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Lewis Carroll: Alice's Highway to Puberty



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Abstract

Although singular approaches to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) have been taken, there might still be some aspects to be analysed in this novel. The aim of this dissertation is to give a deeper analysis on the evolution suffered by the main character, Alice, during her journey in Wonderland. To fulfil this task, this paper will analyse different aspects of the book. First of all, the author's life will be introduced so that a closer approach on the image of Lewis Carroll can be provided. In this point the work of Lewis Carroll will be also presented as an ending to this section. Then, the paper will focus mainly on the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and will try to explore a variety of opinions towards its characterization as literature for children and its place within the genre of fantasy where the specific characteristics of each genre will be introduced. After having gone through all these, the novel will be analysed on the basis of providing a physical and psychological portrayal of Alice since the book shows her not only as a child, but also as an adolescent. Within this section Alice's changes from one psychological stage to another will be exposed, together with her irregular physical growth and shrinkage, in order to show how they affect her evolution through the story. Later, the identity conflicts suffered by Alice in her quest will be explored so that a final depiction of the protagonist can be reached. Lastly, a conclusion will be presented by enclosing all the information given above and labelling this novel as a really complex one.

Key words: Children's literature, fantasy, Alice, child and adolescent.

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1. Introduction

The philosopher Martin Gardner once wrote something memorable on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865): "The last level of metaphor in the Alice books is this: that life viewed rationally and without illusion, appears to be a nonsense tale told by an idiot mathematician" (2000:8). This ironic statement on Carroll's work makes a peculiar description of the novel that we are going to analyse in this paper.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was first published in London, 1865. And in spite of the popularity that it has nowadays, it had a really negative reception amongst the Victorian society. People labelled Carroll's story as being nonsensical, but this fact did not prevent him from writing its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*, in 1871. These books became a total challenge for the literary world and many have been the authors such as Björn Sundmark (1999)¹ or George J. Lough (1983)² who have tried to give an interpretation on the novel. Moreover, this has resulted in a number of great research by different authors on all those issues that Carroll dealt with in his stories. Indeed, Alice's adventures have so many fields to be analysed such as language, logic and criticism among others that it is impossible to cope with them all at once. Therefore, given the amount of themes that could be studied, in this paper we will centre our attention on one of these fields, that is, providing a deep analysis of the characterization of Alice through the story. Indeed, the transition from childhood into adolescence could be seen as one of the most important themes in this novel. Thus, we will try to make an interpretation of it through the main character, Alice.

As it has been mentioned in the abstract, the purpose of this paper is to help the reader understand the changes undergone by the heroine of the book. The study will focus on the characteristics of children's literature and the classification of the novel into this genre, followed by a deep study on the heroine of the story. In order to do so, the journey through Wonderland will be analysed, together with the identity conflicts suffered by Alice during this quest. Finally, a conclusion on these aspects will be explained and further research will be suggested.

¹ Sundmark, Björn. *Alice in the Oral-Literary Continuum*. Sweden: Lund University Press, 1999. Print.

² Lough, George J. "Alice in Wonderland and cognitive development: teaching with examples." *Journal of Adolescence* 6 (1983): 305-315. Print.

2. Author

Not only has Lewis Carroll been a subject of interest among poets and novelists in literature, but also in the fields of philosophy and logic. Lewis Carroll has awakened the interest of many readers during centuries by novels such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* which is considered his masterpiece. However, who was the man behind this pseudonym?

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1896) was the real name of the so called Lewis Carroll. He created this pseudonym in order to preserve his real identity from the public since he was a really shy man and did not want to be recognized by anyone. Besides, his writings sometimes were frivolous and daring since they challenged many issues in the Victorian society, therefore, this could have also been an incentive to create the magnificent author known as Lewis Carroll. His pseudonym is a great example of the meticulousness of this author who does not seem to leave anything undone in his writings. Indeed, this pseudonym is the result of playing with the words forming his real name. Carroll translated his two proper names, Charles and Lutwidge, into Latin and reversed them so that he got "Ludovicus Carolus" this led the way to the birth of Lewis Carroll.

Carroll was born in Daresbury, Cheshire³ the 27th of January, 1832. He was the son of France Jane Lutwidge and Charles Dodgson. According to his biographer Morton H. Cohen he was raised within a family circle where the main ideal was "to make life meaningful to others and to society in general" (11). Therefore, it is not surprising the fact that he was a religious man. Carroll went to Richmond School in 1844 and to Rugby School from 1846 until 1849. After this, in 1850, he joined the Christ Church College in Oxford University where he spent most of his life. In 1854, he obtained the title of *Bachelor of Arts* in mathematics and in Classical languages, and three years later he was given the title of *Master of Arts*. In 1861, he was ordained deacon, but he never became priest. In July of the following year Carroll went for a walk near the river Isis with the daughters of the dean Henry George Liddell. This was the first time that Carroll told the story of Alice to the young Alice Liddell and her sisters. The little girl loved this story and asked Carroll a written manuscript of it, which she received for

³ *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* contains many references of the author's life. Therefore, it could not be surprising to find a relation between the name of his hometown and a character in the novel. This may be the case of the "Cheshire" Cat.

