 'Serpent, I say again!' repeated the Pigeon, but in a more subdued tone, and added with a kind of sob, 'I've tried every way, and nothing seems to suit them!'  
 'I haven't the least idea what you're talking about,' said Alice.  
 'I've tried the roots of trees, and I've tried banks, and I've tried hedges,' the Pigeon went on, without attending to her; 'but those serpents! There's no pleasing them!'  
 (...) 'As if it wasn't trouble enough hatching the eggs,' said the Pigeon; 'but I must be on the lookout for serpents night and day! Why, I haven't had a wink of sleep these three weeks!'  
 (...) 'But I'm *not* a serpent, I tell you!' said Alice. 'I'm a—I'm a—'  
 (...) 'I—I'm a little girl,' said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day.  
 (...) 'I suppose you'll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!'  
 'I *have* tasted eggs, certainly,' said Alice, who was a very truthful child; 'but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.'  
 'I don't believe it,' said the Pigeon; 'but if they do, why then they're a kind of serpent, that's all I can say' (Carroll, 1996, p. 55, 56, 57).

In this passage, Alice does not show sympathy with the condition of the Pigeon – a mother. Be it a result of her immature mind, characteristic of her age, or a deliberate action, Alice shows indifference before the role of the mother, therefore rejecting motherhood to herself. If we conform to Lloyd’s view (2010), “Alice’s assertion ‘little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do’ even resonates with today’s pro-life/pro-choice discussion” (p. 12). For the Pigeon, Alice’s position represents a threat to maternity, as she is the ‘serpent’ (a traditional religious symbol of sin and evil) who attacks her eggs (symbols of maternity) or offspring. This episode ultimately signifies Alice’s autonomy against the domestic logic and the concomitant repressive role of which Victorian women were “victims” (p. 12).

The Duchess, as the unexpected mother of a “troubled” child, presents another significant instance of a distorting maternity. The moment at which Alice enters the house of the Duchess, she finds her nursing a howling baby. Contrarily to what was expected of mothers, who should be loving and responsible for their children, the Duchess behaves as the stereotypical inconsequent mother. Her screams at her baby without considering its well-being and her shakes to the baby when she sings an altered sadistic nursery rhyme demonstrate a deliberate fail in the role of mother. Moreover, the ambience

under which the baby is being educated does not guarantee, by any means, stability to any child. The cook is “throwing everything within her reach at the Duchess and the baby—the fire-irons came first; then followed a shower of saucepans, plates, and dishes” (Carroll, 1996, p. 61). The grotesque representation of the Duchess suggests thus another disruptive image of the socially accepted concept of motherhood.

In harmony with some scholars’ psychological studies, “[v]arious parameters of child-parent interaction, particularly mothers’ sensitive and contingent responsiveness, predict a range of competencies in early childhood” (Bennett, Nimetz, & Pianta, 1997, p. 264). Moreover, they defend that the interaction between mother and child in a problem-solving task, e.g., “mothers’ positive emotional support, quality of instruction, and limit-setting, as well as children’s affection for their mothers,” foretell a cognitive development and adjustment to their school years (p. 264). Piaget’s theory of genetic epistemology (1952) classifies the first three years of life as very important to cognitive development and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (1946) focused on personality development as uniquely important in the human development. Both relate it with the importance of the “mother as the primary caregiver for infants and toddlers” (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Mann, & Wong, 2003, p. 136).

The Duchess subverts all of these psychological and epistemological studies, particularly seen when she, tired of her crying baby, refuses to take care of it and tosses it into Alice’s arms, flying off the room “to play croquet with the Queen” (Carroll, 1996, p. 62). The Duchess fails to fulfil her role as caregiver that would help the baby to develop a stable (social-emotional) personality and cognitive skills, which would help it to cope with life’s adversities. Carroll might have sought inspiration in the lower classed and dysfunctional families, recurring to the negative impact that this reality represented on children’s future lives. Or he might be alluding to the fact that mothers of the lower classes had to work, the product of an industrial life which made them to have less time for their children, causing a negative impact on the life of a child.

The fact that Alice receives the baby to nurse throws her into the role of mother, and, though she does not recognise the Duchess as a fitting mother, she does not present the stereotypical speech of whom is taking care of a little baby, herself. There was “[n]o cooing, tickling, or speaking baby talk” (Lloyd, 2010, p. 13). Because the baby was constantly grunting, Alice looked “very anxiously into its face to see what was the matter with it” without knowing what to do as to the improper behaviour and physical changes that were occurring with the baby (Carroll, 1996, p. 63). The abnormal behaviour and the grotesque appearance of the baby explain Alice’s emotional distancing.

'If you're going to turn into a pig, my dear,' said Alice, seriously, 'I'll have nothing more to do with you. Mind now!' (...)

Alice was just beginning to think to herself, 'Now, what am I to do with this creature when I get it home?' when it grunted again, so violently, that she looked down into its face in some alarm. This time there could be *no* mistake

about it: it was neither more nor less than a pig, and she felt that it would be quite absurd for her to carry it further. So she set the little creature down, and felt quite relieved to see it trot away quietly into the wood (p. 63).

Her indifference is reinforced by her casual and rational remark “If it had grown up, (...) it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig” (p. 63).

When the little creature finally transforms itself into a pig, Alice releases it immediately into the wild without even minding what could happen to it in the coming future. Mothers do care, but she was indifferent to it because of its aspect and unusual behaviour, an attitude that probably makes her no better than the Duchess herself, whose anti-motherly nature she had so severely judged earlier on by saying: “If I don’t take this child away with me (...) they’re sure to kill it in a day or two” (p. 63).

Alice presents some ambiguity of character and spirit: on the one hand, she is the innocent child who enters in “let’s pretend” games, giving free reign to imagination; but, on the other, she is an independent and assertive girl who, though not always verbalizing her most controversial ideas, is able to reveal them through her posture in the various situations that cross her way. As has been seen, her rational view of motherhood is not the politically correct one, as she does not act according to society’s expectations. Her position reveals an indifference and unconformity toward motherhood, which suggests that, through Alice, Carroll might have tried to say that not all women had to be good and nurturing mothers and that some might be more competent in the professional realm. Perhaps the author himself may be suggesting that not all women possess a maternal spirit, and “that’s alright!” as far as they do not harm a child.

Almost all the characters are depicted with a child-like behaviour – animals, cards, talking flowers, and even ineffectual males, such as the King, the Red and White Knights, or the Mad-Hatter. All the characters which Carroll portrayed with an adult behaviour are women, who are also assertive and assume power roles, such as the Queen of Hearts, the Duchess, the Red and White Queens. This explains why there might be some underlying message as to what their attitudes might have signified in Victorian times and later on.

It was not by mere coincidence that Lewis Carroll chose to represent a female protagonist in his stories. Like other Victorian writers, e.g. Kingsley or MacDonald,<sup>35</sup> Carroll was aware that child-readers

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Kingsley (1819 – 1875) was an English reverend of the Church of England, Christian Socialist, poet and novelist. He is best known for his fantasy novels, namely *The Water Babies*, *A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (1863). His socialist vision made him claim an improvement in the living conditions of children, namely of those suffering from the harsh conditions of child labour, which, although it was not the main focus of his *Water Babies*, can be seen in the novel (Uffelman, *Victorian Web*).

George MacDonald (1824 – 1905) was a successful Scottish Victorian author of children’s books. He is best-known for his fantasy novels, such as *Phantastes*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, just

respond “in some innate way to the maternal spirituality offered by the female figure” (Thacker, & Webb 2002, p. 46). Through Alice’s determined quest for self-identity and her progress in her journey, Carroll managed to emphasise the spiritual power of women, and express his recognition of the feminine value as competent capable beings who know what they want. The feminine is opposed to a threatening masculinity, as the writer subverts gender roles, by proposing a kind of androgyny or feminised sensibility with the ineffectual male characters, such as those of the King, the White Knight and Red Knight, and the Tweedle brothers; and a masculinization of female characters with more combative female characters, such as the Duchess, the Queen of Hearts/Red and White Queens, whom Alice dares to confront.

The confrontation between Alice and the other females triggers another hypothesis: that Alice, though impossible to disconnect from innocence with all the qualities of a child, resists to the oppressing rules that cross her way in the stories. So, Alice stands for innocence and resistance, at once. The other female characters are combative, austere and even repressing female adults, fact that may corroborate the argument saying that there are two opposing visions of the feminine, or two types of women in Carroll. On the one hand, Alice represents the girl-child, sexless and innocent, very much connected to the Romantic redemptive premise, who develops into a tender and sensitive woman. On the other, the girl-child can develop into a cold and austere woman, as the combative female characters of the stories. Perhaps Carroll was suggesting in general terms that Victorian women who were in part responsible for educating their children, were also perpetrators of the sexist mentality onto their children, which ultimately deprived women from a free access to the public social domain in its most vast areas (working positions, education, among others).

In *The Mock Turtle’s story* (chapter nine), the Duchess reappears to Alice, now in a better mood, which Alice attributes to the absence of pepper. However, Megan Lloyd (2010) says that “the absence of a child and thus the Duchess’s child care duties may be the real reason for a change in her disposition” (p. 15). This episode portrays the Duchess always spreading moral precepts for everything, a habit which irritates Alice. The remarks that the Duchess makes to Alice are somehow an attempt to force her to conform to a passive role, as she suggests that Alice is always “thinking about something” which makes

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to mention a few; and his fairy tales, such as *The Light Princess*, or *The Golden Key*. MacDonald was a good friend of Lewis Carroll, having also been his mentor. Besides Alice Liddell’s insistence, MacDonald and his family, including his children, contributed with a positive reception to Alice, which resulted in Macdonald’s advice to Carroll for publishing the book (Victorian Web).

Martin Gardner supports Roger Green’s suggestion that Lewis Carroll might have seen the manuscript of MacDonald’s fantasy tale *The Golden Key*, first published in the book *Dealings With Fairies* in 1867, to inspire himself to write about the golden key which opens the door, giving Alice access to the garden, an image of Heaven (Carroll, 2001, p. 15).

her “forget to talk” (Carroll, 1996, p. 84). This remark is the Duchess’s way of stereotyping women, which implies that because Alice is so inquisitive and talkative, and prefers to think over a subject to formulate an argument with which she identifies, she does not conform:

'Thinking again?' the Duchess asked, with another dig of her sharp little chin.  
'I've a right to think,' said Alice sharply, for she was beginning to feel a little worried.  
'Just about as much right,' said the Duchess, 'as pigs have to fly; and the m—' (p. 86)

The Duchess tries to put Alice in a place she thinks is the correct place for women [and children]. Her answer to Alice: “Just about as much right, (...) as pigs have to fly” implies that she does not feel that it is the matter for a girl to think and have an opinion. The Duchess’s vision represents the Victorian vision of women in general terms. Alice does not conform to that vision and her attitude transgresses all social precepts, presupposing her non-conformity to Wonderland’s social contract.

All societies are governed by a set of laws in order to maintain social order. People must obey these rules and laws by agreeing with an unstated social contract: to remain silent is to sign that social contract but, if displeased, one can peacefully try and change those laws, or abandon that same society (Knepp, 2010, p. 50, 51). The Queen of Hearts is the ruthless supreme monarch of Wonderland who terrorises its citizens into following Wonderland’s or, should we say, her laws. Basically, all Wonderland’s citizens obey Wonderland’s law moved by the fear of punishment, seen in the most famous and terrifying sentence uttered by the Queen: ‘Off with someone’s head’, which makes them conform and remain silent. There is social repression in Wonderland, mostly portrayed by the Queen’s authoritative posture, which can be naturally associated to the aboveground *status quo*. Even though he never confirmed it, Carroll might have been mocking royalty, namely Queen Victoria, who in fact loved his stories.

Social repression is also evinced in Wonderland’s court: the authority is supposedly the king’s, but it is the queen, whom he wants to please and of whom he is afraid, who leads this repression. The Queen, who is attending the trial, carries terror to all witnesses, by making some trenchant remarks about what is happening as it does not follow her best interests. The King shows weakness in his imitation of the Queen, in threatening witnesses as an almost desperate attempt to coerce them into saying what he (in fact, the Queen) wants to hear – that it was the Knave who had stolen the tarts. This might be interpreted as a critique (analogy) which Carroll makes to English social and political doings, achieved through the coercion of citizens. Interestingly enough, he represents social repression being performed by a woman, which may be a parody of Queen Victoria and her politics.

In a different perspective, the author may be recognising woman’s claims for power, reinforced by Alice, who refuses to conform; instead, she contests, questions and argues against Wonderland’s state of affairs in an attempt to change its laws, and we learn that she wants to leave Wonderland at the Knave’s

trial. The zenith moment of Alice's resistance to Wonderland's rules, portrayed in the Knave's trial, figures her unfit in that fantastic, yet upside-down world. She is asked to testify at the Knave's trial, but soon she realises that once again her ideas of justice (imported from her world) are not applicable to this strange world. When she wants to speak her mind to the king, who is the figure of power in the court, she is prevented from doing it, as she is ordered out of court for violating *Rule Forty-two*, which states that "[a]ll persons more than a mile high to leave the court" (Carroll, 1996, p. 107). Yet, Alice found this rule so absurd that she refused to obey or even consider it and remained in court to hear more about the knave's fate, having contested that it was the king's invention at that very moment. Finally, when the king ordered the jury to "consider their verdict, (...)" the Queen's interruption saying "No, no! (...) Sentence first and verdict afterwards" made Alice so furious about the degree of injustice and absurdity that she intervened in defiance: "Stuff and nonsense" (p. 110). Hearing this insult, the Queen immediately ordered: "Off with her head!" (p. 110). Alice was then so sick and tired of Wonderland's injustice and nonsense that she desperately wished to leave this topsy-turvy world, and screaming "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (p. 111), she purchased her passport to reality.

Throughout the story, and with the course of events, the King indeed appears to be a feminised version of the masculine sensibility. This is perhaps a way to attain a prior and superior state of being, connected to the aforementioned relationship linking the innocence of the child to the feminine realm, which was believed to possess some healing power. However, it also shows the ineffectiveness that men can have when facing certain situations in life, contradicting the Victorian idea that insecurities and weakness are exclusively a female feature. Carroll presents a masculine sensibility in all his male characters in order to mock these Victorian idea(l)s of gender. Once more, the Knave's trial provides a good example of Carroll's reversal of gender expectations:

'What do you know about this business?' the King said to Alice.

'Nothing,' said Alice.

'Nothing *whatever?*' persisted the King.

'Nothing *whatever,*' said Alice.

'That's very important,' the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: '*Un*important, your Majesty means, of course,' he said in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke.

'*Un*important, of course, I meant,' the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, 'important — unimportant — unimportant — important—' as if he were trying which word sounded best.

Some of the jury wrote it down 'important,' and some '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 (Carroll, 1996, p. 106, 107).

The King lacks the capacity for leadership, and this can be seen when he does not make a clear distinction between what is really important, or not, for/in the trial. The king's incapacity to lead is reinforced by the fact that some jury members wrote 'important,' and others 'unimportant' on their slates, as they did not know what idea to follow. The attitude of the jurors is a parody of the real world and how

real people in general are followers of someone else's ideas; therefore, a critique to the lack of critical spirit.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, when the Red Knight “gloriously” arrives claiming “You’re my prisoner!” to Alice, for the very next moment to tumble off his horse, which led Alice to be “more frightened for him than for herself,” depicts the knight in a not very gallant way (Carroll, 1996, p. 202). Immediately after the Red Knight remounts his horse, the White Knight comes into the picture galloping on his horse, to tumble off in the next moment, as it had happened to the Red Knight, and remounting it again. After a while looking at each other silently, both knights give rise to the most unexpected twist in the gender cliché of Victorian imagination:

‘She’s my prisoner, you know!’ the Red Knight said at last.

‘Yes, but then I came and rescued her!’ the White Knight replied.

‘Well, we must fight for her, then,’ said the Red Knight, as he took up his helmet (which hung from the saddle, and was something the shape of a horse’s head, and put it on.

‘You will observe the Rules of Battle, of course?’ the White Knight remarked, putting on his helmet too.

‘I always do,’ said the Red Knight, [...] (p. 203)

Carroll played with gender roles and their social expectations. The figure of the White Knight initially resembles that of the ‘knight in a shining armour’ who comes to rescue ‘the damsel in distress’ – a Prince Charming who comes with “mild blue eyes and kindly smile,” and the “setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armour in a blaze of light” (p. 211). But the figure ultimately fails in representing the paternalistic figure with whom Victorian women were familiar – the idealised man. Judith Little (1976) classifies the White Knight as a “comic personification of a patriarchal and protective condescension to supposedly distressed and competent maidens” (p. 202).

Instead of representing him with the patronising chivalry, the manly strength that confers him the preparedness for any difficult situation, Lewis Carroll decided to disrupt with the paternalistic figure by ridiculing it in every possible way. The Red and White Knights are portrayed as clumsy characters who do not even know how to ride a horse. The parody persists with both knights when they fight to keep up with the appearances, ignoring that they were not good in the basic art of mounting a horse, but pretending to assume a very manly brave position in “banging away at each other,” according to the honourable code of arms (Carroll, 1996, p. 203). “Rules of Battle” is the ultimate stage to which Carroll managed to go in subverting gender roles; for what can be more humiliating to a Victorian man than bringing about such a manly topic after having failed all social expectations regarding gender. More so, considering that they are knights and, as such, the epitome of masculinity. In a first analysis, the narrator’s remarks about the White Knight reveal this type of criticism of the White Knight’s suitability for the male role:

Whenever the horse stopped (which it did very often), he fell off in front; and whenever it went on again (which it generally did rather suddenly), he fell off behind. Otherwise he kept on pretty well, except that he had a habit of now and then falling off sideways; and as he generally did this on the side on which Alice was walking, she soon found that it was the best plan not to walk quite close to the horse (p. 206);

However, in Alice's observations about the knight underlie "a criticism of the knightly role and of its suitability for the human male" (Little, 1976, p. 201): "'I'm afraid you've not had much practice in riding,' she ventured to say, as she was helping him up from his fifth tumble (Carroll, 1996, p. 206), or, when she helps him remove his helmet, mostly due to the fact that, as she puts it, "it was evidently more than he could manage by himself" (p. 204). Alice's looking at him "with great curiosity" and thinking that "she had never seen such a strange-looking soldier in all her life," due to his unfitting "tin armour" reinforces that same criticism (p. 204).

The representation of the feminine as a subversive mode in the *Alice* cycle, seen through this reversing of gender roles, had something to do with Carroll's awareness of the growing dominance of the feminine in the imaginative and creative realms, challenging the also growing masculine world of nineteenth-century England. Additionally, women were at this time claiming for equal rights, as already debated in chapter two, claims which were almost forcing a re-examination of the notion of feminine identity. All this is seen through a deliberate reversal of the social repression towards women of this period which circumscribed women to the domestic sphere, whose only concerns were to preserve the good functioning of home and the raising of their children, and who were prevented from pursuing an education and having a successful position in the public sphere.

### **3.2.3 Carroll's representation of Fantasy in *Alice* as a response to Repression**

As a literary genre, Fantasy gathers typical elements that almost immediately speak for themselves. To start with, it involves different worlds which are deliberately detached from reality. But it also often provides a transition from a realistic world to the fantastic one, emancipated from the order of time and space. In this sense, Carroll creates a fantastic world in *Alice in Wonderland*, whose access is through a real rabbit-hole, and in *Through the Looking-Glass* through the other side of a real mirror, but where everything is in reverse. Both Wonderland and the Looking-glass world present the abnormality of things, as opposed to the image of the real world. Lisa Ede (1975) positions Lewis Carroll as an author who "present[s] a fractured universe," in which "'normal causal relations are dislocated, where time and space fail to conform to ordinary expectations" (p. 73). As a writer of fantasy, Carroll uses the constructs of time, place, language and subjectivity to 'dislocate' Alice as a subject. Her existence in Carroll's fantasy worlds is almost always problematic; she (as almost all of the other characters) exists in isolation (literal

and psychological), even though she is in a constant exchange of experiences and ideas, trying to form some kind of social bond with other characters.

