

# The Importance of Storytelling for Children and Adults Alike: Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*

---

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES – 4º CURSO  
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA Y ALEMANA  
Y TRADUCCIÓN E INTERPRETACIÓN

AUTORA: MAITE SÁNCHEZ MARCOS

TUTOR: MARTIN SIMONSON

CURSO ACADÉMICO 2017/2018

## **Abstract**

Since the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Peter Pan* (1904), much has been studied and said about these two stories and their authors Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie, respectively. They have undoubtedly become classics of children's literature, and have been retold, reinterpreted, and performed over the years. Through their fantasy, both *Alice* and *Peter* deal with themes highly relevant to any child's – and adult's – development. However, during my study of the two tales, I found a lack of interest and research towards the actual concept of storytelling. Both Carroll and Barrie originally created the stories to tell them to real children; and within each tale, the characters constantly tell stories to one another. Societies and communities are shaped by their stories, and telling them to children can serve many purposes, such as teaching a valuable lesson, learning how to cope with one's own struggles, creating a strong bond between narrator and child, or simply – but not less importantly – taking pleasure in them. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the process of storytelling in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, as well as its roles, in order to explain its significance, as an essential part of growing up and becoming oneself.

**Key words:** Lewis Carroll; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; J. M. Barrie; *Peter Pan*; Storytelling; Children's Literature; Narrative Analysis.

## Index

<b>0. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. “Who will Riddle me the How and the Why?”</b>	
<b>The Art of Storytelling</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<i>1.1. Storytelling and Children</i> .....	<i>3</i>
<i>1.2. Victorian and Edwardian Eras:</i>	
<i>Historical Context</i> .....	<i>5</i>
<b>2. Lewis Carroll</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<i>2.1. Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland</i> .....	<i>9</i>
<b>3. J. M. Barrie</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<i>3.1. Peter Pan</i> .....	<i>15</i>
<b>4. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Works cited</b> .....	<b>21</b>

## 0. Introduction

From a very early age, we receive stories in various forms. Our parents tell us some before we go to bed, we read books in school, watch films and listen to songs. All of these have a great impact on the development of our personality and on how we perceive and behave in the world. But, why is it that the stories we hear or read during childhood are so crucial? Several answers could be provided to this question, for there are as many life experiences as people in the world. However, one thing is clear: tales become part of us, and stay with us through our journey. Being aware of their relevance, I found myself surprised to see that not much attention has been paid to the why, the how or the what of stories in relation to children's literature; in other words, what type of tales the characters tell and are told, in which circumstances, with what objective and, of course, what effect they have. Thus, the main aim of this dissertation is to analyse the stories pertaining to two well-known tales for children, in order to see what they express about their role concerning children and adults alike.

For said purpose, I will closely look at Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911). There are numerous similarities between the two works: on the one hand, both plots contain many tales which intertwine childhood and adulthood; furthermore, the main characters could not possibly have moved forward in their journeys were it not for the stories they heard and told; in addition, after their adventures, Alice and Wendy become the tellers of their own experiences in Wonderland and Neverland, respectively. On the other hand, stories played a significant part in the lives of Carroll and Barrie, not only during their younger years, but also in the later. Moreover, their masterpieces came to be as a result of a strong bond between the authors and real children, who inspired the tales and heard them first.

The area of storytelling is not an unexplored one, even more when it comes to stories for children. At different times in history, various writers and academics have dedicated time to studying the significance of tales for real children. J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Elena Fortún and Bruno Bettelheim are some of the most acclaimed names of a long list. With regard to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, many have focused on the relevance of stories in the personal lives of the authors, as well as in their role of storytellers with children around them, for example Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Lisa Chaney and Morton N. Cohen. Nevertheless, not much has been said about the tales

within the tales; that is, about the stories which are part of Alice's, Peter's and Wendy's journeys. Therefore, I will try to draw connections between the previous research and my own of the fictional worlds.