Christmas with the name of *Alice's Adventures Underground*. After this, in 1865 the first version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published. Shortly after the publication of the novel, in 1868, the father of Carroll died. This event is described by the author as being one of the worst moments of his entire life. And as a result of this tragic death, his family moved to Guilford, Surrey, near London. Carroll continued writing despite of this fact, and in 1871 he published the second novel of Alice's adventures, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. In 1886 he published *Alice's Adventures Underground*, the manuscript that he had given to Alice Liddell as a present. Finally, Carroll met Alice in 1891 for the last time and the 17th of January of 1896 died in Guilford.

Regarding his work, Carroll was a really prolific author quite hard to classify into just one genre. His work has been divided into four different groups by Gea (*The Grove*, 1998 vol. 5:169). The first one encloses all the academic and mathematical research, the second may include his work on logic, and the third one could gather all his literary works where we find novels such as *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and Alice's adventures. The last group of his work is a compilation of the letters he wrote through his lifetime. Overall, he wrote more than 100.000 letters in the last 37 years before he died. This work is regarded as being a profound trip through his life and feelings that may help to know the author deeply. Actually, Carroll tried to remain in the shadows most of his life and little is known about him. These letters are the closest approach to the psychological profile of the author. Gea in his article "Aproximación a Lewis Carroll" compares Carroll to the God Jano since both were "paradigmáticamente bifrontes" (*The Grove*, 1998 vol. 5:168), which is a Spanish concept meaning that something is two-faced. In other words, Gea states that Carroll had something similar to a doubled personality. On the one hand, he was regarded as a celibate deacon, mathematician, gentle and boring in classes and meetings. Nonetheless, on the other hand, we could see a greater portrayal of him as being a poet, enthusiastic about theatre, a good photographer, a shy man and a dreamer. Moreover, all these characteristics can be experienced through his handwriting in his letters. However, even if his letters have been relevant among the works of Carroll, his most popular work was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This novel was adapted as a theatre play and as a book for children with the title of *The Nursery "Alice"* (1889).

In addition, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been classified as literature for adults by the north-American philosopher and writer Martin Gardner in his book *Order and Surprise* (1987:82). He observes that Alice's novels nowadays tend to be categorized by librarians as being "children's classics" as it has happened with *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). However, he continues defending that from the point of view of a modern child, Alice's books lack on storyline, are insubstantial and more frightening than a movie of monsters (1987:82). In fact, Gardner completes his arguments in favour of labelling Alice's stories as being books for adults by his comments in the book *The Annotated Alice* (2000).

Nevertheless, there are many characteristics of this novel that may classify it into literature for children. Therefore, the following section will focus on a further analysis of this issue.

3. Context: Children's literature

Some critical approaches to children's literature such as Mariana Ferrarelli's "Children's Literature and Gender: a Critical Approach" (2007), have labelled this literature as a turning point for young readers. Moreover, as C. S. Lewis claims in "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" (1952) that literature for children gathers all those books that, at a moment in life, have great importance and still are remembered and enjoyed by many: "a waltz which you can like only when you are waltzing is a bad waltz" (66). However, there are worrying misunderstandings on what this literature really conveys. People tend to draw a wide line between the terms adult and children, placing literature for children in a secondary position. For many people this literature is addressed just for amateur readers who need a base in order to improve their reading skills. Actually, literature for children is seen as a previous step before they are able to understand and criticize what is known as "adult literature". The main aim of this section is to clarify these misconceptions and to erase that imaginary line.

As Mariana Ferrarelli explained, literature for children is quite relevant "for the construction of an image of the world" (63). This literature has great influence in the development of young readers who learn from the stimuli surrounding them. Literature

could be one of those stimuli and, thus, should be given the importance it deserves. Reader's background knowledge lies in what they have learned from their childhood until their adulthood. There is not a fixed pattern or a time when we stop learning from what we are instructed, what we see or what we read. It has been defended that the main difference between an adult reader and a younger one is the capacity of criticism they may have. This capacity tends to be more developed in adult readers and this is the main reason for Ferrarelli to defend the idea that children's literature should not be biased in the sense that it should not interfere in the young readers' view of the world. In other words, literature for children should try to be neutral. At this point it is unavoidable to think of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, since it is considered to be literature for children but challenges this idea of being neutral. Indeed, this novel has been esteemed as a satire to the Victorian society due to its implicit criticism.

Regarding the characteristics of what literature for children should involve, it should be stated that naturally there are some textual and stylistic differences between adult and children literature. On the one hand, children's literature is characterized by its transparency. As the stories are addressed for children, it is believed that the text should contain a clear structure and simple vocabulary so that the reading results easier to understand. Complex structures tend to be avoided, in order to provide a more accessible message in the story. Indeed, there is usually a didactic purpose behind these stories, as well as a restriction on taboo topics such as death or abuse.