Alice's multiple odd situations created by, or experienced with, other characters in the stories are set in a distorted reality. Alice tries to cope with fantastic (inexplicable) situations which lead to her loss of identity and, consequently, confusion, given that she is constantly applying a rational analysis drawn from her experiences in the real world, in order to readapt and find a 'new' identity which best suits her new reality. In itself, this is repression within repression, which Carroll does not depict in an explicit way, but in a rather implicit way. On the one hand, there is repression in the 'rules and regulations' that Alice mentions at some point in the story, deriving from social context, and of a behavioural character. On the other, these repressive rules, which she brings with her from the real world and that are not applicable to the new worlds she is introduced, collide with the lack of rules of those same worlds, resulting in Alice's loss of identity. She is forced to recognise the rules she knows and the rules she meets (or their lack) as repressing. The author amplifies the flaws of society to which Alice belongs, by putting them in front of her which, along with the adult reader, she observes as if looking at a mirror reflection. It is this reflection on the mirror which makes the adult reader rethink about the values of society.

As seen in chapter two, the Victorian society was very strict and repressive in all contexts, leaving little room for discussion, and the home/domestic context was no exception, given its hierarchical and patriarchal structure. In consequence, it had a negative impact on children, who should obey their parents without questioning, who themselves in turn responded to society's conventions. Inside home, the father was the major figure, having a full control on every aspect of the domestic life through his decisions and orders; the mother obeyed her husband; the boys remained on a higher level of permissiveness and consideration when compared to the girls, who were at the bottom of this structure. In addition, older siblings exerted some power relationship over the younger ones. On another level, children started to experience and develop their social skills at schools. This represented a first contact with society's public context, which also introduced them to forms of repression: younger children had to submit themselves to older children, resulting in bullying. Simultaneously, and according to Nelson, they were introduced to the larger society's rules, which were incorporated in the educational methods performed by educators. Thus, children started to develop their interpersonal relationships outside the domestic context, based on the power relations established between adults and children, older and younger, and the conciliation of their wishes and society's (as cited in Tucker, 2014, p. 72, 73, 74).

Time and space, in particular, were very important concepts for the Victorians, and their sense of these notions was being gradually disrupted. With the development of the railway network and the

many possibilities of being in one place in a very short notice, together with the many scientific advances of the period, the Victorian world was challenged, creating the anxiety and unease which contributed to the Victorians' questioning of identity. And this overwhelming feeling would be inevitably carried into the literature that was being produced.

In Wonderland, the sense of time is disrupted by its spatial construction of a parallel world where almost anything can happen, including time slowing down. The concern with time is seen in almost all the major characters. Carroll presents the reader with a modern conception of time, particularly seen in the White Rabbit, who is always saying: "Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting" (Carroll, 1996, p. 25). The White Rabbit is always looking at its watch, hurried and worried about being late, busy with many things to do. The Mad Hatter also shows great concern with time, to the point of referring to it as "him," seen in *The Mad Tea-Party*.

From an adult interpretation, Carroll's approach to time could be seen as a result of the way his society organised itself around new priorities – the effects of the Industrial Revolution in the city lifestyle, a society moved by a growing capitalism, all in its turn affecting the lives of citizens, having implications in their frustration, depression and dehumanization.

When immersed in Carroll's fantasy worlds, the reader indeed becomes aware of the differences between the time in those worlds and time in the real world. Alice's falling down the rabbit-hole signals no less than Alice's entrance in dreamland time, though the reader has not yet such knowledge (it is only at the end of the story that the reader learns that Alice awakens from a dream). During Alice's fall down the hole, time seems to have slowed down, as she fell very slowly. Carroll thus defied the rules of gravity, of which he was aware, simultaneously giving both Alice and the reader awareness of being in the presence of a distinct and fantastic world. Carroll makes the lawless nature of Wonderland evident by his use of language that aims at reverting logic. Certainly, these inversions characterise his fantasy, as they violate not only some of the rules that exist in the real world, but, more importantly, they subvert those rules in the most unexpected moments of perusal.

*A Mad Tea-Party* provides an example of time reversal which leads to Alice's confusion in her navigation of reality:

Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."  
"If you knew Time as well as I do," said the Hatter, "you wouldn't talk about wasting it. It's him."  
"I don't know what you mean," said Alice.  
"Of course you don't!" the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. "I dare say you never even spoke to Time!"  
"Perhaps not," Alice cautiously replied; "but I know I have to beat time when I learn music."  
"Ah! That accounts for it," said the Hatter. "He won't stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock" (Carroll, 1996, p. 69-70).

When Carroll personifies time into a human being, by having the word capitalised, he intends to allude to the hurries and worries that afflict humanity. There is a twist from Alice's normal conception of time to the Hatter's conception of *Time*, "revealed as malleable, recalcitrant, or disorderly," capable of inflicting people harm (Rackin, 1966, p. 320).

Such a view of Time as finite and personal, of course, comically subverts the above-ground convention of Time's infinite, orderly, autonomous nature. This finally puts time in its proper place — another arbitrary, changeable artifact that has no claim to absolute validity, no binding claim, in fact, to existence. Since time is now like a person (...) there is the unavoidable danger that he will rebel and refuse to be consistent. That is exactly what has happened in this Wonderland tea party: the Hatter says time "won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now"; that is, it is always tea-time. Time is thus frozen, and one of the most important concepts of common human experience is laughed out of existence (p.320).

Time's nonsensical personification reveals another arbitrary move performed by the author, which may be suggesting that time was another repressive invention of human beings that was leading them to frustration and depression. To illustrate it, the author created the White-Rabbit who presents a similar behaviour to the capitalist/industrial business man who is constantly worried with time (as the saying goes: time is money!), always demanding the employees to finish their tasks in due time.

Time and Space disruptions go hand in hand in the *Alice* books, which is generously visible in *A Mad Tea-Party*. Space seems to be replacing this frozen time as the reader's attention over time seems to be redirected toward space as a form of Wonderland's compensation for the inordinate and flexible Time. The characters move around the table switching their places (spaces) convinced that time does not pass and that it is always six o'clock. Space's nonsensical shifts are then promoted by the intervenient characters, who are responsible for deconstructing the concept of Space while moving around the table "in a kind of never-ending game of musical chairs" (Rackin, 1966, p. 321). Donald Rackin (1966) suggests "this substitution of Space as Carroll's hint at a more accurate conception of Time; but, like the underlying accuracy of Alice's confused multiplication in Chapter ii, this subtle hint at the reality of 'reality' is a bit too sophisticated for most readers, as it certainly is for poor Alice" (p. 321).

Even before, in chapter one, the rabbit-hole, which presents time shifts, also presents space deconstructions. In the rabbit-hole, Alice is given the conditions to wonder and appreciate the many different things that were available on the sides of the well (e.g. book-shelves, cupboards, maps and pictures). In a normal rabbit-hole, there would be neither books, book-shelves, cupboards nor any other material, except dirt. Moreover, if real such a deep well would represent Alice's death the moment she landed. Yet, Carroll breaks with aboveground logicity and creates a space through which Alice could enter Wonderland and comfortably descend without any risk to her life, and alters time to provide her with all the necessary conditions. Such a slowed time indeed allowed her to ramble about her daily life and knowledge: geography (was the hole leading her to the other side of the world where people walk

with their heads down, or to the “antipathies,” New Zealand or Australia?<sup>36</sup>) and Dinah<sup>37</sup> (if only her cat was with her, it could eat some bats, given that they seemed to be mice in the air!) (Carroll, 1996, p. 25). Alice does not know where she is, and Carroll makes her wonder about the farthest places/spaces she knows, based on the childish idea that people who live on the other side of the world walk with their heads down.

Another instance of a space reversal (together with proportion/size changes) is the moment when Alice wants to pass through the smallest door that leads to the garden. In order to pass through it, Alice has to shrink, which she eventually achieves by drinking from the *Drink me* bottle. However, this is not so simple. Because Alice governs herself by the aboveground laws, she puts the bottle on the table and shrinks. The problem is that she has forgotten the keys to the door on the table and she needs to grow large again in order to get them back. In the real world, one cannot shrink or grow large in such a short period of time, which explains why she forgot the keys on the table. Carroll plays with the normal proportions of real objects and of the human body, which he imports from the real world, to deconstruct Alice’s (and the reader’s) concept of space, thus enriching his fantasy.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice is also introduced to a world which presents space distortions as it functions backwards, and she even finds, “half astonished and half frightened,” instances of things and places, such as “the oars, and the boat, and the river,” that had been there in one moment to vanish in the next, “and she was back again in the little dark shop” (p. 180). Besides, the Cheshire cat’s vanishings in Wonderland had already presented this type of time and space distortions.

If the first book presents Wonderland through a rabbit-hole, the second one presents the land whose image is that of a large chess board, and whose characters’ moves correspond to those of a chess game. The moment after Alice passes to the other side of the mirror makes her realise that what she had seen from the old room did not correspond to what she was then seeing: “the pictures on the wall (...) seemed to be all alive, and the very clock on the chimney-piece (...) had got the face of a little old man,” and there were tiny chessmen who “were walking about, two and two” (p. 133). It is at this moment that Alice becomes aware that she is inside another fantastic world.

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<sup>36</sup> Alice was referring to the Antipodes. She had also referred to latitude and longitude without specifically understanding its meaning. Jean Webb defends that Carroll was suggesting that because the Victorian schooling had an emphasis on rote learning, it was inefficient in giving Alice the sufficient knowledge to understand and deal with her situation (Thacker, & Webb, 2005, p. 64).

<sup>37</sup> There are many references to the Liddell family. Dinah is another element which can be a reference to the family’s circle as it was the name of the family’s cat (Carroll, 2001, p. 14, 15).

In fact, in trying to explain Alice's confusion between reality and fantasy, some scholars have come to some theories relating Alice's distorted perception of reality, time and space to hallucinogenic drugs. Supporting these theories, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* indeed presents what might be seen as allusions to drugs; namely, when Alice drinks from the bottle and eats cake and mushrooms, which make her perceive some body changes, or the Caterpillar smoking a hookah, or, even, when she presents altered perceptions of time and space (Parker, 2010, p. 138). However, Alice had already seen a talking rabbit, fallen down the hole at a comfortable speed, landing gently on the ground, before she drank or ate anything comparable to drugs (p. 138). In addition, we learn, at the end of Alice's adventures, that all of it was no more than a dream. For all these reasons, drug theories may fall into disrepute, being easier to preserve the more plausible reading – as a fantasy and a dream (p. 138, 139).

In a more philosophical approach, Scott Parker gives emphasis to Alice's own personal experience of reality, regardless of what moves her towards that experience, whether caused by the use of drugs, a dream during sleep or being in fact in a fantastical world. Alice thinks she is talking to a rabbit and that is indeed her experience. Parker asserts that Alice's experience and the reader's understanding of that experience present two polarised standpoints: on the one hand, the "credulous child" believes that Alice is actually talking to a rabbit, proposing the suspension of the objective truth, by "reproduce[ing] and recombine[ing] elements from the real world" (Harris, 2000, p. 17, 27); and, on the other, the adult tends to assimilate the same distorted experience critically, thus breaking with the suspension of disbelief. Bearing this in mind, Parker argues that "a distinction between normal and distorted experience is exaggerated if not specious insofar as *normal* is suggestive of *real*" (Parker, 2010, p. 140).

Normal experience is based on what we experience on a daily basis; and our experience and perceptions can be affected by internal and external factors, such as expectations, traumas, chemical drugs or prescription medicines, just to mention a few. Normal consciousness is then when we are lucid, whereas distorted consciousness is when we are under the influence of any drug or alcohol or else dreaming. In *Alice*, drugs and dreams are intertwined: symbols such as the "Drink me" bottle, the "Eat me" cake, the mushroom, or the Caterpillar smoking a hookah, can be interpreted as allusions to drugs; however, the bottle, cake and mushroom can also be the products of a dream. Alice has no idea that she is dreaming, contrarily to the reader, who has already been hinted at within the text. Be it a result from drugs or simply a dream, Alice does accept body transformations as part of normal experience, even acknowledging that such a thing would not happen in her world.

Parker (2010) raises some pertinent questions regarding dreams: can one prove that one is sleeping and dreaming about a particular moment, or that one is awake and living that moment? Are

thoughts the product of a dream or of reality? (p. 141, 142). This same thinking can be seen in Alice's conversation with the Cheshire cat. Alice remarks that she does not want to go with mad people, as she perceives herself as the only normal being there. The Cat answers her that they are all mad there, to which Alice contests, asking how he knew she was mad. The Cat retorts that she had to be or she would not have come there (Carroll, 1996, p. 65). The Cheshire cat lets the reader know that Alice is mad, something explained by the fact that she is in a dream, fact that Alice in turn ignores. Alice's perception of facts is that she's living a normal experience, which explains why she thinks the Cat is wrong or meaningless. So, as to whom is right or wrong in this situation, Parker concludes that "neither in waking life nor dreaming life does one (usually) know with certainty which state one is in, and therefore one must be aware at all times of the *possibility* that one is mad" (Parker, 2010, p. 142).

Another passage that highlights this idea and that leads the reader to the same conclusion is the conversation between Alice and the Caterpillar. Alice tells the Caterpillar that "[b]eing so many different sizes in a day is very confusing," an opinion with which the Caterpillar disagreed. Alice went on with her informed remarks: "Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet, but when you have to turn into a chrysalis — you will some day, you know — and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?" But, surprisingly, the Caterpillar disagrees with Alice once again. In the end, Alice partially admits that perhaps the Caterpillar's feelings were different, but all she knew was that it would be a very strange feeling to her (Carroll, 1996, p. 50). All of the conversation between Alice and the Caterpillar has in its core a questioning of identity and a fear of transformation, mostly because she is forced to reflect upon what will remain of the real Alice if she is to change so much. On the same level, the author represents the childish self-centred existence as to children's perspective of the world, trying to make the child-reader understand that each individual has a different view/experience of the world.

'Who are *you?*' said the Caterpillar.

(...) 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 (Carroll, 1996, p. 50).

Alice is forced to reanalyse her position and identity in this new world, as she bases herself on the aboveground laws, which are clearly different from those of the world she is now in. In the 'real' world she knows that growing at the reasonable pace is normal provided that the physical effects do not manifest themselves immediately, but gradually. Once they are so immediate, Alice feels strange, because she is not familiar with such drastic physical alterations, which proves that she is in fact

frightened by novelty. Her confusion leads her to the point of not knowing how to explain what she feels about the drastic changes she has experienced in Wonderland:

'I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly,' Alice replied very politely, 'for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.'

'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar.

(...) 'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,' said Alice; 'all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*.'

'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are *you*?'

Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation (p. 50).

Furthermore, Alice's confusion increases with the fact that the Caterpillar sees all its physical transformations with total normality. In a way, the Caterpillar's perception of reality collides with Alice's, as each one belongs to different realities.

Alice's perceptions of her sense of self are altered (be it by drug use or dream), but never really lost, i.e., the seer (Alice) maintains awareness of what she sees/experiences, feeling it as real. She accepts body transformations as part of normal experience, but she is aware that it would be impossible for such a thing to happen in the real world. Alice 'takes drugs' that make her perceive her body to grow larger and smaller according to her momentary needs, but which fail her in the exact degree that she wished. This shows that she does not have control on the 'drug's influence' of her perceptions of herself. Dreams (either caused under drug influence or simply during sleep) and trusting our perceptions prove that one does not have the authority to dismiss abnormal experiences, because they are just that – experiences (Parker, 2010, p. 148, 149). Parker thus concludes that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a drug story or a dream story, dissolves "the distinction between normal and distorted reality by calling our attention to the faulty assumptions under which this distinction is made," describing "a condition where a person suffers from distorted space, time, and body image" (p. 148, 149).

In a more plausible reading of the stories, perhaps, and discarding the idea of drugs, the idea of a dream narrative may become more relevant as it is at the very heart of Alice's wanderings, and it paved the way for Carroll to test and demonstrate children's imaginative capacity. One can thus argue that the dream plot served quite well his purpose of providing fantasy to his readers. The author also seems to be proposing a reaction against the limits of the conscious and the rational, as he deliberately presents a fragmented and false reality and overvalues dreams (p. 148, 149). His supposed justification or argument lies in that children often dream about the way they want their life to be; Alice wanted to be older than she really was or to meet different people and she dreams, based on the "what if" question about the many possibilities that life could offer her. The dream is then Carroll's means for reinventing and rewriting fantasy. His peculiar fantasy is shaped by a fantasy of distortions, which is in turn enhanced by his riddle-like language and nonsensical style.

Although the author used the extraordinary elements which are present in dreams to enrich his fantasy, the reader only becomes aware of that at the very end of the story. Carroll took advantage of dream-like situations to present major absurdities and impossibilities, which people accept as accomplished truths without the slightest hesitation, especially when reason is strained to the utmost, “and showed extraordinary power, cunning, shrewdness, and logic,” as defended by Brook (1983), supported in Dostoevsky (p. 196). Alice was made to feel all of the frustrations that there are in the absurd and the impossible, situations with which she has to cope in Wonderland (or dreamland), and of which Carroll had full control. He created Alice’s confusion in a world which precisely opposes hers, conferring his intention to set fantasy against rationalism, which is to say that he was subtly “fighting” against the repression of imagination which sustained some Victorian values. The dreamland he has created indeed defied all of the existing laws of predictability from where Alice comes.

The moment in which Alice lands in Wonderland, and wants to enter the door that gives her access to the garden, illustrates the unpredictability that prevails throughout the story. In order to pass through the door, Alice needs to find the key to open it, and then she realises that she needs to shrink in order to pass. The very fact that Carroll gives Alice all of these possibilities (and much more) by providing her the key<sup>38</sup> and the magical shrinking elixir, defy the laws of appropriateness. The episode in which she forgets the keys on the table reveals the unpredictability of the story. Had the whole situation been common to Alice’s world, she would not have forgotten to hold the key in her hand before she had drunk the magic portion.

The dream-like quality of the stories or, as Scott F. Parker puts it, the ‘dream-logic’, introduces fantasy and excuses each rule that Carroll broke within the story. The dream indeed makes certain things make sense, such as: talking animals, or a deck of walking cards, Alice’s size alterations, and doors hiding mysterious places or magic potions that appear to fulfil Alice’s momentary needs. All these are events which begin and end abruptly, according to her shifting attention. Some of these features even contribute to the confusion or mixture between the fantasy and fairy-tale genres, which Carroll apparently practised. Carroll’s fantasy was innovative in its time because he managed to merge several features from very distinct branches of children’s imagination, such as the qualities of fables and fairy-tales. The idea that the author shared with his readers in the introductory poem to *Through the Looking-Glass*

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<sup>38</sup> The golden key which opens the little door to the secret garden can be seen as a metaphor for events that could have been if one had it opened. Later T. S. Eliot used it in his poem *The Family Reunion* (Carroll, 2001, p. 15). Roger Green (2001) asserts that the golden key, which was common in Victorian fantasy, can also be a metaphor for a magic key which opens the door to Heaven (as quoted in Carroll, p. 15).

suggests that he considered his stories to be fairy-tales; however, recent studies have established and proved a distinction between fantasy and fairy-tales. According to them, *Alice* is closer to the fantasy and not so much to the fairy-tale; this because Carroll combined two parallel worlds: the primary and the secondary, the real and the magical. His final goal with this combination was to challenge children's imaginative capacities.

As Maria Nikolajeva (2005) argues, "fairy tales and fantasy are treated together, as stories dealing with magic and the supernatural" (p. 53). Yet, Carroll did not use the "Once upon a time" beginnings and the "lived happily ever after" endings (p. 53) in the *Alice* stories – the most formulaic features of fairy tales. What's more, although in fantasy there are magic helpers and magic events also present in fairy-tales, there is not the presence of the fairy-tale formula intended to convey a moral message. In addition, Carroll's narrative style is also characterised by the use of personifications, mainly by attributing human qualities to animals, cards, and so on, which are recognisable fable-like features, essentially deriving from the ancient Greek tradition. Even if talking animals, in particular, did not really represent a novelty to children's fantasy of the nineteenth century. Carroll did however introduce new items, such as a distant kingdom with magical inexplicable qualities, such as a magic drink that makes people grow larger, or a magic cake that does the reverse, just to mention a few, and also readapted others – namely, events which he picked up from traditional tales, such as talking animals, the use of traditional nursery rhymes, the character Humpty Dumpty who comes from a well-known English nursery rhyme by the same name, or even the fairy tale, though deconstructed, formula bringing kings and queens, knights, and so on, to his stories.

The 'looking-glass', in particular, is an important imagery set that Carroll recurred to by using mirror images (or reversed images), whose symbolic usage may be suggesting an emphasis on the monotonous conformity of Victorian society. To do so, he risked building up a whole different setting from the successful and already famous 'formula' of Wonderland, on which he could indeed have persisted. While both settings are anything but familiar to children's known surroundings, at the same time they present something realistic or familiar, even though in reverse – suggesting that his basis of comparison and construction is the real world and reality.