In order to reach a comparative conclusion of the analysis of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* I will structure the dissertation as follows. First, I will introduce the topic of storytelling by explaining its history, evolution and functions. Second, I will focus on the stories aimed at children, so as to provide a background for the later analysis of the two literary works. Third, I will contextualise the works by giving an overview of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, paying attention to the role of stories at the time. The next section of the dissertation will be divided into two parts: an examination of Carroll's and Barrie's lives in search of the aforementioned tales which influenced them, and the analysis of their works. Lastly, I will bring the paper to an end with some concluding remarks.

Throughout the dissertation, Modern Language Association (MLA) style will be used to quote and reference sources.

## **1. "Who will Riddle me the How and the Why?"<sup>1</sup>: The Art of Storytelling**

Stories are believed to be an essential part of humanity or, at least, they construct what is most human about each of us: we are the stories we experience, but also the ones others tell us, and the ones we tell ourselves. No matter when and where in history we look, stories "are found universally, wherever there is language" (Tolkien 40). They vary depending on the context and intention, but they all come from the same roots: from deep within the human condition. Story as an institution is ancient as the first peoples and in constant evolution; being told and retold, written and rewritten. It has the power to connect people, to create networks which shape society. Within a social context, stories can be told to educate, to set the rules, to provide new perspectives and to bring change, among others.

Given the long life of stories, there must be something about them which has made them necessary and irreplaceable. At a time when humans depended on nature and had no means of making sense of the world, stories served the purpose of explaining natural

---

<sup>1</sup> Taken from *Alice's Adventures under Ground* by Lewis Carroll (vii)

phenomena. These then developed into myths, and became the bones of a certain community; in other words, the most relevant ingredient of the history of the community. Writer Elena Fortún narrowed her study to the traditional story or folktale, and understood it as “el origen de toda la Literatura mundial . . . creado en la infancia de la humanidad” (20); “no inventado por nadie, sino nacido poco menos que de la misma Naturaleza, como las montañas y los ríos” (18).

The process of storytelling continues as the story is spread through word of mouth. Fortún believes women to be the bearers and tellers, as well as children to be the main audience: “[el cuento] nos reúne . . . igual que en los días de nuestra niñez en torno de nuestra madre o de alguna vieja sirvienta” (15). Stories were also transmitted outside of the community. As Fortún explains, wanderers and tellers would bring them along in their travels; afterwards, the tale would remain with new people, who would forget about the storyteller and make the tale their own (22). There was a big step between that oral tradition and the written literature we know today. Several of the traditional stories and fairy tales known in Europe were collected from the memories of people and captured within the pages. We could easily state that there are traces of the early stories in each and every piece of literature.

### *1.1. Storytelling and Children*

Leaving the other functions of story aside, I will focus on the relation it has with children. For the most part, when we talk about stories for children we frequently refer to fairy tales, or else, to stories which have certain fantastic elements intertwined with the plot. As J.R.R. Tolkien argues in his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” adults in the modern world have rejected fairy tales, and “relegated [them] to the ‘nursery’” (50). Consequently, children are the ones receiving the “traditional lore” (50) from the nurses and female storytellers. Nevertheless, Tolkien, an avid supporter of the fairy tale, questions whether there should be a specific set of tales particular to children: for him, a text worth reading during one’s early years must be worth reading at any other moment in life. C.S. Lewis supports Tolkien’s idea that “. . . a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story. The good ones last” (49).

There are many reasons why we should – and do – tell stories to children. Related to those motives, in the first episode of his podcast “History of Children’s Literature,”

lecturer David Beagley rightly points out that children are not the ones in charge of the stories they are told. Adults make the choices; that is to say, they have the control over the creation, production and distribution of tales. Moreover, in creating literature targeted at children, adults unconsciously make assumptions about the audience and, in some way or another, define it.

Regarding the choices adults make in relation to children's literature, the most common purpose is certainly education. There is commonly an implicit moral or teaching, a lesson which the child will come to understand and internalise as the tale develops. In the eyes of Fortún, children need stories as much as adults do, for they wish to learn about other children's experiences, about their failures and successes; about how to live (23). Furthermore, unlike many others, Fortún considers fantastic tales not excessive and inappropriate, but close to the child's chaotic and imaginative inner life (23).