Of course, there are always some exceptions to the rules. This could be the case of *Gulliver's Travels* and Carroll's stories. In fact, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* supposes a great challenge to these rules since all these previous stereotypes are ignored by the insertion of complex funny riddles and poems. In addition to these, despite Carroll was a religious man, he did not want to portray his beliefs in his books nor any other didactic message: "I can guarantee that the books have no religious teaching whatever in them – in fact, they do not teach anything at all" (Cohen 137). As these lines show, Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was somehow purposeless. It was not his intention to teach anything in particular and, actually, he reached his aim. Instead of teaching a lesson, Carroll gives a view towards the search for identity of a little girl and forms a sort of satire based on the Victorian Petrarchan society. Many are the authors that find great criticism behind these stories of Alice, and consider the fact that the events in those stories could have an influence in the reader.

Nevertheless, none of them agree on the idea that Alice's adventures provide any instructive lesson.

What is more, concerning the taboo topics that should be avoided when writing for children, we should remember the frenetic desire of the Queen of Hearts towards beheading people in the first novel of Alice. Death and abuse is implicit through the whole story of Alice which also puts into question the validity of the book as being literature for children. In contrast, C. S. Lewis defends Carroll's stories as belonging to children's literature and claims that these taboo topics which may frighten the reader should not be avoided unless they are able to aggravate their phobias. Indeed, he states that children should not be kept apart from the real world. Literature for children should not be a way of escapisms; on the contrary, it should give the necessary knowledge to the reader in order to be prepared for the outside world: "Let there be wicked kings and beheadings (...) Nothing will persuade me that this causes an ordinary child any kind or degree of fear beyond what it wants, and needs, to feel" (75).

Additionally, it is also important to take into account the development of the endings in children's literature. It used to be the rule to have a "happy ending" in the stories, however, in modern literature, probably due to the influence of adult literature, the endings of the stories have become more and more complex, till they have provided an alternative open ending to the stories. In many children's stories we find that the end of the story is not really an end, and these days we encounter a wider variety of endings. Moreover, this also narrows the space between both literatures.

In spite of challenging many of the characteristics, as it has been mentioned before, Lewis Carroll is still considered as a writer of literature for children by many other authors. C. S. Lewis in "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" defines Carroll's technique as the second appropriate way in order to write appropriate children's literature (64). C. S. Lewis totally rejects the idea of writing just for what children want to read and leaving behind the author's likes. However, in the case of Carroll, Kenneth Grahame and Tolkien, the main story of the novels grows from the first draft told to a particular child. In these cases the author tried to give the child what it wanted, however, C. S. Lewis states that it is the will of a concrete child that differs from other children. He recalls that in these cases both participants of the storytelling have an influence in what it is told. Therefore, we could conclude that the resulting

story is a mixture of two views since both, the adult and the child, have taken part in its creation. Indeed, C. S. Lewis states that “a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story” (66). In addition, other authors such as Hunt present also that literature for children has not the aim of being educational and should provide “spontaneous pleasure”⁴. Therefore, as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* respects these aspects it could also be considered children’s literature. In fact, other indispensable aspect of the literature for children is to have a child as the protagonist of the story, and this is something that Carroll respects totally, since the whole story in Wonderland happens around a seven-year old child: Alice.

Overall, these views could make us reconsider the idea of placing a line between adult and children’s literature. Even if there are notable differences between some novels from each genre, we can also come across with many others that share similarities. One example of this may be those “hybrid” novels that are so hard to classify inside just one category. This is the case of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and, as it has been previously mentioned, Alice’s adventures. Therefore, is there an essential division between adult literature and literature for children? C. S. Lewis provides a good answer to this question. He criticises the fact that literature for children is regarded as being childish and that being an adult involves growing up and becoming more mature by leaving all those childish stories behind. However, this is just a misconception. He states that adulthood does not imply losing old things but gaining new ones. Therefore, children’s literature should not be essentially separated from adult literature; indeed, adult literature should be regarded as a supplement to our previous knowledge: “A train doesn’t grow by leaving one station behind and puffing on to the next” (C. S. Lewis 68).

3.1. Children’s fantasy literature.

As it happens in adult literature, we can also find different genres in children’s literature. Furthermore, fantasy is seen in many books that are intended to be for children such as *Pinocchio* (1883). Indeed, as Tolkien mentions in “On Fairy-Stories” (1947), the presence of magic and other supernatural elements in this sort of stories have led to a global association between fantasy and children’s literature. Nevertheless,

⁴ F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children’s Books in England*, p.1. Cambridge University Press, 1982.

in his opinion “fairy-stories should not be specially associated with children. They are associated with them: naturally, because children are human and fairy-stories are a natural human taste –though not necessarily a universal one–” (135-6). Moreover, Tolkien continues arguing that this relation is just accidental. Even if in children’s literature there are many stories containing unreal elements, fantasy is a different genre. Indeed, there are stories for children that lack on those fantastic characteristic and other fantasy novels that are not necessarily literature for children.