There are many other games of mirror images in the *Alice* cycle showing that nothing is what it seems, and we have to invert the whole picture to understand it, as Jonathan Hansen (2001) states in his essay on "Reconstructing Lewis Carroll's Looking Glass":

Mirror images are both the same and not the same, as they are duplicates of one another – but inverted. Wonderland is the mirror of reality (a relationship made quite literal in the second book of the series, *Through the Looking Glass*);

the difference of Wonderland marks clearly where reality is not, thereby signifying both reality and fantasy at once (p. 2, 3).

There is, therefore, a sort of mirror relationship between fantasy and reality in Wonderland. Fantasy demarcates itself from the Victorian reality and only exists in the fantasy world. Nevertheless, the fantasy world is ultimately subordinate to the real world in the sense that it mirrors itself on real landscapes, real situations, real people's attitudes and emotions, but is represented in reverse. It is Carroll's inversion (or distortion) of the real world which explains the game of logic; fantasy in *Alice* is completely illogical as opposed to the logic that characterises the Victorian reality. Yet, logic is also present within the fantasy world through Alice, who is also reminding the reader about the normality of things when she is confronted with the abnormal to social expectations. It is at this very in-betweenness that the reader experiences a wide range of ideas and feelings, being invited to reflect on his own conflicting desires and rethink the values that rule his society. This invitation is triggered by a clash between order (normal/reality) and disorder (abnormal/surreal) (Ede, 1975, p. 75).

In a more adult or critical reading, this clash of reality with its reversal is intended to confront man's internal conflicts: "man is a creature of strongly conflicting desires (...) drawn towards both order and disorder, acceptance and rebellion, illusion and 'reality,' fantasy and logic" (p. 74). To get through life, individuals unconsciously make a truce with these conflicting forces, truce which Carroll shatters, allowing "these conflicting pressures full expression" through nonsense (p. 74).

Furthermore, both the *Alice* books denote a concrete but complex plot, being not only a single, clearly delineated one, but with a series of secondary plots attached to the main one, being therefore episodic: each chapter offers different stories/situations during Alice's stay in Wonderland and the Looking-glass world. Moreover, Carroll's literary strategy is characterised by the introduction of dialogues to stimulate the children's interest. This complexity may be interpreted as a narrative strategy to influence the reader, as an invitation to make him rethink his narrow vision and re-examine his position in the values that govern society. Although the author introduces longer vocabulary words, some of which are new, both books present, in general terms, a simple language which most readers can understand, as sentences are relatively short and straightforward (debated ahead in the following chapter). However, it cannot be ignored that being it a children's book, the Victorian child reader might have some difficulties in understanding the meaning of certain words, and even the irony and puns characteristic of Carroll's nonsense. The books also incorporate parodies of some well-known nursery rhymes and songs, in verse form, which naturally attract and entertain children.

At the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll "saves" Alice from a tragic ending, by offering to the reader the knowledge that what Alice had been living and what she had been reading was

nothing but a dream; and there were “dead leaves (...) fluttering down from the trees” upon Alice’s face alluding to the pack of cards that had risen “into the air, and came flying down upon her” (Carroll, 1996, p. 111).

‘Wake up, Alice dear!’ said her sister; ‘Why, what a long sleep you’ve had!’  
‘Oh, I’ve had such a curious dream!’ said Alice, and she told her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers that you have just been reading about; and when she had finished, her sister kissed her, and said, ‘It *was* a curious dream, dear, certainly: but now run in to your tea; it’s getting late.’ So Alice got up and ran off, thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been (p. 111, 112).

When Alice wakes up, she immediately reveals her dream to her sister, who agrees with her saying that “[i]t *was* a curious dream (...) certainly” (p. 112). Not surprisingly, Carroll uses Alice’s sister to guide the reader, as she “sat still just as she [Alice] left her, leaning her head on her hand, watching the setting sun, and thinking of little Alice and all her wonderful Adventures, till she too began dreaming after a fashion” (p. 112). This strategy of dream-within-a-dream was intended to make the reader appreciate Alice’s imagination, especially after having realised that it was just a product of fantasy. This was only made possible by inducing Alice’s sister into a dream:

First, she dreamed of little Alice herself, (...) and still as she listened, or seemed to listen, the whole place around her became alive the strange creatures of her little sister’s dream.

The long grass rustled at her feet as the White Rabbit hurried by—the frightened Mouse splashed his way through the neighbouring pool—she could hear the rattle of the teacups as the March Hare and his friends shared their never-ending meal, and the shrill voice of the Queen ordering off her unfortunate guests to execution—once more the pig-baby was sneezing on the Duchess’s knee, while plates and dishes crashed around it—once more the shriek of the Gryphon, the squeaking of the Lizard’s slate-pencil, and the choking of the suppressed guinea-pigs, filled the air, mixed up with the distant sobs of the miserable Mock Turtle (p. 112).

The description of the perception of Alice's sister is the engine which guides the reader into belief, or, stimulates the readers’ suspension of disbelief, regardless of the fact that Alice’s adventures were revealed to be a dream – the readers’ suspension of disbelief is once more reactivated, now using reality to justify it:

So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality—the grass would be only rustling in the wind, and the pool rippling to the waving of the reeds—the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the Queen’s shrill cries to the voice of the shepherd boy—and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all thy other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farm-yard—while the lowing of the cattle in the distance would take the place of the Mock Turtle’s heavy sobs (p. 112).

Lastly, Carroll ends his first Alice story celebrating childhood and its most inner qualities as a sort of appreciation for the imagination of a child, portrayed through Alice’s sister “pictur[ing] to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood;” and celebrating his tale as one which make children’s “eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the

dream of Wonderland of long ago; (...) with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering [their] own child-life, and the happy summer days” (p. 112).

Conversely, the author decided to present a different scenario at the end of the second book, *Through the Looking-Glass*. The moment Alice realises she has become a Queen, she enters into a series of relentless questionings performed by the Red Queen and the White Queen, who insist that she “can’t be a Queen, you know, till you’ve passed the proper examination” (p. 217). Following it, Alice enters a room, with “arched doorway, over which were the words QUEEN ALICE in large letters,” and which sheltered a party in her honour (p. 222). Interestingly enough, a nonsensical madness takes place over what might have been a healthy and happy celebration (Alice as a Queen). The Red Queen introduces her to a leg of mutton, which “got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice,” who “returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused.” After all, it is not very civil “to cut anyone you’ve been introduced,” nor does one eat someone to whom one is introduced (p. 222, 223). When the time finally came for Alice to make a neat speech, as the Red Queen called it, Alice reluctantly, but obediently, “tried to submit to it with a good grace” (p. 27), even if during her speech all sort of things happened:

The candles all grew up to the ceiling, looking something like a bed of rushes with fireworks at the top. As to the bottles, they each took a pair of plates, which they hastily fitted on as wings, and so, with forks for legs, went fluttering about (p. 228, 229).

To make matters worse, the White Queen’s seat was occupied by the leg of mutton and the Queen herself was drowning in the soup tureen; and “several of the guests were lying down in the dishes, and the soup ladle was walking up the table towards Alice’s chair, and beckoning to her impatiently to get out of its way” (p. 229). The confusion had set in in such a way that Alice felt that she had lost insight of her own position and identity within the Looking-Glass [upside down] world, taking her to the point of exhaustion (or fury) which she had already experienced in her first dream, during the Knave’s trial. This time she cried “I can’t stand this any longer!” so desperately, while “she seized the tablecloth with both hands” that all “plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor” (p. 229).

Although there is the sense of waking up from a dream, the sensation with which Alice wakes up is one of uncertainty as to the holder of the dream: was the Looking-Glass world a product of her imagination, or was it the King’s (who dreamt about her)? This question might report us to which deals with the matter of narrative perspective. However, the reader is well aware that it was hers; Alice does not want to be imagined by someone, but rather as the one who imagines and controls everything. The implicit transition from childhood and the child’s imagination, in the first book, to one of a more mature logical puzzle, in the second, might suggest Carroll’s own evolution and changed interests.

Another narrative device with which Carroll shows expertise is the degree of complexity in which he uses the narrator of both stories to convey his most sharp and acute humour (irony, puns, etc.). The narrative has a fully targeted approach to Alice; she's always present in all situations, therefore having a full knowledge of the facts and events; and, through the narrator, the reader has a full access to Alice's thoughts and emotions, as well as to the other characters' emotional states, even if less frequently. Nevertheless, the narrator himself assumes an ambivalent position, making the type of narration complex. It is a third person, limited, though omniscient, narrator, assuming an impartial position, which helps to confer ambivalence to the story. This, in turn, frees the reader from adopting a defensive posture throughout her/his perusal of the most critical social or moral situations; therefore, becoming more receptive to re-evaluate values.

The narrator's voice might be Alice's, as the narrator is able to explain her emotions and relationship to the people, animals and things she found in Wonderland to the reader, as well as how events affected her, making her wonder. This makes it seem that the narrator "represents her [Alice] former self as a subject on a quest for secret knowledge" (Falconer, 2009, p. 8). Her former self is that one carrying the values and information of her (real) world, and her quest for secret knowledge is often Alice's identity. According to Rachel Falconer (2009), like the former self of Alice, "the recovered self or narrator" (i.e., the new and fragmented identity product of the fantastic worlds' confusion) "faces challenges on the journey of her narration, the greatest of which is to find for her text a language and form together capable of articulating her forbidden knowledge and conveying it to the reader" (p. 8, 9). What's more, while Alice is concerned with seeking her own identity as a subject in the wondering lands, the voice of the narrator performs the same process simultaneously and, albeit unnoticed, with the same degree of importance. In this sense, there is "a double logic of narration in which the story implicitly precedes discourse, but is also a product of that discourse" (p. 9) as the discourse reports both to the story that precedes Alice's entry into the new worlds while describing what is happening.

Even other characters are not very easy to grasp, be it for their aspect (talking animals, walking cards or a talking egg), flippant attitude (the Mad Hatter); or social expectations (the King of Hearts or both knights). It is interesting that most of Carroll's characters seem to exist in social isolation (literally or psychologically) and the few ones who form some sort of social bonds end up to be problematical ones. What's more, Lisa Ede (1975) asserts that in Carroll's nonsense, the strongest threat to his characters involves mental suffering, despair, and the fear for the loss of identity, despite that real or threatened physical violence plays an important role as well (p. 73).

Despite the fact that Carroll does not confront the reader to take a stance, or make him feel uncomfortable with direct criticism, he does not provide him with a stable view, either. In the end, the reader realises that “Alice must abandon her dream” to intellectually and emotionally survive, while also recognizing that she rejects “much that is of real value.” This awareness does not give room for the reader’s “comfortable or stable viewpoint,” something which forces her/him “to experience emotionally that which the work articulates intellectually – the frustrating impossibility of man’s ever reconciling his own opposing desires, of ever escaping from the limitations, both real and self-imposed, of his imagination” (p. 75).

The contrastive nuance of *Fantasy* and *Reality* seen between the *status quo* of Carroll’s worlds and that of the real world’s reveals that the first is illogical, appropriates and mocks the values of the latter, which is logical (but which Carroll might be suggesting which one is logical and illogical). Thus, fantasy seeks inspiration in *Reality* by reversing its images to make the reader reflect upon society’s values. Carroll found in fantasy the driving force to convey social criticism aimed mostly at fighting repression, namely the Victorian social repression which limited the freedoms of its citizens: social freedom of women in aspects such as the access to education; social freedom of children (child labour liberation), social freedom of men, even, who were also victims of the patriarchal conventions demanding them to act accordingly to their status as men, assuming manly attitudes, being strong and the family providers. Under this evaluation, the reader assumes a prominent role in textual deconstruction, by firstly experiencing Wonderland and Looking-Glass land and, then, decoding the subliminal messages conveying social criticism, which ultimately makes her/him re-evaluate the hegemonic values that govern her/his society.

## 4. QUESTIONS OF FORM AND CONTENT IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHILD AND THE FEMININE IN THE *ALICE* CYCLE

Carroll's whole life, both private and public, was marked by a well-known discretion, but when it came to his literary production, he was able to be extensively critical and incisive; a feature which is expressed in the many possibilities of fantasy that he presents, but also encompassing the sophisticated shades of logic and mathematics, and the whole translated into a strongly communicative language. His wordplay and combined use of nonsense, logic and fantasy can be said to be his most important features – the ones which mesmerise readers of every age and class up till today. His idiosyncratic style, made up of humour and absurd situations, and aided by nonsense language, propitiates a challenging ambivalence in the readings of the *Alice* books, making all the existent diversity of analysis acceptable, as he either allows the reader to decide or leaves him/her at a loss. The ambivalence is reinforced if we consider nonsense as the centre of this literary work and Alice its major vehicle or point of convergence. Could then nonsense be a synonym of a form of ambiguity? Yes, if one refers to it not only as an ambiguity “between two or more related meanings (...), but between meaning and its absence” (Tigges, 1988, p. 87).

There is indeed a meaning in the absence of meaning; the unstated words that Carroll left for the reader to decipher, for instance, in the dichotomy between fantasy and freedom versus repression and convention, which will be discussed in this chapter in more detail. Additionally, considering the child reader, Carroll knew that he had to change the visual aspect of books. He knew children very well, from his many child friends, and decided to add pictures to support his narratives. Image thus came as an additional text that accompanied his stories, allowing the child to imagine the stories and what was being narrated in a more vivid way.

### 4.1 Literary Nonsense and the Realm of the Absurd

The 1860s and 1870s marked the zenith moment in the popularity of literary nonsense for children, out of which Edward Lear<sup>39</sup> and Lewis Carroll come as the most important and inspiring writers who dominated this niche in the children's book market, and the ones whose names lasted forever in the

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Lear, born in 1812 in England, a writer, poet and landscape painter, is best known for writing the Limerick – a popular form of short, humorous verse, in which he revealed his talents with nonsense (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

realm of nonsense. Most of the times, the definitions of the genre are based on Lear's and Carroll's individual literary productions, and the word 'nonsense' has acquired a different meaning since their existence.

If there is one thing that Lewis Carroll has taught us in children's fiction is that this writing is not made of a simple and meagre language. Carroll played with words, meanings and situations to give rise to a set of questionings and thoughts, not only intended to entertain children, but also adult readers who approach nonsense with a childish spirit, but also to develop their own critical thinking. And this regardless of the fact that Carroll created different worlds/realities, none of which equal to ours, but rather often represented in reverse, in anthropological, social, cultural and biological terms. As previously mentioned, this reversal was what really allowed critical thinking and rethinking; Carroll created the *Alice* stories grounded on the idea of dialogue itself, even if supported by a narration made by a limited omniscient third-person Alice.

Nonsense is often mistakenly defined as a literary style which only uses words without meaning, or simply conveys absurd and incongruous ideas, and is frequently associated to children's literature. Historically, the relevance as to its definition is significantly given to the oppositional sense between imagination (fantasy) and reality, or between fact and fiction. Nonsense certainly is something that is said or written with the purpose of portraying messages and ideas in a distorted humorous way. Not that all this is not true; in fact, transmitting contrary meanings is central to it, but nonsense has decidedly a deliberate intention of making no sense, in order to comment on 'sense'.

Nonsense presents the incongruity of the characters, situations and language; it breaks with the laws of predictability according to what is expected, if it were to happen in the real world – it plays with the unexpected, based on the expectable. Linguistically, “[i]t consists in the negation of logic but also in the impossibility of solving the incongruity that (...) so often underlies humor, linguistic or otherwise” (Ermida, 2008, p. 74). The absurd does not allow us the possibility to “restore an original meaning, precisely because there is no original meaning to restore, as the absurd is based on the absence of meaning, and not on the distortion or dislocation of that meaning” (p. 74). That is to say that Carroll's language play is mostly grounded in the breaking of meaning and common sense of the real world. It juxtaposes logic to illogicality, by breaking with logical meaning and belief, i.e., the absence of meaning, and being only able to do it basing himself on the logic he imports from the real world. In this way, Carroll uses the absurd to stimulate critical thought by presenting satirical representations that do not have an original meaning that the reader can restore.

Based on Freud's views which state that dreams have double meanings – latent and manifest, Hana Khasawneh (2008) relates nonsense writing to dreams – and how images function with signifiers and signifieds (p. 3, 4). Both signifier and signified work together so as to compose a message, which is sent by an agent to be interpreted and assimilated by a receiver. The important thing is that the receiver must possess a previous knowledge of the signs used to communicate within a certain community of which s/he takes part. Hence, communication is dependent on both the context and codes under which both the sender's and receiver's community is grounded, so that messages can be clearly interpreted and understood (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 21). Of course that this does not happen in Carroll's Wonderland or Looking-Glass world, which explains the lack of understanding often existing between Alice and the other characters.

Like dreams, nonsense works best on an unconscious level, which also explains Carroll's use of the dream element in his stories. Dreams (like fantasy) allow reversals and subversion and, like dreams, nonsense writing shares "the processes of regression, displacement and secondary elaboration:" the multiple use of a word in jokes allows reversals, subversion, displacement and secondary elaboration, propitiated by the different meanings underlying that same word, be it on a literal or a metaphorical level (Khasawneh, 2008, p. 3, 4). On that same note, Maria Nikolajeva (2005) classifies nonsense as a deviation from logic, including "a discrepancy between the literal meaning of the word and its metaphorical meaning, or between its true meaning and the way the characters interpret it" (p. 208). So, literal meaning and metaphorical meaning converge onto one final meaning of a certain word, situation, or idea, and the reader will grasp her/his own idea about it.

Carroll's use of *portmanteau* words in *Jabberwocky*, poem included in *Through the Looking-Glass*, illustrates the relation between dreams and nonsense writing, as their latent meanings are manifested through the meanings of each of the blended words in isolation. Both the signifier (the acoustic image of the word) and the signified (the concept of a word) obey to a relationship of significance, as signifier and signified act as a whole in the formation of meaning of the new word (*portmanteau*). For example, the word "slithy", which combines the senses of "slimy" and "lithe" (Lecerle, 1994, p. 44), or "frumious", which means "furious" and "fuming," or even "chortle", which mixes "chuckle" and "snort" (Dubois, *British Library*). Indeed, Humpty Dumpty explains all of which in detail:

'Well, "*slithy*" means "lithe and slimy." "Lithe" is the same as "active." You see it's like a portmanteau— there are two meanings packed up into one word.' (...)

'And what's the "*gyre*" and to "*gimble*"?'

'To "*gyre*" is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To "*gimble*" is to make holes like a gimblet.'

(...) Well, then, "*mimsy*" is "flimsy and miserable" (there's another portmanteau for you) (Carroll, 1996, p. 187, 188).

Authors of nonsense, as Carroll and Lear, have always given an emphasis on coinages and lists of words in their works, which reflects the Victorian concern with the making of dictionaries (Lecerclé, 1994, p. 199). The etymological bend of Humpty Dumpty's etymological explanation and the coinage of new words, are of that a proof.

The origin of literary nonsense comes from two cultural literary fields: "the folk tradition of songs, limericks and nursery rhymes (...) and a sophisticated literary tradition in the post-Victorian nonsense that distinguishes it from the folk tradition and marks it as a literary mode" (Khasawneh, 2008, p. 7, 8). In *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (1988), Wim Tigges states:

Literary nonsense finds its origin, or if one prefers to put it differently, its inspiration, in two earlier types of nonsense, which are less timebound: the popular type of irrational nonsense found in nursery rhymes, topsyturvy tales and similar ancient samples of inconsequentiality, in which the sound frequently does not care about the sense at all, and the ornamental, rational type of nonsense which plays around with the logic of language, and manifests itself in particular in various types of word- and letter-play (Tigges, 1988, p. 85).

The hall-mark of the genre is the art of combining both "the 'popular' and the 'ornamental', the linguistic and the situational, in a way to create that perfect tension, perfectly unresolved" (p. 86). This dichotomy distinguishes Lear's and Carroll's styles within the nonsense genre: Lear's type is "popular" or "folk," i.e., linguistic; and Carroll's is "ornamental," i.e., situational (p. 85).

However, Carroll gathers features comprehended both in the popular irrational nonsense, found in the folk tradition of nursery rhymes, and in the ornamental rational type with his games of logic in language use. He recurred to nursery rhymes and poems which have more emphasis on sounds rather than on sense, mostly because of their alliterative and rhythmic characteristics. Most of the poems in the *Alice* stories are parodies of popular songs and poems, which, had he not included them in the books, they would probably have fallen into forgetfulness.