As noted by Ann Trugman Ackerman, the idea of teaching children through literature dates back to the times of Plato. In the eyes of the philosopher, in order to build the ideal society we must first educate the younger generation (Ackerman 3). Following the argument above, Plato gave adults in the community the responsibility of choosing the tales to be told to children, so that the young would begin to "respect and appreciate [the] positive traits" (3) and keep them throughout their lives.

This interpretation differs from that of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who defend that we should not treat stories as merely educational. The former writer explores the concepts "Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation" (59) as characteristics present in all stories, and particularly in fairy tales. Even though he believes that they are "things of which children have, as a rule, less need than older people" (59), we should not simply disregard them. For Tolkien, *Fantasy* stands both for "Imagination" and for the "freedom from the domination of observed 'fact', in short of the fantastic" (60). *Recovery*, on the other hand, is a "regaining of a clear view," not to see things "as they are," but "as we are . . . meant to see them" (67). *Escape* and *Consolation* come hand in hand. The first one refers to a "desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery" (72); furthermore, Tolkien mentions our "oldest and deepest desire" (74), that is to say, "the Great Escape: the Escape from Death" (74). Lastly, *Consolation* is a quality which Tolkien considers fundamental in any great story. The term could be briefly explained

with the idea of a “Happy Ending” (75), not to hide reality and failure from children, but to produce “a catch of the breath, a beat and a lifting of the heart” (75).<sup>2</sup>

### *1.2. Victorian and Edwardian Eras: Historical Context*

In her dissertation “Victorian Ideology and British Children’s Literature, 1850-1914,” Ackerman claims that “the spirit of an age appears in all forms of literature” (2) and it could not be more accurate in the case of stories for children during the Victorian and Edwardian Eras. From 1830 until the beginning of the twentieth century, England underwent many a change. The rapid development of industry turned the English world upside down; in other words, society was not prepared for the consequences. On the one hand, the country became the most powerful empire, advanced in wealth, progress and science. Nevertheless, industrialisation brought with it an ugly side:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. (Dickens 3)

Although Charles Dickens was describing the French Revolution, the dualism of the Victorian Era can also be seen in his words. People moved from the countryside to the main cities, where workers had to take on harsh and underpaid jobs. Moreover, many poor children were sent to work from an incredibly young age in order to support the family. Working families found themselves poor, with no resources and in terrible circumstances when arriving at the cities: “[they] lived in horribly crowded, unsanitary housing; and the conditions under which women and children toiled in mines and factories were unimaginably brutal” (Reidhead 1047).

During the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian morality and values had a strong influence; so much so that children were educated strictly following those values. The stories they read or were told often came from religious texts. According to Ackerman, “many Victorian parents believed that home education must include Bible reading” (32). Notwithstanding, towards the end of the century, as science and industry progressively took over society, traditional beliefs and morals began to be questioned: all

---

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien uses the term *Eucatastrophe* in relation to *Consolation*, to refer to “the sudden joyous ‘turn’” of events (75).



of a sudden, England witnessed how the status quo fell apart (Ackerman 13, 30). In the face of a need to find new answers, many poets, writers and intellectuals tried to provide them, turning to nature, to history and, in some cases, to the fantastic. Here commenced what Tolkien referred to as “Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation” (59).

As I have already mentioned, for the most part of the Victorian Era, children were expected to receive educational stories, for the literature aimed at them “is a mirror of the times in which it was written” (Ackerman 10). Stories provided the child with tools and examples both to comply with the conservative standards of society and to shape his or her behaviour and ideas (2). In other words, as Professor Reynolds states in her article “Perceptions of childhood,” “much of the earliest children’s literature is concerned with saving children’s souls through instruction and by providing role models for their behaviour.”

However, coming back to Tolkien’s ideas, the importance of fantasy and fairy tales goes beyond the criticism that they are useless or that they fill children’s minds with nonsense and unattainable goals; in fact, “the problems of fairy-tale heroes and heroines are real: poverty, sibling rivalry . . . and many more. The fairy-tale solutions to these real-life problems are literally and figuratively out of this world” (Ashliman 2). Many a time, children in the Victorian and Edwardian periods needed to escape from their realities: for stories to serve that purpose says a lot about their role and value within society. Tolkien metaphorically provides his view on the topic: if we replaced the child and his difficult reality with a prisoner, would it make sense to criticise that “he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls?” (69). Most certainly not, Tolkien argues, since “the world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it” (69).