C. N. Manlove claimed in his work *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* (1983) that modern fantasy “owes its existence in large part to the traditional fairy tale” (1). Indeed, he continued arguing that the most relevant fantasy writers in the 19th century tend to look back to traditional fairy tales. In the 20th century writers not only focused on the traditional tales, but also on writers such as George McDonald or Edith Nesbit (4). Nowadays, modern literature is far from being considered a homogenous field since it encloses many different subgenres. As Montero claims in his thesis (2007), modern fantasy literature could be classified into five main groups:

The first type is Animal Fantasy where the main characters are animals that share human-like characteristics such as the expression of feelings and the capacity to talk. The characters in these stories play a symbolic role since they usually portray real human beings. Within this group we can find stories such as Potter’s *Peter Rabbit* (1902). The second subgenre is Toy Fantasy, where we can find toys with the ability to talk. The difference between this subgenre and the one of Animal Fantasy is that here most of the toys desire to become human beings. In this subgenre we can find novels such as *Pinocchio* among others. The next group is called Eccentric Characters and Tall Tales. Here the author introduces eccentric characters that reached great popularity among children. These stories tend to be set in the real world where some of the characters have supernatural powers such as in *Pippi Longstocking* (1945). The fourth group is named as The Heroic Quest or High Fantasy. The plot of this kind of fantasy is usually full of adventures and there tends to be a journey between the primary and secondary world. The fundamental point in this subgenre is the quest of the hero or heroine who is inside a battle against evil, where the good always triumphs. In this kind of fantasy we can find *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-4) saga by C. S. Lewis. Finally, the last subgenre is called Enchanted Journeys and Magical Lands. In this subgenre the events happen through the path taken by the main characters. Usually we encounter a

travel from the primary world to a secondary one that is full of adventures and enchanted lands. In this category are classified works such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), *Peter Pan* (1904) and, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The motif of the journey has its roots in ancient works as *The Odyssey* by Homer. The adventure starts in the real world, but the action starts when the main character enters the magic secondary world. Indeed, the link between the two worlds is the main character that shows us this secondary world from the perspective of the real one and usually tends to question everything that happens there from the perspective of the primary world. The coming back to the primary world can be different in each story and it can be divided into various types. For instance, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a particular case in which this coming back rejects the fantasy world because of a misunderstanding of sentiments and its power of subversion is ignored. Due to this fact, there are controversial views towards the consideration of this book within fantasy literature.

On the one hand, some authors such as Martin Gardner (1987) label Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequels as England's greatest fantastic stories. Indeed, Gardner in *The Annotated Alice* also comments on the fact that Carroll himself labelled Alice's adventures as a fairy tale in his diary while he reported the trip with the Liddell sisters: "On which occasion I told them the fairy-tale of *Alice's Adventures Underground...*" (113). Moreover, on the basis of this fact, Gea regards Alice's adventures as being a classic (181). On the other hand, other authors claim that even if there is a secondary world full of fantastic elements in Alice's stories, such as a Cheshire cat that is able to disappear, this world vanishes as soon as the main character awakes from her dream. Therefore, the idea of a world that is product of the main character's imagination has produced sceptical views towards placing this novel within the fantasy genre.

Among these views lays the one proposed by Tolkien in his "On Fairy-Stories", where he argues that Alice's adventures do not belong to fantasy literature. As he claims, the story does have fantastic elements but they are all product of the "machinery of Dreams" (116). When we come back to the first world, the real world, the secondary world disappears and it is totally destroyed, the character rejects this fantasy world. Therefore, this fact goes against the claims of Tolkien who affirms that in fantasy genre "the faeries are not themselves illusions; behind the fantasy real wills and powers exits, independent of the minds and purposes of men" (116). He continues his argumentation

by stating that genuine fairy-stories should be taken as being true, thus, as Carroll destroys this secondary world by making it product of the imagination, he labels it as being a fake world, something invented.

As we have seen until this point, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* results a really complex novel to classify into a particular genre. Besides, Carroll's deconstruction⁵ of the traditional rules forming storytelling has influenced the developing of literature. Through these sections it has been shown that Carroll reverses all the fixed norms of style, language and topics concerning Children's fantasy literature. In fact, it could be claimed that by deconstructing the real world Carroll gives a different perspective of it to the reader. Moreover, the main character, Alice, is the one in charge of showing this reversed perspective. We, as readers, are introduced to the insight of a child's view towards what surrounds her. This reversal of ideas also affects the readers, not in an instructive way, but in changing views towards their everyday-experiences. Carroll shows how the seven year old girl tries to make sense of the world. Through Alice quest the reader is witness of many events such as her identity conflicts, developmental stages etc. Indeed, these events are the ones on which the next section of our analysis will focus.

4. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)

Lewis Carroll's work is known by almost everybody in nowadays society; his novels on Alice's adventures have been adapted to cinema and television and, of course, even if not at the very beginning, later on they have had a really great reception from the audience. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* deals with the story of a seven-year-old girl from the upper class. The story of this little girl begins when she falls asleep and enters in a land of talking animals, mad hatters and violent Queens of Hearts; in other words, when she enters in Wonderland.

As it has been mentioned before, this novel was first told by Carroll during an excursion through the Thames with the daughters of the reverend Duckworth. Among the three daughters there was his muse Alice Liddell who then asked Carroll to make

⁵ "Deconstruction finds disorder and a constant tendency of the language to refute its apparent sense. (...) Texts are found to deconstruct themselves rather than to provide a stable identifiable meaning." *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (2004: 377).

her a written copy of this story. Some years later, in 1865, the adventures of Alice were published and at the beginning of the story we could read the poem “All in the Golden Afternoon” which is like a preface of the book.