The phonetical aspect (musicality) of songs, limericks and nursery rhymes causes essentially a "hedonistic reaction" on readers (Khasawneh, 2008, p. 8, 9), which also explains Carroll's choice of nursery rhymes for his work. Likewise, nursery rhymes possess 'childish' properties; because children do not have a full control of language, sound and rhythm come as a matter of their interest and focus whilst the meaning of words is secondary. Carroll's nonsense poetry "is parodic in relationship to children's rhymes that involves taking an approved rhyme and rendering it absurd" (p. 8, 9), which, in most cases, confers to nursery rhymes a comic element within the story. As in the case of other nursery rhymes included in *Alice*, *How Doth the Little Crocodile* exemplifies Carroll's use of an already existing poem.

The original version of *How Doth the Little Crocodile* is Isaac Watts's *Against Idleness and Mischief*, based on which Carroll presents a parody and a reversal in meaning. *How Doth the Little Crocodile* proves that same idea of reversal and opposite meanings, when compared to Isaac Watts' meaning of the poem, by mocking and subverting the reality of the existing things (preconceptions). Watts's version privileges the orderly and economical world with the idea that each living being has an attributed role in it. The poem speaks about a busy hard-working bee, containing a moral message which tries to teach children values such as work, effort, commitment, and so on, in order to, at last, give them some good account for every day, avoiding idleness and malice:

How doth 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

*Against Idleness and Mischief* – Isaac Watts  
(Carroll, 2001, p. 24).

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!

*How doth the little crocodile* – Lewis  
Carroll  
(Carroll, 2001, p. 23).

However, Carroll 'counteracts' Watts's original version in using the lazy slow-moving, not so hard-working crocodile, by extending Watts's application, i.e., the crocodile is equal to the bee as it also performs its role, being equally worth praising. The crocodile is obviously different from the bee but that difference ought to be respected. Carroll almost makes it look as if he wanted to praise children's essence, their sense of discovery, and indirectly asserts that children should not be demanded to act as little adults but as the children they really are, with their own particular needs. Even in the smallest details of his work, Carroll is fighting every evidence of social repression, while entertaining. By subverting the poem's original meaning, Carroll ended with the idea that writing for children always had to contain a moral (repressing) message. In this particular poem, Carroll values the inborn gleefulness of children, namely by using the words 'cheerfully' and 'smiling,' and their freedom of spirit.

There are instances of other rhymes which Carroll introduced in his stories, whose main purpose was to entertain, such as the case presented in *A Mad Tea-Party*, through the Hatter's song *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Bat*, which is Carroll's parody of Jane Taylor's famed poem *The Star*. The *Alice* stories present other instances of nursery rhymes and songs of the period with the purpose of helping to tell the story, enriching it by adding a joyful distracting element, which acts at the level of children's concentration. The Mother Goose's<sup>40</sup> nursery rhyme which Carroll readapted in *Through the Looking-Glass*, and which Alice sang to the White Queen for her to sleep, is of that a good example:

'Hush-a-by lady, in Alice's lap!  
Till the feast's ready, we've time for a nap:  
When the feast's over, we'll go to the ball—  
Red Queen, and White Queen, and Alice, and all! (Carroll, 1996, p. 221)

Sounds and rhymes are indeed very effective in calling children's attention, and Carroll often breaks with the narrative thread by introducing small verses and songs to keep the youngest readers' focus. He also plays with the musicality of words in his dialogues. Pat the lizard, the White Rabbit's gardener, is a good example of humour supported by language: "Now tell me, Pat, what's that in the window? Sure, it's an arm, yer honour! (He pronounced it 'arrum!)" (Carroll, 1996, p. 45). The author only allows the distortion of language, in parenthesis, after it has been regularised in the text, as if he wanted to maintain a respectful and correct use, even though he writes "yer" in the text.

This concern with words and its sounds is linked to language games. In a broad sense, Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>41</sup> (1953) introduces language games with examples of simple practices (real and imaginary), considering the whole process that involves the use of words similar to games, through which children assimilate their native language. He calls this whole, "consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the language-game" (Stern, 2004, p. 88), thus including all linguistic aspects in context. This idea intertwines with the aforementioned idea that the user of a language has to have a prior knowledge

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<sup>40</sup> Mother Goose is known for her many stories for children, which have been passed through oral tradition. She is the author of several songs, games and nursery rhymes, which many authors, such as Lewis Carroll, used in their own books for children. However important her work may be, her identity is not certain, as there are some who claim her identity to belong to Boston, USA, and others who argue that that is not possible because there were already records of her work in Europe, namely in France, previous to the existence of this Bostonian woman. Regardless of that, her stories were first gathered in *Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oie*, published by Charles Perrault, in 1697 (*Poetry Foundation*).

<sup>41</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in 1889, in Austria, and he is a remarkable philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote *Philosophical Investigations*, originally *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, in 1953, in which he introduced new insights exposing fallacies in the conventional understanding about language (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

of the signs of a certain community in which s/he lives, i.e., the context and codes which allow the purpose of communication.

Be it by giving orders, and obeying them, play-acting, singing catches, guessing riddles, making and telling a joke, or simply asking, thanking, or greeting (just to mention some from the list Wittgenstein offers), the language game in use can assume many forms. For example, – ‘symbols,’ ‘words,’ ‘sentences,’ – a multiplicity which is not fixed, as there is always a constant renewal of language types and language games, while others “become obsolete” and disappear (p. 88, 89). Carroll explored language games and all this multiplicity in *Alice*, in a literary genre that is based on the creation of a fictional reality through language, which simultaneously represents reality.

The tension between reality and language, i.e., the tension between meaning and non-meaning which allows ambiguity, is what separates nonsense literature from purely linguistic wordplay, and from realistic literature (Tigges, 1988, p. 86, 87). Tigges suggests a dichotomy arising from within, in nonsense, as part of its origin: ‘popular’ nonsense and ‘ornamental’ nonsense. The first has to do with Eduard Lear’s “emotional, musical and phonetical nonsense,” the latter with “the purely intellectual, mathematical and semantical prose” of Lewis Carroll (p. 84).

The other dichotomy closely connected to that of ‘popular’ nonsense and ‘ornamental’ nonsense, which might best serve the purposes of this chapter dealing with language as one of the main vehicles of nonsense, is [between] situational nonsense and linguistic nonsense (p. 85). Linguistic nonsense is “both the type of nonsense in which the tension between meaning and non-meaning is created by means of play with language elements and that in which a nonsense language is actually created,” whereas, “[s]ituational nonsense entails the creation of a nonsense-world – Wonderland, the land beyond the Looking-Glass, (...), where, unlike in fantasy (...) no consistency is offered by way of foothold to the reader” (p. 85). In this sense, Carroll’s Wonderland and Looking-Glass land present both types (linguistic and situational), as they come up as places allowing an exchange of arguments within language, between meaning and non-meaning, only made possible by its spatial distance, i.e., absurd situations (characters’ uncommon points of view and attitudes, and other abnormal events) are excused by the fact that they are occurring in a world that is different from, and parallel to, the real world.

*Alice in Wonderland’s* chapter seven, *The Mad Tea-Party*, illustrates one out of many instances on how, through language, Alice is made to deconstruct the conflicts between her knowledge of the real world and the new fantastic world of nonsense. The real world carries meaning to the fantastic world, in which there is non-meaning, in turn, confronting meaning. The March Hare offers her some wine from the table in which they are gathered; however, they did not have wine, fact for which Alice indignantly

replied: “Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it” (Carroll, 1996, p. 67). At this moment, Alice questioned herself as to the appropriateness of the March Hare’s remark, which was not in accordance with the social rules that Alice was accustomed to in the real world.

There is a clear presence of linguistic and situational nonsense, because Carroll plays with social expectations by creating an abnormal situation carried through language (if one thinks of that same situation occurring in the real world), which caused Alice to feel uncomfortable at the tea-party. The breaking with the ‘normal’ rules of politeness continues with the March Hare’s answer “It wasn’t very civil of you to sit down without being invited” (p. 68), to which Alice tried to contest by saying that she did not know that the table was hers and that it was laid for many more than three. Suddenly, the Hatter interrupted the roam of the discussion with a remark that exceeds all linguistic expectations: “Your hair wants cutting” (p. 68). Alice, once again, horrified with the characters’ behaviour, attempts to impose meaning/sense of the real world in Wonderland: “You should learn not to make personal remarks” (Carroll, 1996, p. 67). The reply’s impact on the Hatter caused him to open his eyes very wide and answer the most unexpected, nonsensical of answers, breaking with the maxims of conversation, by posing an unanswerable riddle: “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?”<sup>42</sup> (p. 67).

Conversational Implicature involves, roughly, things that a hearer can infer from the way something is said, rather than from what is said. Paul Grice, the linguist who owns this theory, noted that conversations are usually to some degree cooperative enterprises. Having acknowledged it, Grice formulated the Cooperative Principle: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange), at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1991, p. 26). He distinguished four specific maxims which he called Maxims of Conversation. The maxim of Quantity includes two ideas (1) to make your contribution as informative as is required, and (2) to make it no more informative than necessary; the maxim of Quality which is governed by a sincerity condition saying “try to make your contribution one that is true;” the maxim of Relation which asks us to “be relevant”, and finally, the maxim of Manner, which presents a supermaxim “Be perspicuous”, encompassing in its turn various submaxims: a) avoid obscurity of expression; b) avoid ambiguity; c) be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), d) be orderly. (p. 27).

Almost all the conversations in *Alice* occur under a breaking with several (or all) of these maxims. The aforementioned example portrayed in *The Mad-Tea Party* illustrates how Carroll creates nonsense

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<sup>42</sup> Often questioned by his readers as to the riddle’s solution, Carroll later added in the preface to the book that this riddle had “no answer at all” (Carroll, 2001, p. 75).

and the absurd (by subverting communicative patterns). The maxims of Quantity and of Quality are disrespected – Alice is offered some wine, which does not exist. The March Hare’s statement is deceptive and untrue, not based on a sincere condition or a realistic situation; therefore, making its intervention unnecessary and inappropriate as to the situation. The Hatter’s intervention by saying that Alice’s hair needed cutting increases the confusion. The maxim of Relation is broken due to its irrelevance in the contribution of something important to the topic being discussed. The presupposition<sup>43</sup> of his utterance is that they had to be speaking about hair styles, or going to a hairdresser to have a haircut, which is by no means the case. The Hatter ignored pragmatic presuppositions (which prevent the violation of the maxim of Relation) and he continues to contribute to the confusion by posing an unsolvable riddle: “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?” (Carroll, 1996, p. 68). This, once more, does not respect the natural flow of conversations. Ahead in the tea-party, presuppositions are also ignored by the March Hare:

‘Take some more tea,’ the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.  
‘I’ve had nothing yet,’ Alice replied in an offended tone, ‘so I can’t take more.’  
‘You mean you can’t take less,’ said the Hatter: ‘it’s very easy to take more than nothing’ (Carroll, 1996, p. 72).

Carroll indeed played with presuppositions; ‘Take some more tea’ presupposes that Alice had already had one cup of tea, which she had not. Because she belongs to the real world, Alice is very much aware of these linguistic rules, something of which the March Hare, as other Wonderland’s and Looking-Glass land’s characters, are oblivious. The failure of the communicative aspect of language leads to incongruity, which in turn “results from a combination of dissimilar elements and feeds on the consequent surprising effect,” meaning that opposition and surprise result in humorous situations (Ermida, 2008, p. 25). As in a game – a language game – the sudden perception of an incongruity results in the readers’ drop of the initial interpretation, and the subsequent search for a surprising meaning which s/he had not anticipated (p. 25).

In *Humpty Dumpty*, the character with the same name asked Alice how old she had said she was, to which she mistakenly replied “[s]even years and six months” (Carroll, 1996, p. 184). Humpty triumphantly claimed that her answer was wrong, mainly because Alice assumed that his question was a direct question about her age, not a linguistic trap to test her attention. These constant language games

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<sup>43</sup> The concept of presupposition is very wide and has become interdisciplinary; it holds interest on “logics, philosophy of language, semiotics and generative semiotics,” having assumed several facets. (Ermida, 2008, p. 153). However, there are three important linguistic facets worth mentioning: Logical presupposition, which is “relative to the proposition/sentence;” textual presupposition, which is “relative to the mechanisms of cohesion and progress in the text,” and pragmatic presupposition, which is “relative to the contextual factors that affect the utterance act” (p. 153).

and wordplay naturally contribute to Alice's feelings of discomfort in the fantasy worlds she entered and increase her identity crisis.

When Humpty Dumpty was explaining to Alice that what he was carrying in his neck ("or was it his waist?" questioned Alice) was a cravat and not a belt, and that it had been offered to him by the White King and Queen, Carroll introduces the word 'un-birthday,' which Alice does not recognise as being part of the English language. She immediately interrupts him with an inquisitive "I beg your pardon?"; Humpty promptly answers her by saying that he was not offended by her to the point that she had to beg for his pardon. At this point, the communicative thread fails to pass the message between the two, because Humpty ignores (or pretends to ignore) the real meaning of the expression 'I beg your pardon,' and he takes the meaning of the word 'pardon' literally. This explains his answer "I'm not offended" (Carroll, 1996, p. 185) and his implicit criticism of language norms, "[w]hen I use a word, (...) it means just what I choose it to mean— neither more nor less" (p. 186).

Carroll's successive games with words, meanings and situations, give rise to a set of questionings and thoughts intended to simultaneously entertain and develop the reader's critical thinking, even though these challenges occur in different worlds or realities that are represented in reverse, or that are opposite to the real world.

Inverted logic is to *Through the Looking-Glass* as madness is to Wonderland, and much of it is provided by Carroll's display of nonsense. Although both worlds present illogical and mad situations, *Through the Looking-Glass* land presents more language subversions and Wonderland more absurd situations. Nevertheless, this distinction is almost imperceptible as the inverted logic pervades throughout the stories, amplifying and subverting fantasy, and intended to force an "examination of the weak intellectual barriers that man sets up between himself and reality" (p. 73). The simplest rules (social, moral, etc.) are inverted in context and in confrontation with human belief, which is questioned through language (situational or linguistic). The Victorian reader cross-examines the intellectual barriers that represent repression and those that represent freedom, analysing and measuring her/his social values and intellectual barriers, being therefore forced to, at least, recognise its existence and, perhaps, rethink her/his position in society. In so being, it will work on the growing awareness of the repressive values, envisaging how the world would be without these "intellectual barriers" which support repression, resulting eventually in its future abolition.

The same process occurs with Alice, whose original socio-cultural background defines her perception of reality and affects her identification with a different reality. Alice witnesses, in particular, a sharp confrontation between repressive values and norms and the opposing ones of freedom (social and

moral). In fact, more than witnessing it, she experiences it, which explains the crisis of identity that she undergoes. And all this confrontation is made possible, as previously mentioned, through deliberate language displacement on the phonetic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels; which, in turn, makes what Alice perceives to be the case not always be what really the case is – reflecting the illusory (or arbitrary) nature of reality itself.

On a distinct level, the dynamic meaning of Carroll's nonsense fights against "[t]he colonising force of fiction" which "inculcate[s] hegemonic ideologies" and "reinforce[s] gender roles" (Thacker & Webb, 2002, p. 54). Carroll's subversive, though silent, voice contradicts language's masculine side, endowed with patriarchal power, by ridiculing it, and undermining "the rationalism and material concerns of the adult world" (p. 47), mostly because he represents masculine figures in embarrassing situations, making dumb remarks and being submissive to women. In addition, Carroll's choice of the element of the fantastic, together with his direct speech address to children, "offer an appeal to the 'feminine' and an entrenched loyalty to the Romantic image of children of the early part of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century" (p. 54). The closeness that Carroll has with the child provides him with an in-depth perception of its conflicts, and the resulting subversive fantasies suggest "a response to the disjunction between images of children as innocents and the confusing and corrupting adult world of the period" (p. 55).

## **4.2 The Role of the Contemporary Illustrations of Carroll's *Alice Cycle* – Representing the Child and the Feminine Visually**

The art of illustration has existed for centuries, but that being reproduced for the benefit of younger audiences only emerged in the latter half of the sixteenth century, with the invention of printing. During that period, both the aim and use of illustration was connected to instruction and enlightenment purposes. Only in the nineteenth century did the pure fictional illustration come into regular usage (Male, 2007, p. 144), flourishing until our days.

Only very recently was illustration recognized as an independent discipline, as the founding of the Society of Illustrators in the USA in 1901 proves it. Despite that, this has not prevented illustrations from being looked down by the fine arts community, mainly due to its avowed commercial purposes (p. 10). While being both visual language and means of information, illustrations have been undervalued, considered disparate from "painting, engraving, commercial art, cartoons, pictures in books and drawing," and often mistaken with graphic design and fine art, perhaps because of the overlap that

happens occasionally (p. 10). It is however undeniable that the distinctive role of illustration is communicating in detail a contextualised message to an audience, not just reproducing the message but enhancing and evincing its most potential; it obviously aims at commercial interest through the selling of a creative product. All of its measure and variety makes of illustration a powerful instrument and a most effective visual language (p. 10).

During the nineteenth century, illustration acquired a significant role, namely at a political level. For instance, names such as James Gillray, William Hogarth, or George Cruikshank (at an early stage of his career) mark the history of illustration in Britain, having had a proponent role in the *status quo* of the British historical developments of the time. All, Gillray, Hogarth and Cruikshank (just to name a few) were known for their caricatures and political satire (*Cruikshankart.com*). However, during the second half of the nineteenth century and with the rise of children's literature with Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (illustrated by Linley Sambourne) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, among many other children's authors that appeared, illustration gained a new function apart from that that it already had – entertaining children and supporting narratives assuming the role of visual narratives.

These visual narratives in children's books helped in stimulating the readers' imagination, through the visual depiction/"descriptive atmospheric images" of those imagined worlds and the conditions they offered, or "the many myths, legends, anecdotes and fictitious events," all of which never seen, thus validating the childish fancies more, and the adults' as well. Victorian children's literature is known for having been the hallmark of its first golden age, due to the change in its approach to children – transiting from a strictly instructional vein to a more entertaining one, as debated in chapter 1. As mentioned in subchapter 3.2.1 on children's imaginative abilities, namely when they detach from the real world, embracing a pretence world which helps them to develop their cognitive and emotional side, illustration assumes a collaborative role with narrative fiction in the construction of those make-believe worlds because, as already argued, the child-reader can consolidate her/his knowledge about the real world (cognitive and emotional) by being confronted with its opposite, the fantasy world.

Lewis Carroll also conceived the *Alice* books based on this Victorian novelty and awareness, and Alice's very first intervention or provocative questioning "what is the use of a book (...) with no pictures or conversations" (Carroll, 1996, p. 23) clearly elucidates that. It is this innovative Victorian mentality, valuing pictures in books as being something important for ensuring the child's interest and understanding of the story that underlies their awareness of the unique character of book illustration, deriving from the combination between the verbal and the visual forms of communication, facilitating an adequate interpretation of the whole story.

The verbal and the visual communicate with the reader by means of two distinct sets of signs: the iconic and the conventional. On the iconic level, both signifier and signified share qualities, as signs are directly representing its signified; for example, the picture of a printer on a computer's keyboard does not require a special understanding of it to know its function. On the conventional level, there is no direct representation between signs and the object signified; for example, the word 'print' carries a meaning if one possesses the code – as one ought to possess a previous knowledge of the letters which make up the word; one has to decipher them and join them to understand what it means and what it stands for. Conventional signs require that readers share a previous knowledge of a particular language (spoken and written, among other communicative signs). If one is reading something in an unknown language, the communicative purpose falls flat, or the meaning is obscure (Nikolajeva, 2001, p. 1).

The iconic and conventional signs seen in the verbal and the visual communication, and the overall meaning in illustrated books is assembled by the reader in the interaction between these different communicative means. Illustrations, or images, accompanying stories are iconic signs, and the words which tell stories are conventional signs; but in their core (images and words) they share a complementary relationship and they work to the same purpose. The illustrations bear the function of describing or representing what is being told by the conventional signs – words, whose function is to narrate. Iconic signs possess a less direct instruction on the reader, contrarily to conventional signs; and their coexistence results in a tension that allows “unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image in a picturebook” (p. 2).