There is something relevant which cannot be ignored when analysing and describing stories meant for the young. As noted by Tolkien, some people “tend to think of children as a special kind of creature, almost a different race, rather than as normal, if immature, members of a particular family, and of the human family at large” (50). In his chapter of *Childhood Studies: An Introduction*, John Clarke discusses the belief “that up to the modern period the current idea of childhood simply did not exist” (3). According to this view, “childhood was ‘invented’” (3) between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. One of the reasons could be that in Victorian times the exploitation of child labour resulted in several campaigns and protests which brought childhood to the centre

of attention, as “a period of life in need of protection” (9). Thus, since stories reflect the times in which they were written, “in mid-nineteenth century England, children’s literature began to flourish as a genre separate from adult literature” (Ackerman 6).

## 2. Lewis Carroll

Lewis Carroll as we know him today –the creator of *nonsense*, and most of all, the man who gave us the magical *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*– was in fact a serious Oxford don who led a double life. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, as his real name was, was born in Cheshire, on January 1832, the third of eleven children and eldest of the boys. At some point during the writer’s childhood, his parents Charles Dodgson and Frances Jane Lutwidge had to move the family to a small town in Yorkshire, where the father worked as a priest. As author Rosa Montero notes, Carroll perfectly reflects “la dualidad, la represión y la hipocresía de la época victoriana” (169).

From a very early age, he developed two nearly opposite personalities, which then turned to be two distinct identities. On the one hand, Charles Dodgson senior “instructed his son in religion, mathematics, and Latin” (Cohen 51). As the years went by, Carroll attended Richmond School and later Rugby, to end up enrolled in Christ Church in Oxford. In the latter, he “won a Boulter scholarship, was nominated in 1852 for a Studentship . . . with his BA in 1854 he took first-class honors in mathematics and second-class in classics” (52) and eventually stayed as a lecturer in mathematics. On the other hand, Carroll lived in a constant “search for beauty” (59) mostly by means of story in its various forms.

During the time the family spent in Yorkshire, and while his father taught him all about the rational sciences, Carroll “became protector, instructor, and entertainer” (Cohen 51) of his siblings in his spare time. He invented stories for them, he wrote and performed plays, and he even put together “a series of family magazines” (51). It is fundamental to mention that Carroll “carefully observed how [his siblings’] minds and hearts were moved and how he might influence them, how he might please them” (59). Stories came out of him, based on his siblings and *for* them, as would later happen with *Alice’s Adventures*.

Wit and humour are two features commonly associated with Carroll and his works. Following Tolkien’s idea of *Escape*, some believe that in the face of the writer’s difficult life “hampered by inescapable limitations, blotted by imperfections, and lacking

emotional fulfilment” (Cohen 63), “laughter proved a successful escape” (62). Nonetheless, apart from producing stories, Carroll was also highly influenced by the ones he read. Cohen claims that, in a way, “his reading helped him justify himself to himself” (58), that is to say, the stories which the Romantics and the Victorians told served him to understand and come to terms with his true self.

Alongside his academic writing, he wrote short stories, poems and word puzzles, among other things, under the penname of Lewis Carroll. But writing was not the only form he explored to tell stories: in fact, he was also an artist and a renowned photographer. It is hard to tell what the real purpose of the man behind the camera was; indeed, some have put into question whether his real interest laid not in photography, but in young female children. Several of his photographs involved girls between seven and twelve years old posing naked in front of the camera. His actions are not for me to judge, and no matter his intentions, the close relationships he maintained with all those children “helped Dodgson create the stories that find an easy access to the child’s heart, stories that lodge themselves deeply in one’s consciousness and remain there into adulthood” (Cohen 60). Furthermore, the one girl who inspired *Alice’s Adventures* was at first a model and object of adoration of Carroll’s.