At the beginning of the poem Carroll recalls that “golden afternoon” on the 4th of July, 1962, as a great day with the company of the three little sisters: Lorina Charlotte, Alice Pleasance and Edith.

All in the golden afternoon
Full leisurely we glide;
For both our oars, with little skill,
By little arms are plied,
While little hands make vain pretence
Our wanderings to guide. (Carroll 6)

Finally Carroll plasms the joy of Alice Liddell when she heard the story, and he compares Alice’s adventures to those childhood dreams present in both Alice and his muse.

Alice! A childish story take,
And, with a gentle hand,
Lay it where Childhood's dreams are twined
In Memory's mystic band,
Like pilgrim's wither'd wreath of flowers
Pluck'd in a far-off land. (Carroll 6)

In addition, it must be considered the interpretation of the reader Howard Lees⁶ about the meaning of this last stanza. He wondered whether Carroll claimed in these lines “that Alice should store these tales in her childhood memory; the memory that, when she becomes an adult, is like a withered bunch of flowers plucked in the far-off land of childhood” (115). Moreover, this last comment on the loss of childhood has become one of the major themes in Alice’s book and the one in which we will focus our attention when doing the novel’s analysis.

⁶ Carroll, Lewis. *The Annotated Alice. Introduction and Notes by Martin Gardner*. New York: New American Library. 2000.

Overall, it can be appreciated that the poem, as well as the story is centred on Carroll's muse, Alice Liddell. Therefore, the analysis of this dissertation will pay attention to how this character is portrayed in the story, as well as the path she takes from childhood to adulthood.

4.1. Alice as the heroine in Wonderland and her journey

Previously it has been considered that one of the most relevant themes in the novel is the loss of innocence, or childhood. This section will analyse deeply this theme by approaching Alice as the female heroine of the story and comparing her trip through Wonderland as the path of every girl into womanhood.

Throughout the events in the novel, Alice undergoes several physical changes. These changes in size could be a symbol of how the character grows and develops during puberty. During these events Alice feels a variety of confronted feelings such as discomfort, sadness and frustration as she is not able to control her body. This could be taken as a portrayal of how girls, in some stages of their lives, feel before reaching womanhood.

"Now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!" (For when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off). (...) Just then her head struck against the roof of the hall: in fact she was now rather more than nine feet high, and she at once took up the little golden key and hurried off to the garden door. Poor Alice! It was as much as she could do, lying down on one side, to look through into the garden with one eye; but to get through was more hopeless than ever: she sat down and began to cry again. (Carroll 13)

Indeed, this inevitable loss of childhood is portrayed as something tragic in the novel since Alice feelings towards these changes are quite negative and became one of the main themes in the story. It should also be considered that Carroll's view towards this transition is full of pity and sadness. This might be due to the fact that in real life Alice Liddell's loss of innocence finished the friendship between him and his muse. When Alice became older they lost contact, and her relationship with him became a mere formal one, instead of a real friendship. For instance, as Gea stated, in 1865 Carroll

annotated in his diary that he had met Alice and she seemed to have changed for worst. Indeed, her change could be related to the fact that the little girl was entering puberty (177).

It is widely known that Alice Liddell became Carroll's muse and also the one who metaphorically gave birth to the heroine in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The feminine heroine in this story is also named Alice, and she is described as a little child from an English wealthy family eager to know as much as possible from what surrounds her.

Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end? "I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?" (...) "but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?" (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.) Presently she began again. "I wonder if I shall fall right *through* the earth! (Carroll 8)

Her curiosity is insatiable like the one of any other child at her age. She always tries to make a clear understanding of the world, but this is completely upside down when she enters in Wonderland. This illogical secondary world challenges her knowledge and she starts feeling how the natural order collapses around her. For instance, this can be seen in the following quote from the chapter "Pig and Pepper" where Alice meets the Duchess.

The only two creatures in the kitchen, that did *not* sneeze, were the cook, and a large cat, which was lying on the hearth and grinning from ear to ear.

"Please would you tell me," said Alice, a little timidly, for she was not quite sure whether it was good manners for her to speak first, "why your cat grins like that?"

"It's a Cheshire-Cat," said the Duchess, "and that's why. Pig!"

She said the last word with such sudden violence that Alice quite jumped; but she saw in another moment that it was addressed to the baby, and not to her, so she took courage, and went on again:

"I didn't know that Cheshire-Cats always grinned; in fact, I didn't know that cats *could* grin."

"They all can," said the Duchess; "and most of 'em do."

"I don't know of any that do." Alice said. (Carroll 54)

In addition, as every hero in a story, Alice also takes a journey full of adventures with a particular motive or aim. In her case, this pilgrimage is a quest for the owner of the huge garden in Wonderland, the Queen of Hearts. Moreover, this journey could be taken as the main representation of the developmental stages that Alice undergoes in the story. Therefore, the pilgrimage becomes a quest for womanhood. In this case, the garden full of beautiful flowers could symbolise the world that Alice is about to enter in – the step from innocence into puberty or adolescence. In fact, the owner of the garden, the Queen of Hearts, is seen as a grown up (an adult) that could not only represent the last stage of the journey, but also the end of puberty. Indeed, Sundmark in his book *Alice in the Oral-Literary Continuum* (1999) depicts the Queen of Hearts as a symbol of “adult womanhood” (54).