Reading an illustrated book means, therefore, that the child reader (and the adult) will simultaneously decode verbal and visual signs, by turning from verbal to visual in an exchange that will not just increase but also create new expectations, experiences and feelings. This can be easily proved, namely when a child asks his parents to read them a certain book over and over again – each time they hear that story they are indeed able to extract new meaning as if they were reading a new story. Moreover, book illustration and children's literature intertwine in a major point which sets the bounds that they share: children have an innate predisposition to simultaneously cross-read and interpret the signs given by both the verbal and the visual, whereas adults often lack this ability as they tend to look at illustrations as mere adornments.

In addition to the verbal conception of the fantastical, Lewis Carroll, as other authors of the period such as Charles Dickens, acknowledged the visual potential in children's books and asked for the strategic help of an illustrator. The case of Charles Dickens is very clarifying as to the use of illustrations in books – and his target audience was not children, contrarily to Carroll's. In fact, very few of Dickens' works were

issued originally without illustrations, only *Hard Times*, in 1854, and, *Great Expectations*, in 1861.<sup>44</sup> Dickens worked in close collaboration with some selected illustrators, such as Robert Seymour (1800-1836), George Cruikshank (1792-1878), to name but a few, giving them an overview of his ideas about what he wanted to highlight in his stories, particularly in the cover of the book. Because Dickens' works were published serially in newspapers and magazines, he had to meet with the illustrator monthly so that they could elaborate on their drawings (*David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page*).

The original illustrations included in his books give the contemporary reader a glance of the characters as he had described them to the illustrators, whose works had to be assessed by Dickens, the one with the final word. Illustrations assumed an important descriptive role of the characters (either obscure or light-hearted; their respective costumes, and so on), and also in terms of the particular setting of the dramatization of the stories (*David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page*). For instance, in the case of Dickens (as of Carroll), the scenes they selected to be illustrated with an emphasis on the scenes they thought that could provide the reader more emotional connection and interest, as they had conceived their stories, i.e., if they wanted a scene to convey a more emotional, compassionate feeling to the reader (e.g., one of *Oliver Twist's* most unfortunate events), or if they wanted to represent a chaotic scenario in a specific way (e.g., *Alice's* "The Mad Tea-Party").

Carroll gave emphasis on the dialectic between textual image and verbal text, demonstrating an interest in stimulating and increasing the reader's imagination, by appealing to the fantastic and unimaginable, the chaotic and crazy, the unexpected, to provide the reader with a different view of the world expected. In this way, Carroll could instigate children's critical thinking in the creation of their own self, the least influenced as possible. Most of Carroll's important works are illustrated, proving that he attributed a significant importance to illustrations. He chose some important artists to draw the scenes, characters and situations that he decided to include in the books to complement his vision of fantasy, having worked closely with them. As Dickens, he made sure that the illustrations were in tune with what he had envisaged. Some of his illustrators were Henry Holiday (*The Hunting of the Snark*, 1876); Arthur B. Frost (*Rhyme? And Reason?*, 1883 and *A Tangled Tale*, 1885); Harry Furniss (*Sylvie and Bruno*, 1889 and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, 1893), or Emily Gertrude Thomson (*Three Sunsets and Other Poems*, 1898) (*The Lewis Carroll Society*). But the best known was his first illustrator, John Tenniel, with whom Carroll worked in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871).

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<sup>44</sup> More information on this particular topic is available at *David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page*, on <http://charlesdickenspage.com/illustrations.html>.

The verbal incision of Carroll’s fantastic writing, thus coupled with the visual aspect of the illustrations that Tenniel conceived, amplify Carroll’s fantasy, as it fully immerses the reader into the book’s universe. This in spite of the fact that Tenniel used “aspects of the familiar as points of departure to track Alice’s descent further and further into Wonderland’s madness” (Carter, 1995, no page).



There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" (when she 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); but, when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waist-coat pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge (Carroll, 1996, p. 23).

Figure 1 – The White Rabbit’s first appearance in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).

The presence of a white rabbit hurried with time, taking a watch out of its waistcoat pocket like a human, duly represented in the illustration that accompanies the text, contributes to the fusion between the fantasy and real worlds as well. The illustration of the rabbit, which Tenniel depicts with all its human traits and accessories, looking at its pocket-watch, introduces Alice and the reader to the fantastic. In the illustration, the White Rabbit is holding a watch with one hand and an umbrella under his arm, and his eyes wide open in distress at being late make the reader realize how far Carroll’s description of the “White Rabbit with pink eyes” (Carroll, 1996, p. 23) goes – a human-like rabbit, with human clothes and walking on its two feet (Carter, 1995, no page).

It is perhaps significant that the first handwritten manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Underground* included thirty-seven ink illustrations drawn by the author himself, some of which inspired John Tenniel to maintain Carroll’s original drawings, such as the one with Alice swimming in the pool of tears (*British Library*).



Figure 2 – Pool of tears drawn by Carroll, in *Alice’s Adventures Underground* (*British Library*).

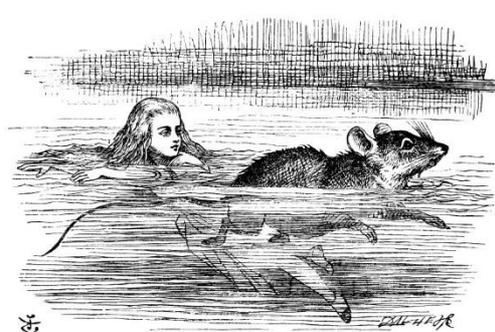


Figure 3 – Pool of tears drawn by Tenniel, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).

Notwithstanding, the fact that Carroll introduced new chapters in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, such as *The Mad-Tea Party*, which did not exist in *Alice's Adventures Underground*, gave Tenniel more liberty to recreate the whole madness characteristic to Wonderland. This, as well as Alice's irritation and discomfort about the nonsensical situations, could be clearly seen in the visual depiction of the tea-party scene.



Figure 4 – Madness at the tea party table (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).

Tenniel's depiction of the fantastic nature of the scene, transmitting the madness and confusion involving the tea-party, is demonstrated more immediately in this scene than in Carroll's first description of the scenario:

*There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head (Carroll, 1996, p. 67).*

In fact, the depiction of her irritation contributes to a reversal of what was socially expected of her as a girl, given that little girls should be subdued and reserved. Contradicting that, Alice is very opinionated when something or someone confronts her ideas. In the illustration, she abandons her manners and gives a dissatisfied frown. This is reinforced with Carroll's following description of the nonsensical situations at the tea-party; and both illustrations and narration make the representation of the child, particularly of little girls, subversive. It is subversive because her attitudes do not conform to the Victorian ideals of the feminine and girls' education.

Carroll and Tenniel wanted to enlarge on Wonderland and the Looking-Glass land with visual depictions of fantastic inversion, distorted and grotesque perspectives and relative size. In a way, Carroll's and Tenniel's visions of Wonderland invade and shape the reader's vision of the stories, considering that illustrations are a form of narrative, and all narratives instruct the reader into a determined message. The images that they have decided to focus on were intended to ensure that readers would not miss the messages or the creators' own vision of the fantastic and grotesque, while also entertaining and opening up new 'windows' in their imaginative abilities.

As much suggestive as the narration provided by Carroll may be in describing the Duchess as “very ugly” (Carroll, 1996, p. 84) in *The Mock Turtle’s story*, the reader can only know the extent to which the ugliness of the Duchess goes because Tenniel had already shown it in the Duchess’s kitchen. As Martin Gardner suggests in *The Annotated Alice*, the Duchess’s grotesque representation seems likely to have been copied from “a painting attributed to the sixteenth-century Flemish artist Quentin Matsys,” depicting a “fourteenth-century duchess, Margaret of Carinthia and Tyrol” who had the reputation “of being the ugliest woman in history” (Carroll, 2001, p. 61). In this portrait, the reader is also suggestively presented to the grotesque ugliness of the baby, the smiling cat and even the cook’s exaggerated use of pepper.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 5 – The portrait of the Duchess’s kitchen (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).

Tenniel is also faithful to Carroll’s way of representing the child. The baby is crying; it seems that because it is crying, it turns into an ugly baby and eventually becomes a pig. The Duchess does not look like the perfect mother, either, due to the way she is holding the baby with indifference, seen in her displeased facial expression, which conforms to (and reinforces) Carroll’s description of the dysfunctional domestic environment for raising a child: “the cook (...) at once set to work throwing everything within her reach at the Duchess and the baby – the fire-irons came first; then followed a shower of saucepans, plates, and dishes” while the mother (the Duchess) was “nursing her child (...) singing a sort of lullaby to it as she did so, and giving it a violent shake at the end of every line” (Carroll, 1996, p. 61, 62).

On the other hand, even when Alice is represented as a docile and naïve girl (qualities which indeed she possesses) both in the visual and verbal texts, somehow to conceal her rebelliousness, Alice is yet always involved in a subversive atmosphere. By showing Alice carrying the “baby” in her arms

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<sup>45</sup> Although the use of pepper might be alluding to the Duchess’s bad temper, the historical fact states that it was custom for lower classed Victorians to use excessive pepper in the soup “to mask the taste of spoiled meat and vegetables” (Carroll, 2001, p. 62).

(together with Carroll's narration stating that its mother, the Duchess, had temporarily abandoned it to go to a croquet-game), Alice assumes the role of mother; and her tender look makes it appear that she does not reject motherhood. Nevertheless, Carroll's narration makes the reader aware that she releases the baby-pig into the wild, expressing a sort of relief in saying that it is better for it to be a beautiful pig than an ugly baby.

However sweet and guarded Alice might seem, there is a growing emphasis throughout visual and verbal texts on the fact that she is easy-going and sociable, inquisitive, attentive, and opinionated, contradicting all the Victorian ideals of girls' education which state that girls should be reserved and poised. This is recurrent in Alice's illustrations as representative of little girls, and this reversal 'fights' against the underlying repression in the Victorian education of girls. If Alice started her adventures by depending on favourable circumstances, waiting for a magical solution to the obstacles that come in her way (e.g. a cake, a mushroom or a drink), she would eventually learn that only a change in attitude could help her finding an actual effective solution. An example of that is when she finds the Frog-Footman and she does not want to break into the Duchess's house. Had she not violated the social rule to which she was holding to (never enter into someone's house without permission), she would have had to wait "for days and days" (p. 60).

Alice's violation of social norms goes on, then, till the end of the story. This rebelliousness is more clearly seen in the last illustration of her *in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which she dares to take a stand. If her words levelled against the characters "You're nothing but a pack of cards" are striking enough in showing her spirit, the 'shower of cards' that fall upon her, which Tenniel brilliantly depicts, accompanied by her reaction and infuriated expression (also seen in the *Mad-Tea Party* table illustration) does it with the same portion of effectiveness. This "double" representation (visual and verbal) of Alice's rebelliousness strengthens her determination in ending with what upsets her, which demonstrates her intention to, if necessary, use force to change the course of events of an arbitrary society with which she does not identify. This attitude reveals a determined girl and, when transposed to the real world's society, may be interpreted as a claim for freedom of expression and opinion for women, which naturally had yet to go through the radical change in the Victorian mentality regarding the education of girls.



Figure 6 – The shower of cards, *Alice's Evidence* (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).



Figure 7 – Alice carrying the pig baby, *Pig and Pepper*, (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).

In addition, Alice's revolt against the flying cards marks the bridge between fantasy and reality, which Alice immediately crosses, while fighting the cards, to wake up from her dream on her sisters' lap. More or less exactly, the same thing happens in *Through the Looking-Glass* in relation to Alice leaving the fantastic world. She had gotten so furious with the disorder that was established in her dinner that she picked the Red Queen up and started shaking her. Both visual and verbal texts seem to make a two-step transition from fantasy to the real world. Carroll makes it by dividing his narration into two different chapters – *Shaking* and *Waking* – and Tenniel makes it by adding two different illustrations of one single moment:



Figure 8 – Alice shaking the Red Queen, *Shaking*, (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).



Figure 9 – Alice waking from her dream, *Waking*, (*Alice-in-wonderland.net*).

To conclude, Victorian authors already made the traditional distinction between verbal and visual language creatively productive, by admitting the interaction between the two in order to conceive a stronger meaning for the text, which indeed justifies the importance of illustrations in the Golden Age of children's literature. Illustrations can be then interpreted as a lively and dynamic response that the artist gives to the author's text, and both illustrations and words work together in a continuum to produce meaning. This creative vision appears to be better suited to the Victorian illustrations of children's books, especially because authors and illustrators originally worked in tandem for the construction of a wider meaning in their stories (Millikan, 2011, no page).

### 4.3 The Arguments of Fantasy and Freedom Vs those of Convention and Repression

In the central dichotomy that this work intends to study and emphasise as part of a deliberate literary strategy, Carroll indeed explores and extrapolates the concept of freedom by presenting the arbitrary conventions of its opposite – repression – to the reader. The author gathered a series of social aspects, from laws, hierarchies, the education of children and of girls, among others, and subverts them through parody, in worlds where there are no rules and the only thing that rules is the abuse of power by only a few. It is in episodes such as the Knave's trial or the banquet made for Alice that the confrontation between freedom and repression is most obvious. In the trial, the Knave is sentenced without clear and reliable evidence. On a different level, the banquet does not provide any rule in organization or logic of events in what convention is concerned. These episodes provide the adult reader with various interpretations and some possible conclusions, being the connection between the Victorian *status quo* and Wonderland's or Looking-glass's the most striking one. The moment the reader starts imagining those unconventionalities, it becomes inevitable to compare it with the society of her/his time, which in turn makes her/him be aware and perhaps re-evaluate the values that prevail and rule her/his society.

As such, Carroll's innovative style of writing for children presents a relation between fantasy and repression in the sense that his fantasy intends to represent the freedom that did not exist in Victorian society in the face of its repressing rules. In a first glance, Victorian society is represented as repressive without it even being stated, i.e., it is implicit by opposition to Carroll's fantastical, but based upon reality, worlds. However, in the end, Carroll's fantastical freedom paradoxically turns out to be repressive as well. In a world where there are no rules everything becomes arbitrary: there are characters, such as the Queen, who abuse the power they have; besides, in a world without rules no one respects the other and the confusion is settled, as broadly seen in the stories.

Without having ever admitted it, Carroll's narrative style may suggest different critical readings due to the ambiguity of his text. Themes of Victorian contemporary issues, such as women's claims for gender equality conform to the idea that there is repression in Alice's rebelliousness, or rather a claim for greater social freedom for girls (future women) as for boys. Alice, a charming girl of the middle-class, gradually undergoes the discovery of her own identity within a fantastic world turned upside down, leading her to stressful situations. Despite his conservative social position, Carroll subliminally states his ideas on the way Victorians saw women's education and social status at (and since) an early age. Alice's rebelliousness comes as a social confrontation to the way Victorians expected little girls to act (passively),

as Jane Eyre had done some years earlier. In fact, both Jane and Alice might be the first female child characters presented with strong personalities claiming a social position contrary to the 'norm'.

Moreover, Alice's disguised "intentions" challenge the canons of what it was to be a woman (since childhood) in Victorian society. She is a defying character in the sense that she behaves inappropriately when she actively faces all the situations proposed by the Wonderland and Looking-Glass worlds, which were anything but the proper attitudes of the everyday life of a child. Carroll represented Alice as veiled by the Victorian social conventions followed by the middle-class – she is polite, well-behaved, well-dressed and poised, with a charming elegance, and a well-spoken girl who knows all the conventional rules of social behaviour – to combat repression, by implying that one only feels repressed if one gives a big importance to social rules, underlying that rules were made to be broken and/or changed.

Carroll's approach marks the major, though gradual, social change within children's literature regarding the way children were seen and how it was to write for them. In the late eighteenth century, childhood as a concept valuing children's specific necessities as different from that of the adults was not considered. This stage was not seen as relevant to the good physical and psychological development of the child. Children, particularly of the working-class, worked from an early age, being therefore repressed in the access to those needs. "They were often treated brutally both at home and at work" and they attended school for short periods of time and many did not even go to school (Hopkins, 1994, p. 1).

According to the arguments presented in Chapter 2, throughout the nineteenth century, the concept of childhood developed significantly and children started to gain more legal rights and more protection, a product of the adult's awareness about children's needs, which gradually released them from the repressing living conditions at work and at home. The literary responses to child labour seen, for an instance, in Charles Dickens's novels and other authors, exposed the suffering of child workers, having raised an awareness in the middle-class reader. All of this contributed to a shift in attention of the period's most influential commentators to child workers, which soon entered the political heart of England "when reformers such as John Fielden and Lord Ashley, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, took up their cause in Parliament"<sup>46</sup> (*British Library*).

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<sup>46</sup> In 1833, Lord Ashley, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury had an important role in passing the Factory Act which stated that no child under the age of nine could work and that children between nine and thirteen years of age could work forty-eight hours a week and must go to school in part-time. In 1847, John Fielden helped in passing the Ten Hours Act which demanded that no worker could work more than ten hours a day, and in 1878, the Factory and Workshops Act stated that no woman could work more than sixty hours a week and no child under the age of ten could work (BBC, n.d.) and in 1981 the law warranting free education for every child aged five to thirteen was passed.

Considering that books were a very popular form of entertainment and leisure at the time,<sup>47</sup> adult readers would read the books either to themselves or to their children and would inevitably extract some subliminal messages, which their children would not, given that children's readings were more focused on their imaginative ability, as discussed earlier in subchapters 3.1 and 4.2, which along with their sensitivity, made them grasp meaning beyond the more conventional system of meaning of the adults. That is to say, they would give full reign to their imagination in the construction of Carroll's worlds, characters and situations. Pedagogically, both Carroll and the parents find in the stories aspects for someone who wants to give an education to their children in the context of child and feminine notions as well. The pedagogical intention of representing fantasy in a certain way to suppress or replace the previous ones which were outdated lies in the fact that he wanted to convey the idea that children had a voice that should be heard. Adults, in turn, should educate their children by stimulating their personalities into being critical. In addition, girls, who had a more repressive education than boys, should also be stimulated by adults in this way and learn that they could politely express an opinion while dreaming and being children in full. Carroll's pedagogical innovation in children's literature works therefore both in the adult's as in the child's spectrum. So, Carroll conceived Alice with a different opinion on every subject.

Equally sounding in Lewis Carroll's innovations is that his narrative style does not neglect the adult reader as a part of his audience. On the one hand, the author stimulates children's innate abilities to grasp the messages that adults ignore, mostly by appealing to the childish imaginative skills and sensitivity that makes them grasp meaning beyond the conventional system of meaning – language, which allows imagination to take over. On the other, he provides his readers with other (masked) meanings. In other words, his style includes two distinct levels: 1) a direct/ludic approach through fantasy to stimulate children's imagination, 2) a subliminal approach in which lies the interpretative ambiguity targeted to the adult reader, through the distancing of the author who does never take a stance in any possible criticism<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> The several reforms in the Victorian educational system throughout the nineteenth century, e.g., the reforms of 1832 that "took place in the midst of the establishment of the proprietary school and the beginning of the Arnoldian revolution" (as mentioned in chapter 2) and "those of 1867 during the momentous reorganization of the public and the grammar schools, or "those just after the establishment of a state-supported elementary school system," mark the Victorians' intellectual interest, namely of the higher classes, to literate the English population, whose significant improvement never seemed to please, or seemed insufficient to the eyes of the higher classes (Rothblatt, 1981, p. 24).

<sup>48</sup> Carroll already showed the idea later developed by Roland Barthes of the death of the author, in the sense that he wrote his texts assuming the role of the "modern scriptor" who distances his voice from his text, being its only origin language (Barthes, 1982, p. 146).

Carroll certainly knew how to articulate the literary requirements of imagination with the social demands of his time, also in terms of norms and conventions. Ultimately, he showed that if one wanted to be able to create / be creative – one should not take things too seriously – thus, reversing the all-prevailing perspective of earnestness of the Victorian period, and leading us to the simple conclusion that when things are taken too seriously or conventionally, they become inherently inflexible and repressive. As his much more notorious contemporary writer, Oscar Wilde, does in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), one can only parody with those situations.

The lens of the satirical representation of the various social factions of Victorians in *Alice* shows, on the one side, members of the higher classes such as kings, queens and a duchess; on the other, members of the lower classes such as the Hatter, the March Hare, the Tweedle Brothers or Humpty Dumpty, among many others.