Alice’s journey is full of this type of symbolism since everything in Wonderland bears different possible interpretations. However, through this section it will be analysed the developmental stages of Alice and the irregular portrayal of them made by Carroll. As it happens with everything in Wonderland, the moral and physical changes in Alice occur as a juxtaposition of different stages, they appear somehow disordered, in an irrational manner. Therefore, there are some occasions in which Alice is seen as a seven-year-old girl, but others in which she seems to be an adolescent.

Indeed, she had quite a long argument with the Lory, who at last turned sulky, and would only say "I'm older than you, and must know better." And this Alice would not allow, without knowing how old it was, and, as the Lory positively refused to tell its age, there was no more to be said. (Carroll 21)

Alice is supposed to be seven years old and this is quite well portrayed through the novel. First of all, Alice is usually called by her sister and even by the narrator as “little Alice”. This adjective reinforces the idea of being physically small, but also is the way in which somebody refers to a child and not a grown up person. Other characters in the story also treat Alice as if she was a child. For instance, when Alice meets the King and the Queen of Hearts who ask her “What’s your name, child?” (Carroll 69), and then when the queen is about to behead Alice due to her insolent answer, the king tries to calm his wife by stating the following: “Consider, my dear: she is only a child!”

(Carroll 69). In this occasion we can observe how both characters see Alice as a little girl and not as an adult. Moreover, as she is considered an immature child, they do not make her responsible of her actions. If she had been an adult she would have received a punishment but she does not. Therefore, in these situations her behaviour and her interlocutors acknowledge the fact that she is just a seven year-old child.

In addition, the character of Alice could be analysed on the basis of different moral developmental stages seen in a research made by Lawrence Kohlberg (1971). In this study a description of children's moral evolution is made. Moreover, Kohlberg's research focuses on the moral thinking of the subjects, not in their actions. According to his stages, when Alice is considered to be a child, she could be shifting between the third and fourth stages mentioned in this research. Kohlberg refers to the third stage as "The interpersonal concordance" or "good boy-nice girl orientation". This stage might be seen in how Alice tries to keep her temper and remains calm when she sees adults' authority over her. Even if in Wonderland they are all presented as irrational adults, she still tries to maintain her good manners. One example of this could be seen when she talks with the caterpillar and he contradicts her so much that "she felt that she was losing her temper" (Carroll 42). In addition, Kohlberg claims that at this stage "one earns approval by being "nice" (1).

Continuing with the moral stages seen in Alice, the fourth stage is called "The "law and order" orientation". As Kohlberg states, the individual is "oriented towards authority, fixed rules and the maintenance of social order" (1). However, this is challenged in Wonderland since there seems to be no order at all. Alice, as any other child at her age, is used to be governed by strict rules and behavioural patterns. Therefore, we can see her searching for guidance in Wonderland and becoming frustrated when she realizes that there are no rules at all. This is quite well seen through the competitions and also the games in Wonderland such as the Caucus Race and croquet. For instance, the Caucus Race seems to be a competition where a group of animals keeps on running, however, they run in circles and there seems to be no finish line or winner. There are no rules at all in the game and Alice is unable to find the logic in this activity, for her it is just an absurdity.

First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, ("the exact shape doesn't matter," it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here

and there. There was no "One, two, three, and away!" but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking "But who has won?" (...) Alice thought the whole thing very absurd, but they all looked so grave that she did not dare to laugh. (Carroll 23)

Another characteristic that makes Alice be still considered a child is her necessity to show her knowledge. From the very beginning when she is falling through the rabbit hole she starts talking about what she has been taught in school and starts boasting of her knowledge:

"I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think—" (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the school room, and though this was not a *very* good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over) "—yes, that's about the right distance—but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?" (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say). (Carroll 8)

At this point in the analysis we shift to another research on socio-emotional development made by Erickson (1999) where several stages on the psychosocial development of children until they reach adulthood are explored. Therefore, on the basis of Erickson's stages, this previous example of Alice's behaviour could be related with the stage of "Industry versus inferiority". Erickson claims that during his so called "school age" children learn to master "the more formal skills of life" (2). Moreover, it could be stated that these skills described in Erickson's paper are challenged through adult characters in Wonderland, since Alice is tested on what she has learnt in school. For instance, when our little heroine meets the Mock Turtle and they talk about their lessons in school, Alice recites a poem in order to show her knowledge. However, it all turns wrong since the other characters do not understand her: "What *is* the use of repeating all that stuff?" the Mock Turtle interrupted, "if you don't explain it as you go

on? It's by far the most confusing thing *I* ever heard!" (Carroll 89). This sort of comments also offend Alice as she feels unable to fit and demonstrate that she does know the lessons that have been taught to her in school.

Finally, another proof of her childhood stage could be her mental abilities. Alice capacity to understand what she is told sometimes resembles to an adult like mind, but others it shows her naïve character and her child-like capacity. The main aspect of her childish mind is her lack on hypothetical thinking. Normally, an adolescent person has this thinking developed as he/she is able to see things from the perspective of others. In other words, people in their adolescent stage already know to put themselves in others positions and understand how they may feel in a particular situation. This is totally an unknown behaviour for Alice as she proves at the beginning of the novel in the conversation with the Mouse when they are in her pool of tears. In this case, Alice starts talking about her lovely cat, and without thinking it twice she states that her cat is "a capital one for catching mice" (Carroll 18). The mouse, of course, gets very upset with the child and even if Alice begs for pardon we are shown her great lack of hypothetical thinking.

This lack of hypothetical thinking also influences the child's usage of language and logic; in fact, it can be seen how Alice takes words literally and is not aware of their possible double meaning. This is a great puzzle for her, and makes her even more confused as the story goes on. Carroll plays with homophones and polysemy through the whole novel and this drives Alice crazy as she is unable to understand the meaning of anything surrounding her. Examples of her lack of knowledge regarding the abstract concepts could be seen in the misunderstandings of Alice in Carroll's word-plays such as when the Mouse claims: "Mine is a long and sad tale!" (Carroll 25). The Mouse is certainly stating that his tale or story is long and sad. However, Alice understands that he is talking about a long tale, referring to the Mouse's body part. Therefore, this misunderstanding led her to get very confused and astonished since she cannot understand how a tale of a mouse can be sad.

Through the story Alice suffers also a cognitive development, even if she appears to be a naïve child sometimes, it can be also appreciated her changes into adolescence and maturity. In a research made by George J. Lough (1983), he considers Alice's book as an illustration of the cognitive development from late childhood to

adolescence. In addition, he gives some examples of how Alice's logic is challenged by the characters in Wonderland, but also how she grows up and changes her cognitive development and behaviour resembling more to the one of an adolescence.

There are several moments where we can see Alice learning lessons that could be considered to encourage her development. Some of these lessons through the novel are taught indirectly by the Cheshire cat. The first lesson the cat teaches Alice is to become aware of her laziness. When she is lost and decides to ask the cat for help, the cat gives her an ambiguous answer by stating that all depends on where she wants to get to (Carroll 56). G. J. Lough claims that the cat seems not to be very helpful at first sight, but by this kind of trick, it is making Alice aware of the degree of logical precision she needs to develop. Later on, this same conversation moves to the reasoning of the cat, who states that all cats are mad:

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

"I suppose so," said Alice.

"Well, then," the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now *I* growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad." (Carroll 57)

This statement could be easily labelled as invalid by making a substitution of the argument such as "Apples are not blue, and apples have brown seeds. Lemons do not have brown seeds. Therefore, lemons are blue" (Lough 309). Alice is not able to do this since her level of cognitive development is still at the concrete operational level. She cannot demonstrate that the Cheshire cat's argumentation is wrong because she still does not know how to do so. Therefore, this could also be taken as an example of Alice being just a child. G. J. Lough explains that in an indirect way the cat is introducing Alice to a skill that she will develop sooner or later: syllogistic reasoning.

In addition, through the story it can be seen also the development or growth of Alice. Conform the story goes on not only does change the physical appearance of Alice, by those alterations on size, but also her behaviour and maturity. One example of these changes can be seen in the tea party with the Mad Hatter and the March Hare. As soon as Alice maintains a conversation with these characters she ends up in a sort of argument:

"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."

"Nobody asked *your* opinion," said Alice. (Carroll 63)

Lough argues that in this case Alice has fallen again in a verbal trick by the other characters; however, her "impulsive" reaction towards the Hatter could be understood as the kind of impulsivity that is present in early adolescents. Therefore, here Alice is showing a growth from childhood to adolescence. Besides, falling into this trap is quite shameful for Alice and this could "encourage a more thoughtful and cautious approach to life" (Lough 310).

Moreover, this prudent behaviour is later achieved by Alice when she meets the Duchess. During a conversation this character proposes Alice a really puzzling statement and Alice instead of reacting impulsively, admits being doubtful about the statement. By recognizing that she does not understand what the Duchess meant, Alice shows that she has become more mature and learnt how to act cautiously from her previous meeting with the Mad Hatter and the March Hare. In addition, Alice continues showing her steps into adolescence during the following events. Indeed, when she is in the court blaming the King of Hearts of using invented rules we see a more mature and confident Alice. It seems that the character has grown up until she has reached adolescence; at this point in the story she displays a higher level of reasoning and is able to defend greatly her position as we can see in the next excerpt from the novel:

At this moment the King (...) called out "Silence!", and read out from his book, "Rule Forty-two. *All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.*" "Everybody looked at Alice.

"*I'm* not a mile high," said Alice.

"You are," said the King.

"Nearly two miles high," added the Queen.

"Well, I shan't go, at any rate," said Alice: "besides, that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now."

"It's the oldest rule in the book," said the King.

"Then it ought to be Number One," said Alice.

The King turned pale, and shut his note-book hastily. (Carroll 98)

In this part of the novel the King of Hearts is calling her out of the court, but Alice is able to refute his order by demonstrating that he is talking nonsense. In this case Lough claims that "she is mature enough to effectively challenge illogical statements" (311).