Apparently, all seems to make perfect sense – just like the contemporary setting, there is a king and a queen, there are soldiers and a court, and so on, which suggest that there is a social hierarchical organisation, an apparently ordered society which Alice will find to be wrong. However, those characters had to submit themselves to dictatorial whims, namely of a tyrannical queen who openly exerted repression through the famous catch phrase: 'Off with his or her head!' Indeed, Carroll, who was very aware of Britain's unfair reality, writes the stories lampooning the Victorian's state of affairs but suggesting that all of it is nonsense – thus, presenting what could be called a dystopian vision of the world: one in which nothing is understood, nothing makes sense: a person is sentenced to death without really knowing why, which suggests pure arbitrariness. Was this a deliberate political move on the part of Carroll? Again, if so, it is hard to prove because he himself appears to have lived all his life by the book and one can only speculate about the several possibilities that his ambiguity and arbitrariness may suggest.

There is an unavoidable social influence of the English reality which Carroll experienced that is reflected in the way he assesses it critically and conservatively. Critically with his (aforementioned) subliminal approach, and conservatively with regard to personal and professional (social) reasons that led him to write covertly. Although Carroll felt conditioned to take a stance in the face of any contemporary socio-political struggles and might have recognised them in his heart, he never manifested them openly. He was so careful in this respect that there is no evidence proving his position on the various Victorian issues. As a member of Oxford University, Christ Church, he was forced (by hierarchical impositions) to comply with certain repressive rules which have to do with institutional organisation and social appearances. To illustrate it, and as mentioned in subchapter 3.1, Carroll could not marry in order to keep the studentship assigned to him and, then, proceed to the holy orders. Because he did not publicly

express himself about these socio-political convulsions, one does not know about his true opinions that would help to truly prove his social criticism, leaving no option for scholars and critics but to speculate about the possible hints present in his text which might reveal some critique.

Photography and Oxford allowed Carroll to meet various different and famous people of the time. He met with people such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, Samuel Wilberforce, George Macdonald, Ellen Terry, Charlotte Yonge, John Everett Millais, Lord Salisbury, Queen Victoria and Prince Leopold – to name but a few (Wakeling, 2015, p. 161). Carroll's frequent contacts with the more forward-looking and progressive intellectual and artistic circles, namely his socialist acquaintances like Swinburne or Wilde, assures that he was aware of the most controversial and even reformist perspectives about Victorian society, which might explain his subliminal critique.

To illustrate it, Swinburne "defines here the ideal republican citizen who aspires to live in an individual-centric society that encourages its members to follow their conscience, and that resist institutional authority" (Levin, 2013, no page) and Carroll's *Alice* seems to suggest the same thing. *Alice's* struggle against repression, fruit of social conventions aimed at controlling the masses, proposes a new individual who fights for her/his ideals and truth, which passed through a rethinking and deconstruction of the values that ruled the nineteenth century English society.

Painting a darker scenario in which the author was truly a paedophile, then, his attitude seems to reveal a conscious man who knew that the urge for children could not pass the boundary of their freedom as individuals whose needs were based on personality formation, and the innocence so strongly debated in this study. Of all the changes that happened since the beginning of industrialisation and capitalism, the most impacting on people's lives were those affecting personal life, e.g. sexuality, marriage and family (Giddens, 2002, p. 48). Everything depended on how others saw their neighbour, and with Carroll things might have been not that different. He was indeed a Victorian and, so, he might have been a victim of the Victorian preoccupation with the appearances and what others thought of him.

In this regard, the freedom that prevails in his mind, not only creative but also moral, leaves him in a self-repressing situation, mostly because acknowledging his hypothetical sexual interest in children was morally and physically wrong. Carroll himself might have repressed it at all times, which led him to frustration and sadness. In this sense, freedom wins the fight against repression in Carroll's reality because the freedom of children is for him more important than his own. Nonetheless, Carroll's low profile leaves no room for certainty regarding his sexuality and no one can prove and assert anything about it. And there are many voices stating that he was extremely shy, which restricted his love life.

In terms of social hierarchy issues, those which control time and space concepts and conventions appear to be equally relevant. Carroll's perspective, like that of many Victorians, was undoubtedly affected by the new immediacy of things and events – of being in one place and moving to another in the shortest period of time, which the novelty of railway travelling allowed. There is, of course, a sense in which social hierarchy issues which control gender, political and social power are likewise all inventions, mere human constructions (inventions of social and political conventions, science, etc.), something which Anthony Giddens (2002) asserts to be characteristic of an epoch “developed under the impact of science, technology and rational thought” with its origins in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (p. 1). Even the subversion of language, which is in itself an artificial system, means the deconstruction of these hierarchies while deconstructing language itself. As an attentive writer, Carroll noticed that it is through language that the spread or construction of these hierarchies take place and, for this reason, he deconstructs language, assumedly to deconstruct preconceived ideas of society and its organization, which may be the reason for such a repressing society.

Thus, for Carroll, fantasy – in the fictional sense of an invented or constructed world, conceived in the writer's mind – may indeed not be so different from other created social structures of human life; for him, all human constructs appear to be inextricably linked by the same inherent logic. For him, mathematics is essentially a game of numbers; it thus follows that poetry and prose are a game of words, in which one plays with the questions of form and content. Therefore, Carroll seems to prove (and also be the proof) that one can be creative in an inherently repressive environment; this is seen in the way as Alice comes to us with all the forms of convention and education, only to see them be completely subverted in the end.

There is a common perception of the Victorian period which states that Victorians were prudish, hypocritical and narrow-minded. Nevertheless, this does not apply to all Victorians, but to Victorians belonging to specific segments of the Victorian society, namely the rapid-growing and powerful middle-class. It was common that middle-class members wanted to climb the social ladder and achieve positions equivalent to those of noble people and felt that it could be achieved by acting according to the conventions and values characteristic of the period. In many ways this period echoes values which Queen Victoria herself advocated, particularly morality and domestic purity and social propriety (Homans, & Munich, p. 69, 75 – 82).

In the domestic sphere, at home, there was a family hierarchy that should be respected if people wanted to be socially respected and admired: the husband came first in the hierarchy; the wife, at a lower level, was responsible for the welfare of the family (husband and children) and the proper functioning of

home. In the public sphere, where essentially only men were allowed and respected, Victorians based their interests on power, political and social, visible in the upper financially powerful classes. Queen, ministers of parliament, businessmen and powerful landlords representing the upper-class, had the objective of increasing their power – the power of the nation (economic power) achieved with expansionism, increasing their businesses all over the world which would lead them to a substantial social visibility, something for which the middle-class also yearned.

A relevant context to consider in this respect is that the Victorian era was the period of the rapid expansion of British imperialism and colonization. The queen became, consequently, more powerful; indeed, in 1877, she is dubbed 'Empress of India', "to tie the monarchy and Empire closer together," according to the trusted advice of her Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (Williams, *BBC iWonder*). Yet, despite Britain's economic power, there were several social injustices affecting the lower classes, being poverty the most significant one, which eventually led many people and even children to crime (particularly in London and other industrial cities). In accordance with the Victorian ideology, laws were not outside the current regulations: harsh punishments were then dictatorial – capital punishment was accepted as the natural order in the nineteenth century (Gregory, 2012, no page), almost exclusively on crimes of murder (Wiener, 2004, p. 27). According to Martin Wiener (2004):

The nineteenth-century criminal justice process simultaneously applied its universalistic language as an instrument of "social control" in two ways – against members of the working classes and against men (and thus, of course, particularly – though never exclusively – against working-class men). However, the criminal law and its administration was always more than a simple instrument of control: it was throughout a structured public arena (and also private seminar, when after murder convictions cases went to the Home Office) in which general and difficult questions of responsibility were argued, and decisions were arrived at with immediate practical (sometimes life-or-death) consequences for potentially any member of society. These public and private discussions themselves depended on how a variety of cultural notions were constructed – respectability, Englishness, manliness, and womanliness high among them. Both faces of criminal justice, of control-and-resistance and of general moral debate, were real and fundamental; each shaped the context for the other; both stories need to be told, together (p. 29).

The severity of the Victorian law is not so different from that in Wonderland and Looking-Glass land. Correspondingly, the head of the Victorian law was Queen Victoria in the same way that the Queen of Hearts was the head of Wonderland's and Looking-Glass's law. Accordingly, the famed sentence uttered by the Queen of Hearts 'off with their heads!' symbolised inherent repression and, simultaneously, Carroll's critique of Victorian society through satirical subversion. It might be a sign of his disapproval of social injustice regarding prosecution, trial and condemnation of individuals in what might have been arbitrary, as indeed were his Queen's (and his king's) condemnations, for instance in the Knave's trial. In a first moment, 'off with their heads' seems a simple parody strategically created to simply entertain the child reader, which it in fact is; yet when delving into a deeper analysis and considering the social

circumstances which inevitably influenced and inspired the author to write in a certain direction, parody alludes to the Victorian law, hinting, in turn, its contemporary reader to her/his reality (the Victorian).

By establishing a correlation between the fantasy and the real world, freedom and repression, the adult reader embarks on a sort of travel through the rabbit-hole, a falling down of those pre-established models of social convention that led Victorians into a trap called repression which caused the social anxieties/malaise in their souls, which prevented them from happiness most of the time. Wonderland's and Looking-Glass land's freedom of the Victorian conventions is translated into confusion and, ultimately, repression. Carroll reverts the repression that exists in the real world into a freedom of any regulations, which results in a world where nobody understands one another.

In this respect, Alice is mostly an exogenous figure to these other worlds, bearing an outsider position which is comparable to the position of British imperialism. She comes to Wonderland as an intruder and as an observer, and may thus be viewed as a 'colonizer' because she tries to impose her home rules (the English rules). British imperialism and its protagonists aspired to control many trade routes, e.g., from India, and achieved it through colonization. This, in turn, made them impose their Englishness – their rules, lifestyle and customs, to sum up, their culture – in those places which already had their own customs and traditions, and culture.

In line with Robert Young (1996), Englishness of the 19th century is often characterised as a fixed English identity, of certainty, centredness, homogeneity, which was a product of, and reaction to, the changes and transformation of metropolitan and colonial societies – identities which “needed to be constructed to counter schisms, friction and dissent” (p. 3, 4). The fixed, centred and homogeneous English identity is what Alice tries to impose in Wonderland as an absolute truth. What she is not able to see is that this is *her* truth, her 'game', not the Other's. All this is subliminally present in Carroll's subconscious, namely the encounter with the Other in his fantastic worlds. A conclusion can be stated as to Alice's position – that her imposing of this 'Englishness' in Wonderland and Looking-Glass land is also a form of repression of its inhabitants.

Perhaps more importantly as far as this work is concerned, another context or perspective in which to consider issues of freedom and repression involves the specific variables of age and gender. As discussed in chapter 2, the Victorian reality concerning childhood and children's education, particularly of little girls, contributes with another repressing element underlying the *Alice* stories. Little girls' education is very much connected with the condition of women which was translated into women's passivity. This product of a patriarchal ideology undoubtedly contributes to another repressive element underlying the *Alice* stories. The English sovereign, the most powerful person of England and beyond,

was a Woman – Queen Victoria and, even her, suffered from this hegemonic pressure, which also prevented her from some social liberties or, at least, conditioned her as a woman, albeit at a subconscious level. Carroll might have inspired himself on this almost unprecedented reality, transposed it to the stories of Alice in a satirical way by daringly inverting gender roles – the Queen of Hearts/Red Queen is the undisputed ruler of the fantastic worlds and the King figure assumes, on the contrary, a low profile and also a submissive role, as discussed in subchapter 3.2.

This representation may indirectly reflect that the marital relationship between Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (her husband) was not normative or natural according to dominant Victorian patriarchal ideology, and this despite their efforts to show a natural relationship to the eyes of their subjects (Houston, 1999, p. 44). In the first years of marriage Queen Victoria and Prince Albert suffered from the hegemonic patriarchal ideology. Prince Albert renounced to usurp his wife's legal authority, but the representation of his decision, in *The Early Years*,<sup>49</sup> relies on contradictory ideas on gender roles, as the memorial simultaneously proclaims masculinity as “the ‘natural’ and original source of sovereign power” (p. 43, 44).

Gail Turley Houston (1999) asserts that the common belief (and awareness) of the sovereign's sexual difference influenced Victorian writers' impressions of sovereignty, subjectivity, and representation (p. 52). In fact, this applies to Carroll himself, though he does it subtly and probably in a subverted way. It is inevitable to compare Queen Victoria with Carroll's Queen of Hearts or the Red Queen, as both characters assume the position of authority and the King assumes the submissive role. This particular “insurrection” in portraying a feminised King and a masculinised Queen in *Alice* has to carry a very strong critical intention to the Victorian gender ideology, and it can illustrate Carroll's idea that women were not fairly treated, to say the very least. It is however inevitable not to compare Queen Victoria to Carroll's Queen of Hearts/Red Queen. The question is: to what extent was this repressive representation of his Queen reflecting his own views on the actual Queen of England? Once more, Carroll neither confirmed nor denied this fact, but there is an unmistakable similarity between the real and fictional Queens – austere authority. Victorian precepts and values were rigorous and severe, something that became intrinsically associated to its ruling queen, who assumed her authoritarian position very early on in the period - 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1837 (Williams, *BBC iWonder*).

Although Carroll has never woven a comment about the marital relationship of Queen Victoria with her husband Albert, Carroll may have been inspired with Queen Victoria's marital life to create his

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<sup>49</sup> *The Early Years of the Prince Consort* is a compiled book which includes a series of royal letters some of which written by or under the direction of Her Majesty the queen, by Lieut.-General the Hon. C. Grey.

Queen. When Queen Victoria and Prince Albert married, both had to find ways to adjust their social roles to their private life. Albert's identity became null in the presence of Victoria as the ruling queen to the point that he needed "to prove his masculinity while serving a woman sovereign," whereas the Queen herself felt compelled "to prove her femininity while yet ruling a male subject" (Houston, 1999, p. 45). The author deconstructs this struggle in *Alice*, by mocking with it through the relationship between the King and Queen of Hearts. Both the feminised King and masculinised Queen accept their public and private roles as part of the norm of Wonderland and Looking-Glass world, and even other characters in the stories do not question their relationship as British subjects did in the case of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

Closely connected to convention and values is the idea of tradition. The notion of tradition seems to refer to something which exists for many centuries,<sup>50</sup> however, the term as it is known today is a result of the Industrial Revolution and the interests of a practical life – a creation of Modernity and globalization: a search for sophistication intertwined with power (Giddens, 2002, p. 39). Carroll is ultimately and deliberately attacking tradition and custom and the roam that the world was taking. According to Giddens (2002) "[t]radition is perhaps the most basic concept of conservatism, since conservatives believe that it contained stored-up wisdom" and that "the persistence of tradition in industrial countries was that the institutional changes signalled by modernity were largely confined to public institutions" like the government or the economy (p. 42), which is connected to the idea of power. Carroll, like his literary style, shows a two-side reading of his social positions: he was a conservative in the way he manifested himself socially, by repressing some of his longings and his most controversial views; nonetheless, he did not quite totally repress his views as he discreetly expressed them in his artistic creations, like *Alice*.

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<sup>50</sup> Anthony Giddens (2002) provides some examples of tradition that arrived in the nineteenth century: he referred to the association of kilts as the national dress of Scotland, when in fact it was in the beginning of the eighteenth century that the kilt was invented by Thomas Rawlinson to facilitate the life of factory workers (p. 36, 37). He gives another instance: during the 1860s, the process of acculturation performed by the British contributes with some creations in the Indian tradition, such as the use of turbans, braces and tunics as part of the Indian soldiers' uniforms, which were previously similar to that of the Europeans, but which the British understood as non-Indian (p. 37).



## 5. THE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT OF CARROLL'S *ALICE* IN MODERN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

In this chapter I propose to discuss Lewis Carroll's literary and aesthetic legacy, the most relevant aspects of his influence in other writers and artists, namely the rewriting, the adaptation and the dissemination of his *Alice* cycle and other related texts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Surrealism and its most prevailing artists, and their works, are taken as an example of a different artistic realm seeking inspiration in Carroll's *Alice*; even though they explore it in a more direct, incisive and aggressive way, in areas that, as defended in this study, also aimed at women's empowerment.

Carroll's *Alice* cycle has undoubtedly left its mark on English literature and on the various forms of art, including artistic movements such as Surrealism (1919-25), but also in the way later writers conceived and wrote children's books; the cycle has definitely revolutionised the literary representation of children. The cycle has also inspired the emergence of twentieth-century cartoons in the cinema and the television, with an emphasis on dialogues and on the appealing ability to stimulate children's imagination that the drawn moving image has. It would namely inspire Walt Disney, who can be seen as the Lewis Carroll of the twentieth century. He adapted the *Alice* stories to the cinema in his 1951 animated film, which combined elements present in both stories in just one. The stories are so powerful that they continue to be adapted to the cinema by the same film producer (*Walt Disney Pictures*), but this time in two separate stories – *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016), which present an older Alice (nineteen years old) who returns to the magical worlds in which she had been during her childhood.

*Alice in Wonderland* (2010) was written by Linda Woolverton and directed by Tim Burton. The film starts with Alice's engagement party. In this scene, both writer and director decided to incorporate Alice's rebelliousness with her ideals regarding the position of women in the society of the nineteenth century. Alice decides to go to her engagement party without a corset and stockings. Her mother argues with her saying that she's not properly dressed, to which Alice contests asking who decided what was proper to dress. In addition, when she is informed that this party was her engagement party and that she had to accept Hamish's proposal, she says that she does not know if she wanted to marry him. In this first scene, the story shows an inquisitional trait as to the role of the nineteenth-century woman that is similar to what is defended in this study. The moment in which Alice is being proposed to at the gazebo, in front of all aristocratic members, she refuses Hamish's proposal and asks for a moment. It is at this

instance that Alice follows the White Rabbit and seeks refuge from the social impositions in his fantastic world (*IMDb*).

*Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016) was also written by Linda Woolverton but directed by James Bobin. This time, the film opens with a warrior Alice fighting against pirates and commanding the crew of her father's ship. Hamish wants to buy all of Alice's properties, or what it remains from the fortune, and tries to humiliate Alice by offering her a position in the company as a clerk, arguing that there are not a lot of companies accepting female clerks. Alice argues with her mother for having sold what they had left (the ship) to Hamish and seeks refuge in Wonderland. There, she will find Time personified against whom she will fight to rescue the Hatter's family. For that purpose, Alice will travel back in time. Once again, the film presents a pro-active woman who wants to help her friends and does not show any signs of fear, facing all of the male characters that come in her way. Such fearlessness leads her to success as, in the end, when Alice comes back to reality she is able to overcome the problem of losing her father's ship and her only means of subsistence and social independence, with her mother's change of ideas. Against all social expectations, she gives up on the sale of the ship and decides to set up their own business (*IMDb*).

But, before this, the stories had also been inspiring for contemporary artists and duly adapted in Carroll's own time: in 1886, Henry Savile Clarke<sup>51</sup> asked Carroll's permission to adapt *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* into one musical stage show, which Carroll agreed, having been involved in its adaptation to stage and, even, in the selection of actors. It is a two acts play, corresponding to each one of the stories. Carroll and Clarke transformed the original rhymes into songs and Carroll created some new lyrics to add in the play, whose music was arranged by Walter Slaughter.<sup>52</sup> It premiered during the Christmas season of 1886 and the success was such that it lasted on stage until 1927 (*British Library*).

In 1890, Carroll had the unusual opportunity of adapting the stories to toddlers (under-fives) with *The Nursery Alice*, due to the rapid expansion of the market for children's literature. At the time of the author's death, in 1898, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* had already sold 86,000 copies and *Through the Looking Glass* had reached the generous number of 61,000, and both books continued to be printed to date, having been translated into seventy different languages. In this particular version, Carroll had

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<sup>51</sup> Henry Savile Clarke (1841–1893) was a journalist “also known for his work in ‘light’ literature and popular entertainment,” who saw in the Alice stories an opportunity of a successful play (*British Library*).

<sup>52</sup> Walter Slaughter (1860-1908) was a composer of musical comedy and children's plays, and also musical director (*British Library*).

decided to maintain twenty of the original illustrations, but this time coloured and enlarged (*British Library*). Later, in the twentieth century, Carroll would continue to inspire the coming generations throughout Europe, as *Alice* was translated into other languages.

As Christine Roth asserts in her essay “Looking through the Spyglass,” the golden age of children’s literature, Lewis Carroll and James Barrie (and perhaps the other children’s writers) tried to reconnect with “a much-needed and protected/protective nostalgic space of wild childhood (...) by using child subjects as mediators between the spaces of childhood and adulthood, creating fictional(ized) child characters who are not as much natives as double agents, of sorts, in the untamed Wonderland or wild territories of Neverland” (Hollingsworth, 2009, p. 23).

Carroll’s determined and inquisitive little girl who entered a fantasy and mysterious world inspired and influenced the children’s stories that followed and the rise of female child characters in children’s literature. There are some sounding names that prove it to be truth, such as Wendy who entered Neverland with Peter Pan, Dorothy who entered the Land of Oz, or Lucy who entered Narnia. These names are just some of the female characters that arose after Alice to enrich children's literature, highlighting the relevance of women in literature (consequently in society) since an early age. Apart from the stories, these female protagonists mediate childhood and adulthood spaces.

Jean Ingelow's<sup>53</sup> children's stories were somehow influenced by Lewis Carroll's. For instance, *Mopsa the Fairy* (1869), a story about a boy who discovers a nest of fairies and with it a fairyland, shows very well the increasing use of fantasy in stories for children. In 1900, Lyman Frank Baum<sup>54</sup> created a fictional character named Dorothy, a farm girl who embarked in a series of adventures and met Tin Woodman, the Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion, of whom she became friend and who accompanied her in the adventures. According to the story, during a cyclone, Dorothy’s house was harvested with her and her dog Toto inside. Meanwhile, Dorothy fell asleep and when she woke up, she was in a new fantastical world with fantastical characters. Much in the same way, in 1902, James Matthew Barrie<sup>55</sup> created Wendy who went with Peter Pan and both entered Neverland, a fantastical world filled with fantastical characters, such as Captain Hook, a terrible pirate, Tinkerbell, a fairy, or the crocodile, just to

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<sup>53</sup> Jean Ingelow was born in 1820 in Lincolnshire, England, and was a poet and writer. Many of her narrative poems, some of which approaching Christian faith and romantic love. However, she also wrote for children very much influenced by Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald. She died in 1897, in London where she lived for many years (*Poetry Foundation*).

<sup>54</sup> Lyman Frank Baum was born in the United States of America, in 1856. He created Lucy, the protagonist of *The Wizard of Oz* (1900). His stories, like Carroll’s, would later be adapted to the theatre and cinema, whose protagonist was played by Judy Garland (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

<sup>55</sup> James Matthew Barrie was born in Scotland, in 1860. He was a dramatist and novelist, best known for having created Peter Pan (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

mention a few. Both Wendy and Peter tried to live within a dream, but Wendy, owner of a strong character, always tried to call Peter to his good senses and to grow up. Similarly, C. S. Lewis<sup>56</sup> created a series of books about a fantastic realm, whose access is through a wardrobe, with a female protagonist named Lucy. As *Alice*, his stories have been adapted to cinema, television and stage. This fantasy world of magic, mythical beasts and talking animals receives children protagonists coming from the real world, in order to give emphasis to the childish imagination.

More recently, there were other (re)interpretations of Alice which appeared throughout the twentieth century, some of which quite controversial. For example, the anti-drug novel *Go Ask Alice* (1966) and Alan Moore's pornographic novel *Lost girls*<sup>57</sup> were both inspired on the original *Alice*. Joanna Russ "published four sword-and-sorcery stories" named *The Adventure of Alyx* (1983), "about a resourceful adventuress seeking her fortune in strange lands" (McHale, 2015, p. 54). Jeff Noon also created an alternate world reality in *Vurt* (1993), whose third book of the series, *Automated Alice* (1996), follows Alice's journey to the future.

In the field of the visual arts, there were also interesting developments, particularly connected with certain effects and motifs in the stories. For example, 'growing' and 'shrinking' and other 'dream' motifs would inspire Surrealist artists at the beginning of the new century;<sup>58</sup> as for Carroll, grotesque representations were only possible to come to life through the dream medium. In fact, surrealists like André Breton would indeed claim Lewis Carroll as their precursor. In the same way that Carroll valued the qualities of the imagination, because they gave him the freedom to lightly speak about almost every serious subject, so did the surrealists. André Breton stated: "Beloved imagination, what I most like in you

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<sup>56</sup> Clive Staples Lewis was born in England in 1898 and became one of the most influent children's writers of the twentieth century. He became famous for his books *The Chronicles of Narnia* and children's literature ([CSLewis.com](http://CSLewis.com)).

<sup>57</sup> *Lost Girls* was partially published in 1991, 1992 and 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Surrealism appeared in 1919, when André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon (the first Surrealist group) launched *Littérature* (Aspley, 2010, p. 3). Surrealism is often associated to the bizarre, grotesque, fantastic, unfamiliar, distorted and disturbing, mostly because it encompasses these features in its artistic genome. Nevertheless, Surrealism is, roughly explained, an "artistic and literary movement that attempts to express the workings of the subconscious mind (...) characterised by incongruous juxtapositions of images" (Aspley, 2010, p. 3). And in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, in 1924, Breton defines Surrealism as an "[a]utomatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de tout autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale" (Aspley, 2010, p. 4, 5). After the WWI, there was the common idea that this conflict between Europe's countries was the product of an excessive rationality and materialism shared by the middle and upper classes. Dadaists had already developed a taste for chaos and the irrational, something which surrealists embraced, along with a fondness for the psychoanalytical idea of unconscious desires, very much influenced by Freud's recent studies. For this reason, dreams became important in transmitting people's secret desires and wishes to find political, literary and artistic creativity (Gil, 1999, no page).

is your unsparing quality” (Breton, 1972. p. 4). It is this unlimited quality of the imagination that allows images such as fantastical dreamland figures, melting clocks, and others alike, to characterise Surrealism as an attempt to merge the world of dreams and the world of reality in order to create a world of “surreality” (*Markeim Arts Center*).

In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), Breton also evidenced the characteristics of children's curiosity and wonder, which are namely present in Alice's point of view. Interestingly, this confirms Catriona McAra's (2011) assertion in “Surrealism's Curiosity: Lewis Carroll and the Femme-Enfant,” that the surrealist movement claimed Carroll as an important precursor and that “surrealism can be seen to have co-opted the curiosity of his heroine Alice as an investigatory trope, in keeping with its research-based practice” (p. 1). As a curious girl, in Carroll's perspective and as defended in this study, Alice was an agent of critique, transgression and disruption, techniques which the surrealists used in their works. McAra reaffirms this same idea by saying that:

One might suggest that the surrealists' fascination with Alice pertained to the way in which she manifested her own curiosity, and indeed curiosity characterised the surrealist project in general. It is the narrative drive of Alice's desire to know that allows us to identify with her. The White Rabbit is the object of Alice's desire, but he is a cipher for the subtext of the Carrollian quest: the search for knowledge (p. 5).

In his 1928 *Surrealism and Painting*, André Breton pointed out Picasso's painting as demonstrating that “the mind talks stubbornly to us of a future continent, and that everyone has the power to accompany an ever more beautiful Alice to Wonderland” (p. 2). McAra enumerates a series of sequential events and ideas that strengthen the idea that Surrealists claimed Carroll as an inspirational source. First, there is the dream feature in *Alice in Wonderland*, which coincided with the importance of dream narratives in Surrealism. Secondly, after their first Manifesto, surrealists often referred to Carroll in their art and literature; for an instance, Louis Aragon's 1929 translation of Carroll's nonsense verse *The Hunting of the Snark* (1874) was followed by his article “Lewis Carroll en 1931”, published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, “in which he mocked the puritanical respectability of Great Britain in the Victorian era and praised the way in which Carroll appealed to children's love of the absurd” (Aspley, 2010, p. 107). In addition, Aragon considered “how the use of nonsense poetry rebelled against the prevailing tendency to bowdlerise children's literature” (McAra, 2011, p.2).

Maria Pilar Gil (1999) asserts that “[n]o one can deny that in Alice's eyes a world of oversight, inconsistency, and, in a word, impropriety hovers vertiginously around the centre of truth.” This impropriety laying at the centre of truth passes through a profound human introspection about their unconscious desires to ultimately promote a change: intellectual, emotional, or social.

English surrealists, like David Gascoyne (1935), also claimed Lewis Carroll's works as an inspirational source and the author as their precursor (p. 132). The following year, names such as Herbert Read and Julian Levy claimed in their studies about the movement that Carroll was central in Proto-Surrealism. In 1936, Carroll's drawing of the Gryphon and Mock Turtle was shown in an exhibition of the prehistory of the movement – the drawing appeared “in the *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York” (McAra, 2011, p. 2). The same emphasis on Carroll continued in the following years with the second generation of surrealists, like Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, or Leonora Carrington.

Not surprisingly, Breton continued to include Carroll in his list of influential writers in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938) and the episode of the Gryphon and Mock Turtle is once again included in *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1939/1947) (p.2). Pierre Reverdy's<sup>59</sup> words in a 1918 article would inspire Breton and other surrealists:

The image is a pure creation of the mind.  
It can not arise from a comparison but from a bringing together  
of two more or less distant realities.  
The more the relationships of the two realities brought together are  
distant and apt, the stronger the image will be, the greater will be  
its emotive power and its poetic reality (Aspley, 2010, p. 7).

Reverdy's words echo Breton's ideas of bringing together two realities that apparently had nothing to do with each other, but which, when combined, created a stronger image that contributed to a stronger message. These words also reverberate much of Carroll's *Alice*, as the author approached two distant realities – the Victorian reality and a fantastical one – whose distant and apt relationship resulted in the readers' access to strong visual and emotive representations. Illustrating it were Carroll's language games and play of puns and portmanteaus, madness and the absurd, which enabled the separate realities to collide in order to ultimately reveal knowledge.

Significantly important is the fact that the surrealists' interest in Carroll happened at the same time that their concern with the *femme-infant* (child-woman) was becoming prevalent in their artistic and literary representations, during the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s. In *Arcane 17* (1945), Breton describes the child-woman as a figure who “sends fissures through the best organized systems because nothing has been able to subdue or encompass her” (McAra, 2011, p. 3). Hence, the surrealist

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<sup>59</sup> Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960) was a French poet and moralist influenced by Cubism and then Surrealism. He is known for a poetry difficult to grasp. He was the founder of Nord-SUD (1916) aimed at promoting Cubism. Later, he turned to Surrealism during the 1920s, but returned to “Cubist-inspired poetic techniques” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

idealisation of the child-woman is as “an enchanting, liminal and rebellious figure” (p. 3), sometimes, close to the representation of an adolescent. However, some figures, such as Whitney Chadwick, considered this search for the woman-child as sexist, working “to exclude woman artists from the possibility of a profound personal identification with the theoretical side of Surrealism” (Chadwick, 1985, p. 33). This was so, mostly due to the surrealists’ fixation for younger women, namely the relationships (both in the artistic realm and real life) that they maintained with younger women, which they would reproduce in their paintings – Max Ernst was known for this. It thus constitutes another similarity with Carroll and his fixation for the young girl – Alice Liddell.

Carroll’s image of Alice as a child-woman character is somehow ambiguous and potentially controversial, but possible to assess as such: ambiguous in the sense that while an innocent girl, she is only innocent to a certain extent, as she shares with the surrealist *femme-infant* the feature of the “child-like curiosity, conceived as naughty and playful” (McAra, 2011, p. 4) in the quest for self-identity (knowledge) within a topsy-turvy world. Even Alice’s constant changes in size, growing and shrinking, and her somehow adult manner allude to the mixed innocent and cunning attitudes. In the same way, the surrealist child-woman is often ambiguous: she is either “a young adult exhibiting a child-like behaviour or a precocious minor,” sometimes a sexualised child (p. 4).

Catriona McAra’s (2011) study enumerates a series of surrealist works that in one way or another sought inspiration in Carroll’s Alice or in Tenniel’s illustrations of *Alice*. For example, Max Ernst’s<sup>60</sup> 1930 graphic novel *Rêve d’une Petite Fille Qui Voulut Entrer au Carmel (The Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil)* was inspired in Tenniel’s illustration *You’re Nothing But a Pack of Cards* from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (p. 6).

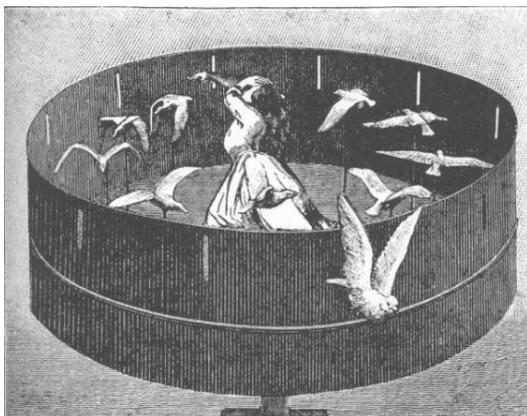


Figure 10: Max Ernst’s 1930 collage in his graphic novel *Rêve d’une Petite Fille Qui Voulut Entrer au Carmel (The Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil)*: (McAra, 2011, p. 6).

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<sup>60</sup> Max Ernst (1891–1976) was a German surrealist painter, sculptor and poet who initially had connections with the foundation of the Dada movement, and then he became involved with Surrealism. He was an advocate of irrationality in art and Automatism (a technique aimed at expressing the creative force of the unconscious) in Surrealism (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

Instead of representing this child-woman – an “Alice” – defending herself from a pack of cards, he presents her defending herself from pigeons. Ernst decides to represent his heroine at the centre of an enclosure, which she calls a dovecot, but which alludes instead to the drum of a zoetrope. Visually different from Carroll’s and Tenniel’s idea, he rewrites the scene correlating it to “an optical device generated from and spoken to an experience of popular culture,” at the same time that he connects it to the new “exploits in technology” (Manghani, Piper, & Simons, 2006, p. 6).

In addition, Ernst included Carroll’s name in his list of “Favourite Poets and Painters of the Past”, in a 1942 edition of the *View* magazine (Devigne, Drost, & Moureau-Martini, 2008, p. 181). Dorothea Tanning,<sup>61</sup> who also enjoyed Carroll’s *Alice* and Tenniel’s illustrations, claimed that Carroll (among a few others) had a particular importance in the last year of Ernst’s life, and the same was true of Leonora Carrington,<sup>62</sup> who had read Carroll’s stories in her childhood (p. 6, 7). McAra suggests that it is possible that Carrington, Ernst, Tanning, as well as other surrealists, might have used nostalgia “as a deliberately regressive strategy to interrogate their class origins” (McAra, 2011, p. 7). Because both Tanning and Ernst came from a very strict religious, bourgeois background, they have identified with Carroll’s character Alice and her inquisitive attitude, which concealed social criticism. As already debated, Alice carries the innocence of a bourgeois nursery and escapes to an imaginative and fantastical realm – to being able to question the values concerning her social class/society.

It is undeniable that Tenniel’s illustrations, whose specific target audience were children, reinforced Alice’s innocence. Nevertheless, both Tanning and Ernst extracted and appropriated Alice’s subversive behaviour to their works, applying it to the representations of their girls, who cease to be innocent or asexual and become somewhat sexual and in full control of their actions.

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012) was an American surrealist painter and writer, and was married with Ernst. She is best known for her dreamlike imagery, though it “was considered more Gothic in nature than surreal” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

<sup>62</sup> Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) was an English/Mexican surrealist artist and writer who had a particular interest in representing elements related with sorcery, metamorphosis, alchemy and the occult in her artistic expression. This artistic vein comes from her Irish roots, namely her mother, who along with her nanny introduced her to Celtic mythology and Irish folklore (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).



Figure 11: Dorothea Tanning's 1943 *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 (40.7 x 61 cm) Tate Collection, London, T07346.1997. © Tate, London 2016 © ADAGP, DACS. London 2016.<sup>63</sup>

Tanning's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* presents another appropriation of Alice as it evokes the scene in which Alice is at the garden of talking flowers in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Contrasting with Carroll's depiction, Tanning opted for a disproportioned and more threatening vision, and the curiosity exhibited by her little girl "has brought erotic nocturnal knowledge (the flower implies defloration, or even menstruation, according to the archaic meaning of flowers)" (McAra, 2011, p. 9). A more adult vision of *Alice* with a darker meaning, or a highly sexualised girl, recur in Surrealism – the surrealist girl is no longer polite as in the nineteenth century, and she is rather a wise and secure girl, a determined child that handles and overcomes the obstacles that come in her way. Tanning's *Endgame* (1944) alludes to a chess game with proper chessboard squares as background – similarly, both Carroll's descriptions and Tenniel's illustrations present a description of the *Through the Looking-Glass* world with fields that assume the form of a chessboard. The painting also presents a big shoe belonging to a girl which "rebelliously tramples a bishop in a manner reminiscent of Tenniel's illustrations," (p. 9) revealing once again the surrealist intention of women's empowerment. Tanning described the painting, saying: "It's more than a game. It's a way of thinking. You have to be clever in a warlike way. You are a good chess player if you have a mean streak in you. I think mean people make good chess players" (*The Dorothea Tanning Foundation*).<sup>64</sup> Her description conferred and confirmed the aggressiveness to achieve an empowerment which had been denied to women for so long.

<sup>63</sup> Image reproduced courtesy of the Dorothea Tanning Collection and Archive, New York. Purchased with assistance from the Art Fund and the American Fund for the Tate Gallery in 1997.

<sup>64</sup> (2013). "Endgame." *The Dorothea Tanning Foundation*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dorotheatanning.org/life-and-work/view/229/>, accessed: 16-11-16.



Figure 12: Dorothea Tanning's 1944 *Endgame*, oil on canvas, 17 x 27. Copyright © 2013 The Dorothea Tanning Foundation. All rights reserved.

Broadly speaking, Tanning's disruptive representations of Tenniel's renderings of the child-woman in the 1930s and 40s contrast with the representations of the 1950s and 60s. The transgressive representations in *Endgame*, *Birthday* or *Jeux d'enfants* has completely replaced the well-behaved and poised bourgeois child, and the body in a state of 'becoming' assumed the control of the narrative (p. 15). Not surprisingly, Tanning herself has also explored the child-woman as a narrative device in her allegorical, surrealist novel, *Abyss* (1949/77), later republished as *Chasm: A Weekend*, in 1998 (p. 19). The story "transports Wonderland and Looking Glass House to a desert fortress called Windcote which, like Carroll's fictional worlds, is slightly out of time and functions according to subtly altered social codes" (p. 19). Destina Meridan, Tanning's representation of the Alice-figure, exhibits a curiosity that leads her to the attic nursery, where she shows Albert (the protagonist) her memory box, sharing a secret of her imaginary friend, a lion – Destina's curiosity is ultimately perceived as her intention to charm Albert (p. 19). This proves once again that surrealists have excluded Alice's innocence, or at least represented their resembling characters with a certain malice which does not exist in Carroll.

Salvador Dalí<sup>65</sup> is another famed surrealist who has appropriated Alice. In fact, he authored thirteen illustrations for a new edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, in 1969. Even before, Dalí had already approached the theme of little girls. He was inspired by Giorgio de Chirico's<sup>66</sup> "image of a girl playing with

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<sup>65</sup> Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) was a Spanish surrealist painter, filmmaker and writer, whose works defied the conventional rules and the normal sense of the real (*Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation*).

<sup>66</sup> Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) was an Italian painter and graphic artist. He was the brother of Alberto Savinio – a composer, painter and writer. When he moved to Paris in 1925, he became friends of the surrealist painters Max Ernst, René Magritte, Yves Tanguy and Salvador Dalí (*Art Directory*).

hoops and passing through portals” (Leppanen-Guerra, 2011, p. 161). Based on this girl, Dali replaced the hoop for “a girl swinging a jump rope over her head” in his 1936 painting *Suburbs of a Paranoiac-Critical Town: Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History* (p. 161). Dali would later confirm this appropriation when he identified de Chirico’s girl as Alice in the illustrations he created for that new edition of 1969. He represented Alice in the same way he had represented de Chirico’s girl – “a girl in a long dress with a jump rope suspended above her head and a slender shadow stretched out before her” (p. 161).



Figure 13: Salvador Dali's *Suburbs of a Paranoiac-Critical Town: Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History*, 1935, Oil on panel. 46 x 66 cm (18.11" x 25.98"). Salvador Dali *Catalogue Raisonné* of Paintings [1910-1964] – Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation.



Figure 14: Salvador Dali's Alice Frontispiece – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1969, medium: etching. 11.5" x 17". Reference #: ML No. 321. William Bennet Modern.