Finally, the last event that shows Alice as an adolescent is her confrontation with the Queen of Hearts during the court.

"No, no!" said the Queen. "Sentence first—verdict afterwards."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly. "The idea of having the sentence first!"

"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.

"I won't!" said Alice.

"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

"Who cares for *you*?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (Carroll 101)

Lough comments on the fact that adolescents tend to be "especially sensitive to and frustrated by discrepancies between what is and what could be" (312). This is pretty well seen in the excerpt above since Alice becomes rude and blames the authoritative voice of the Queen for acting inappropriately. Therefore, in this last example it can be appreciated how Alice has developed the rebellious side of Adolescence against authority. Actually, this could be taken as her last step shown in the novel towards womanhood.

All in all, these are steps that Alice follows in order to reach adolescence. However, it can be seen that as she comes back from the dream, everything vanishes and Alice is seen again as a little girl.

4.2. Identity conflicts: "Who in the world am I?"

During her journey Alice faces many conflicts; nevertheless, the most important one is her search for identity. Indeed, the developmental stages that Alice undergoes in

Wonderland make her journey be as a search for her real identity since after so many confusing physical changes she no longer is able to be certain of who she really is.

Alice's metaphorical entrance into puberty is seen from the very beginning in the novel, for instance, when she falls down the rabbit hole and enters Wonderland (Carroll 8). This transition into the secondary world is full of biological changes and experiences that will make her be confused and lost. These strange events and meetings with other characters lead the way to her doubts towards her own identity. Among all the characters that Alice meets in Wonderland, there are three that had a great impact on her identity confusion.

The first one is the White Rabbit, who she meets in the hall at the beginning of the story. After shrinking and swelling, Alice physical appearance has undergone so many changes in a short period of time that she feels lost and does not even recognize her own body. In the following excerpt we can see one of the first identity crisis she suffers through the story:

"Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night. Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!" (Carroll 14)

For Alice being physically different also implies being someone else. As Mark Gabriele states in "Alice in Wonderland: Problem of Identity – Aggressive Content and Form Control" (1982), "she cannot remain Alice anymore if she changes" (378). This is the main reason why she starts thinking of the probabilities to be other person such as Ada or Mabel but with no favourable results at all.

The second character who affects her disturbed identity is the Caterpillar. In this case we could perceive what Erikson describes as the fifth stage of socio-emotional development: "Learning identity versus identity diffusion" (2). Indeed, this character asks her who she is but Alice is not capable of providing a clear answer:

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I

was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar, sternly. "Explain yourself!"

"I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see." (Carroll 39)

As it can be seen, Alice is still in her quest for identity without a clear answer to who she might be. After this the Caterpillar sends her to a magic mushroom with the power to make her grow or shrink after eating it. Moreover, the encounter with this individual is full of symbolism. For instance, the Caterpillar could symbolize the change in puberty since this animal is in the previous stage of becoming a beautiful butterfly. Besides, the mushroom could also reinforce the idea of change and growth that occur during puberty.

And finally, the last important character challenging Alice's notion of her own identity is the Pigeon. This character thinks that Alice is a serpent due to her long neck, and when she tries to convince it about her being a child it does not work. The main reason for this is the fact that Alice herself is not sure about who she is, and doubts when trying to answer the Pigeon:

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

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

"I—I'm a little girl," said Alice, rather doubtfully; as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day. (Carroll 49)

In all these examples there are clear doubts flourishing in Alice due to the changes her body undergoes and the characters in Wonderland do not really help her in the search for her identity. Overall, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* gives a unique portrayal of the stages that all little girls undergo in their search for adolescence or womanhood.

5. Conclusion

In this dissertation the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been analysed through different means. Actually, the aforementioned statements call into question the following issues: The first point to be analysed has been the impact of Carroll's life and

also the influence of Alice Liddell in the creation of this fantastic work. Indeed, it was this little girl the one who served as a muse for Carroll to create the worldwide known heroine of this story. With respect to the classification of this book within literature, it should be concluded that it is a complex work which is hard to label as just children's literature. Of course, it has a great place into this genre but, it should not only be considered literature for children as it is a novel that shares also some characteristics with adult literature and is enjoyed by them too. However, the main purpose of this study has been to reveal a different interpretation of the journey made by Alice through Wonderland. In order to reach this aim, we have focused our attention on the portrayal of Alice through the story. The reason for this is the fact that she represents one of the main themes in the novel, that is, the loss of innocence and the transition from childhood into womanhood that is implicit in her journey.

Finally, for further research it could be suggested a deeper analysis of the book by taking into account the next adventure of Alice, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871-1872). In this second story many other examples of the evolution of Alice can be found, and also a great influence of Carroll's feelings towards the real Alice. Indeed, one of the characters in this sequel, the White Knight, is seen as the protector of Alice. Moreover, a link could also be established between him and Carroll, since the author could be taken as the guardian angel of Alice Liddell in real life, and the knight as the one of Alice in Wonderland.

In conclusion, the intention of this study from the very beginning was to give a closer approach to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as well as to the portrayal of Alice in it. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that this is meant to serve as a base for future research on Lewis Carroll's novels.

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