Figure 15: Salvador Dalí's Down the Rabbit Hall – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1969, medium: etching. 11.5" x 17". Reference #: ML No. 322. William Bennet Modern.

Contrarily to Ernst's representations of Alice, which conform more to a girl-child, Salvador Dalí depicted Alice more as an adolescent girl holding a jumping rope above her head, always with the projection of her shadow before her – a “representation of the self in the act of becoming, and a sense of time as a continuous and unsegmented past, present, and future” (p. 161). Hence, and though an older Alice than Carroll's, it is a representation conforming to Carroll's description of Alice as “a selfhood undergoing a series of metamorphoses:” physical and psychological (p. 161), and the shadow of Alice projected into the distance, with her arms opened holding the jumping rope forming an arc, symbolises the many possibilities ahead of her.

In this sense, the surrealists appropriated and extended Carroll's narrative to combat the repressive values of society, namely those concerning women's position in society itself; even if it seems that, in order to achieve their purpose, they have neglected Carroll's child facet. Surrealists seem to value more an imaginative side that portrays their fight for women's recognition, rather than nurturing Carroll's emphasis on children's needs. Alice is a young girl who is going through body changes due to her transition to adulthood and, consequently, going through a crisis of identity which makes her embark into a series of adventures seeking for knowledge (of the self). In a way, surrealists explored the search for identity to represent and set free their creative outpourings from rational bonds; their interest in the dream, also present in *Alice*, allowed them to explore the “unthinking imagination and the unlocking of the unconscious mind” (Hiltz, 2011, p. 1).

The unconscious was also very important to James Joyce, who sought for some inspiration in Carroll. With *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Joyce attempted “to employ language as a new medium, breaking down all grammatical usages, all time space values, all ordinary conceptions of context” (*The Guardian*).

Even his first work *Ulysses*<sup>67</sup> presented the interest in language, particularly in new words which served his needs according to his narrative purposes. Like Carroll, Joyce deconstructs language to question the conception of context and, like Carroll, he gave emphasis to dreams.

Carroll's era is characterised by great discoveries in the field of psychology (which saw further development with Freud in the beginning of the twentieth century) which influenced both Carroll's use of dream in his work as it would have influenced Joyce's work later. Even before Freud or Jung, there were Thomas Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Mind* (1820), which defended that psychology had a central importance in every science (Wee, *Victorian Web*); and, in 1855, Alexander Bain's *The Senses and The Intellect* brought a new approach to psychology; it analysed human behavioural patterns and how human beings functioned, with an emphasis on consciousness (Wee, *Victorian Web*).

Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* – a story about a dream – recreates the mechanisms of the dream to offer a psychoanalytic depiction of the characters, being the dream a mechanism which allowed the author to develop the stream of consciousness technique. In a way, Joyce gave an emphasis to the dream (its distortion) to explore the stream of consciousness based on the unconscious. Carroll, in his own way, was able to explore his characters' unconscious, Alice's in a more evinced way, as a means of inner reflection and self-awareness. The dream came to both authors, and to the surrealists, as the space and freedom to introduce the language of the unconscious (*The James Joyce Centre*). Just like Carroll's *Alice*, Joyce's work contains the use of puns, songs, jokes and portmanteaus. In fact, many features that Joyce incorporated on *Finnegans Wake* are, as asserted by J. S. Atherton (2008), “merely the logical development, or the working out on a larger scale, of ideas that first occurred to Lewis Carroll” (p. 1). These ideas are connected to the ones that Carroll affirmed on his Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno*, in which he stated that “[p]erhaps the hardest thing in literature (...) is to write anything original” (Carroll, 1996, p. 247), and that if a writer wanted to write a good story, it should not be “utterly commonplace,” should contain new ideas, and should not be “very weary reading” (p.246). Joyce's work is indeed original and he acknowledged his literary debt, having admitted his borrowings from Carroll with as much clarity as his final technique will allow (Atherton, 2008, p. 1).

To tell how your mead of, mard, is made of. All old Dadgerson's dodges one conning one's copying and that's what wonderland's wanderlad'll flaunt to the fair. A trancedone boyscript with tittivits by. Ahem (Mahon, 2007, p. 325).

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<sup>67</sup> James Joyce's *Ulysses* was serialised in parts in the American journal *The Little Review* from March 1918 to December 1920 and published in 1922 by Sylvia Beach. The author started to prepare the book in 1902 and the narrative holds inspiration on the 8th century BC Homer's *Odyssey* (*The James Joyce Centre*).

According to Atherton, this passage taken out of *Finnegans Wake* alludes to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson as 'old Dadgerson', and the 'wanderlad' being Joyce himself, "who was always conscious of himself as an exile and is present as the (...) real Us (...) throughout *Finnegans Wake*" (p. 1). Dodgson's "dodges" are connected to several things, being the verbal novelties in the style of "Jabberwocky" the most obvious. There are references to Carroll's work in Joyce's work. For instance, he uses the words "misch for masch" and "mishmash" alluding to Carroll's juvenile work when he wrote for his magazine *Misch-Masch* (p. 1).

In the same way, another remarkable Modernist, Virginia Woolf, was aware that dreams and phantasies can reveal inner thought/experience. Woolf even wrote "Lewis Carroll" (1939) an essay about the author and his use of dream techniques, considering metamorphosis, contraction and expansion of time and space, "and the lack of transition within 'the world of sleep ... the world of dreams'" (Richter, 1970, p. 54). The author also had a great interest in the stream of consciousness and interior monologue techniques, and she evaluated her own phantasy, of "watching her 'under-mind' working at incredible speed while her 'upper-mind' drowsed," drawing "a sense of certain laws of operation within various levels of the imagining and dreaming mind" (p.55). It is not surprising that Carroll's fantasy called for Woolf's attention to write her work (e.g., *The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection*, *Jacob's Room* and *To The Lighthouse*) based on the idea of dream and fantasy. In fact, she used fantasy and the dream to suggest and imply certain motives that each reader would interpret and extract different meanings from, something which can also be seen in Carroll's work and style (p. 55). Woolf was also inspired by Carroll in the importance of the parenthetical remark, "to place the inner and outer worlds, (...) to record simultaneous thought and feeling, speech and thought, or thought and action of a single person" (p.45). Phantasy allows characters' double level of thinking and it opposes the conscious logical thought (p. 57). This juxtaposition provides a sense of a known experience to the reader, making it look like a remembered dream or a scene from *Alice* (p. 57). Virginia Woolf perceived that "these are not books for children. They are the only books in which we become children" (Allnutt, Mitchell, Pithouse, & Strong-Wilson, 2011, p. 39).

*The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection* (1929) redirects the reader into an at least two levelled focus of a Carrollian attention: 1) the title is clearly an indicative of an inspiration and allusion to *Through the Looking-Glass* and 2) it depicts the wanderings of a woman who looks at the images reflected in the mirror in her room. If Alice looks at the images of the living room reflected on the other side of the mirror to give place to imagination, Woolf's female character observes the images of her room reflected on the mirror, transitioning to a flow of thinking about her life. The mirror is just an excuse to dream, to

then reflect, renegotiate with thought and common sense, to eventually change. And this technique, Woolf explored in more depth in *Jacob's Room* and *To The Lighthouse* (Schotter, 2010, no page).

Another writer mostly known for her gothic fiction and style, Angela Carter, is characterised by an intensely vivid dark imagination, which she imported to her stories and adaptations; namely, fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and also *Alice in Several Perceptions* (1968), depicting Alice's Wonderland dream collapsing "into a climactic all-night house-party" (p. 54). Her gothic imagery with "delights in moonlit forests, graveyards, isolated castles, locked rooms, guttering candles and the howling of wolves in the night" show some of her personal literary traits that can be, in some degree, comparable to Carroll's unique traits of twisted and dark madness, and the grotesque, that pervade all Wonderland and Looking Glass land (*British Library*).

## FINAL REMARKS

It never seems sufficient to research or write about the meaning of Lewis Carroll and his work, and the ideas that inspired the changes that occurred in Children's Literature in his lifetime. Both the author and his *Alice* books mark a watershed period in the literary transition from the culturally old-fashioned perception of the child as a (little) adult to the modern conceptions of the child and childhood. The new concept was signalled by the emergence of the modern society that resulted from the industrialization and sophistication of human knowledge, also associated to the evolution of science and psychology. In Victorian times, the growing interest in childhood and the concern with children were, in practical terms, made visible through several Education acts and measures aimed at removing the child from the working force and introducing them to schools. Accompanying these social changes, children's books gradually moved from a highly moralistic and didactic character to a more entertaining or imaginative one.

Hailed as a pre-eminent work of fantasy, Lewis Carroll's *Alice* presents some innovative strategies, being often claimed as the first real children's book whose main purpose was to entertain children. His conspicuous nonsense fantasy presents two different levels of reading: the childish level and the adult level. The first is a straightforward or imaginative reading intended to entertain the child as such; the latter, a subliminal one with the eventually implied, hidden messages. That is to say that, at one level, the author appeals to the childish imagination, which can be found in Alice when she is confronted with the simplest of situations and makes enquiries about the state of things; on another level, it is in the subliminal reading that *Alice* presents the reader with some possible critical interpretations, very much

connected to Alice's enquiries and the way in which she compares the confusing *status quo* of fantasy worlds with that of Victorian reality.

On the childish level, the author recurred to the important dream element to represent children's imaginative abilities and their ability to momentarily disconnect from reality, enter into the world of pretence, in order to consolidate the conceptual knowledge they acquired in the real world; therefore, recognising the child's different conceptualization of the world. Imaginary friends and make-believe worlds are the type of fantasy that children usually use as a contrast with reality, serving to build their own identity – a means for self-knowledge: both conceptual and emotional – and to accept things as they are. In the same way, the child reader is bound to identify with Alice's fantasy worlds and imagination, as her curiosity is no more than the representation of the child's innate inquisitiveness aimed at understanding the world structure and organization.

The writer's approach to the child is somehow different from that of his contemporary writers. Contrasting the prevailing realistic tendency to represent the harsh life that most Victorian children faced, Carroll represented instead the child's imagination – which is in fact the real essence of the child – by recurring to fantasy. It is through Alice that the Victorian reader realizes that the child deserves a different type of attention and care. While the child in Dickens is legitimately depicted as a victim of Victorian developmental priorities to raise a social awareness in the Victorians, Carroll shows them above all that children are sensitive and frail beings who do not have the same configuration of the world as the adults do. Carroll's innovative representation of a child's world is achieved through the combination of some ancestral concepts such as those of fantasy worlds, talking animals, nursery rhymes and songs which, when associated with other elements as humour and illustrations, create an original whole.

Deliberately or not, Lewis Carroll started the debate on how an author should write for children with Alice's introductory question: "What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" The question underlies the recognition of children as demanding a different, more appealing literary approach: he included illustrations in his narratives, intending to provide the child reader with a visual accompaniment supporting his stories, while stimulating the child's cognitive and emotional capacities. In doing so, he was simultaneously acknowledging the complementary relationship between visual and verbal communication – to provide a stronger meaning to his text, and to increase and create new expectations, experiences and feelings on the reader – admitting children's innate predisposition to simultaneously cross-read and interpret the signs they were given.

Nonsense as an 'upside-down' style that allows meaning in its absence, i.e., the implied messages, and the somehow mad but sharp narrative style by which Carroll is best known, plays a major

role in Carroll's subliminal approach. It is at this level that humour, absurdity and satire allow multiple ambiguous interpretations to the adult reader. It is up to her or him to think about the parodied theme and then withdraw her/his own interpretation. Under the pretext of a fantastic world supported by humour, Carroll subverts gender roles, social and class expectations, positions of power, all without risking his book being censored, or affecting his position at Oxford University. We cannot assert that the author was openly or deliberately criticising Victorian society, but it is very clear that some personal and social anxieties must have influenced his satire of Victorian moral and patriarchal values.

In the various excerpts taken from *Alice's* stories that were analysed in this dissertation, it was possible to verify that Carroll's unique fantasy *both* opposes *and* symbolises repression. Fantasy hails from the author's attempt to represent freedom in a world seemingly without rules, proving as well that even without them there *is* repression because societies and languages – no matter how different – are intrinsically arbitrary systems invented by man to regulate his existence. Besides, one can detect that Carroll's realization is that it is somehow part of human nature to exercise power over the other, the result of competition – social and economic, or personal.

In the course of the narratives, female characters reveal themselves to be overly manipulative and psychologically affected minds, whose signs of imbalance manifest themselves predominantly in the form of violence when resolving domestic (e.g., the Duchess) and public conflicts (e.g., the Queen). The similarity between the Queen of Hearts and the real Queen Victoria is, in this respect, outstanding. The Queen of Hearts is socially more powerful, respected/feared than her husband, something that Queen Victoria herself experienced to a certain extent. At the same time that she stood for the patriarchal values ruling her society, she lived in a constant struggle between the public and domestic spheres. Lewis Carroll thus created the King and Queen of Hearts to parody the country's most powerful entity and to critique the Victorian patriarchal society that defended men as the only beings who could assume public and power positions.

We could see that the feminine representations in *Alice* are almost all repressive, abusive and authoritative. And even Alice assumes the role of a dominant girl in the stories. She is sweet and naïve, but also assertive, inquisitive and determined, features mainly contrary to social expectations. She enters unapologetically into worlds that are not her own, representing to a certain extent the figure of the Victorian coloniser, and trying to impose her rules and beliefs on the inhabitants of those worlds. Alice does not give up on her pre-set convictions and insists on questioning and investigating why things are as 'they are' in those strange worlds. Yet, Alice's attitude and personality, as well as the other female

representations, contradicted the social precepts of women's behaviour, and the author's choice may signify a claim for women's rights.

At the end of this research, we can conclude that Lewis Carroll demonstrated an exalted mastery of language, having recognised that it is through language that power, prejudice, and repression are perpetrated, which he himself combated using the language of humour. By recurring to nonsensical humour, the author deconstructed patriarchal beliefs of gender and social class, and overall repression, making readers think and re-think about their society's state of affairs. And there is no better way to gradually change mentalities than to use humour as a milder and most effective way of raising awareness about other life possibilities and perspectives, with the positive effect of human evolution. By being confronted with her/his social fears, the reader thus experiences the fantastic worlds by decoding the messages s/he comes across throughout the narratives, so that s/he is finally able to re-evaluate certain values and perform a change in the hegemonic repression that pervades society.

Undoubtedly, there is still a lot in Carroll's literary production, not just nonsensical language and creatively absurd situations, to be explored, both in his versatile verse collections and in his other lesser-known narrative works, which could and should be done in eventual future research. Lewis Carroll's linguistic creativity and unique narrative style were so revolutionary that the coming writers (both for children and adults), and other artists of the twentieth century, have inspired themselves on his literary legacy to produce their own works, be it with a socially critical intention, or as brand new literary approaches. And children's literature radically changed its course; since then, children's stories began to include more challenging dialogues, interactive illustrations and mixed fantasy elements, carried through entertaining approaches that make the delights of the youngest up till today.

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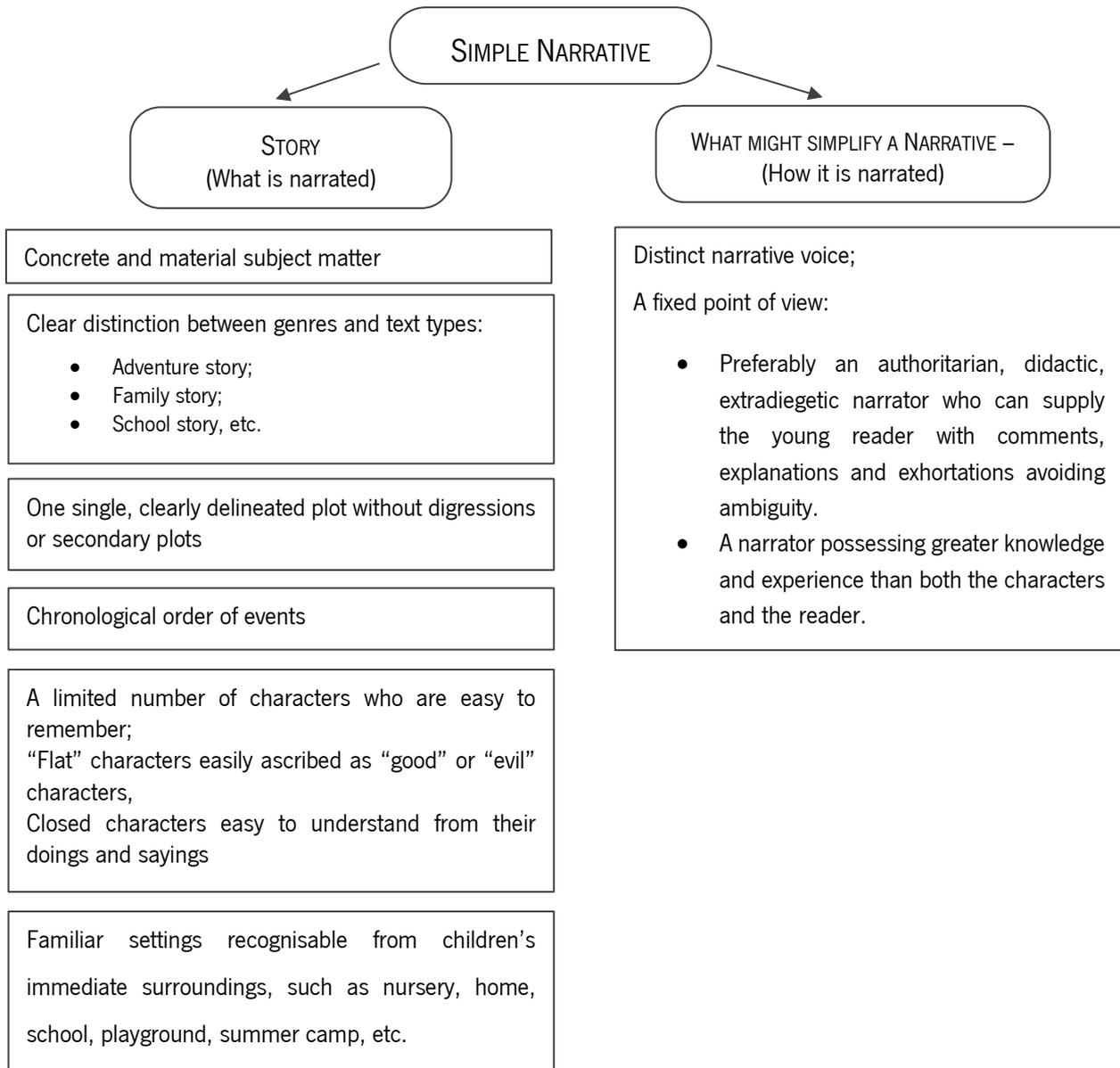
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## ANNEXES



\* Complex temporal and spatial constructions are excluded

Table 1: Set of features which might help to classify a narrative as simple (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. xvi).

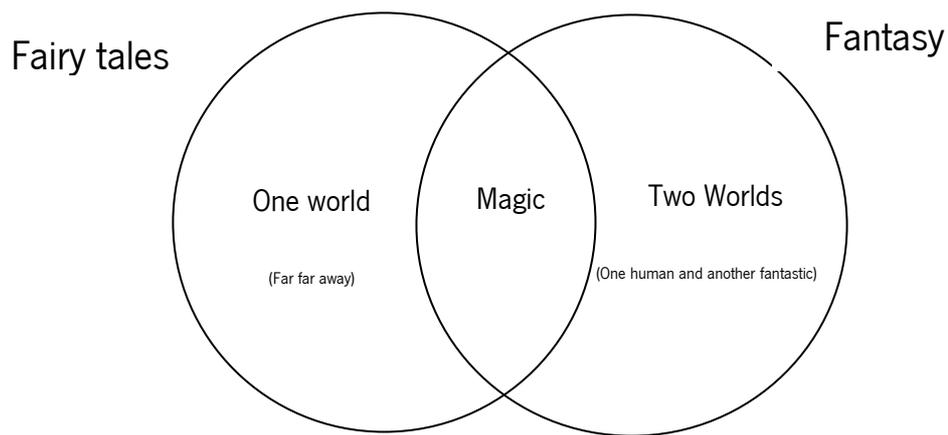


Table 2: Features of fairy tales' worlds and the worlds in fantasy – its similarities, differences and fusion (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 60).



Figure 16 – Alice Liddell as “The Beggar Maid.” (1858). *The Met – metmuseum.org*.  
Image: 16.3 x 10.9cm.