In April 1856, when Carroll was twenty four, the Liddell sisters came into his life. Only a year before, H. G. Liddell, the father of the children, had been appointed dean of Christ Church, Oxford, where Carroll lived and lectured. Although there were four children –Harry, Lorina, Alice and Edith– Alice soon became the writer’s favourite. If young Carroll invented stories because of and for his siblings, the adult did the same with Alice. The earliest version of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was in fact titled *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* and Carroll narrated it to the Liddell sisters during a trip they took up the river Godstow, on July 4 1862. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst collected various entries from Carroll’s diaries in his book *The Story of Alice*; an annotation for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July reads: “On which occasion I told them the fairy-tale of ‘Alice’s Adventures Under Ground,’ which I undertook to write out for Alice” (117). It is undeniable that young Alice Liddell inspired the famous tale, but there were many other factors which influenced Carroll and enabled him to eventually write it. In other words, “all the individual fragments of his childhood and early adult life – thimbles, theatre, gloves, lessons, poems, puzzles, pictures, miscellanies and more – would be shaken together and transformed” (85).

### 2.1. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

The story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* begins and ends with two poems which illustrate the idea I have just mentioned. Carroll came up with the story in order to tell it to the Liddell girls; apparently, there was nothing he could do against their “three tongues together” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 3) begging him for the tale: “thus grew the tale of Wonderland” (4). Similar to other magical places, Wonderland allows children to play and grow. And, as Carroll himself assures, “Children yet, the tale to hear, / Eager eye and willing ear, / Lovingly Shall nestle near. / In a Wonderland they lie, / Dreaming as the days go by” (244). In other words, the tale of Alice will transport all the children who hear it to the magic land, one which will always remain the same, for stories are immune to the passing of time: “though the shadow of a sigh / May tremble through the story, / For ‘happy summer days’ gone by / . . . It shall not touch, with breath of bale, / The pleasance of our fairy-tale” (118). It is true that Carroll refers to his audience merely as children, but in her essay about him, Virginia Woolf rightly describes the stories of Alice as “the only books in which we become children” (246).

Both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are filled with stories which the characters tell themselves or each other. However, before moving on to analysing those, we should stop for a moment and look at the notion of story in itself. In the majority of her works, scholar Clarissa Pinkola Estés explores the ideas surrounding stories and claims that “a story is not just a story; in its most innate and proper sense, it is someone’s life” (508). At first glance this belief may appear simple, but if we observe the adventures of Alice, we realise that reality and tale are often one and the same. From the beginning, Alice does not clearly distinguish between those two concepts: “When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 30).

There are several occasions in which tales and real events are intertwined. The most notable come hand in hand with the English literary or cultural tradition. As an educated child, Alice has encountered plenty of tales, about Tweedledee and Tweedledum, Humpty Dumpty and the Lion and the Unicorn, for instance. Therefore, whenever she comes across any of these characters, she already knows their story. Humpty Dumpty notices this and reacts, “You’ve been listening at doors . . . or you couldn’t have known it!”, to what Alice responds “I haven’t, indeed . . . It’s in a book.”

(*Adventures in Wonderland* 185). The curious detail is that Humpty Dumpty is not surprised at all that his story is well-known: “Ah, well! They may write such things in a *book* . . . That’s what you call a History of England” (185).

Coming back to Pinkola Estés’s statement, when a certain character relates their life, the terms *story* and *history* are used equally: “I’ll tell you my history, and you’ll understand why I hate cats and dogs” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 19); “[The Mock Turtle] shall tell you his history” (80); “they set to work very diligently to write out a history of the accident” (104). Truly, those two concepts were not easily distinguished until the 16<sup>th</sup> century; they both come from the same Latin roots. In regards to *story*, as defined in the Century Dictionary, it is “by derivation a short history, and by development a narrative designed to interest and please” (“Story”).

The last point connected to the idea of story as a narrative of someone’s life, is that neither the reader nor Alice are sure whether the adventures have happened at all. The land of dream is closely linked to tale, in the sense that they both provide a contrast to reality. It may be that Alice was only dreaming about Wonderland, or it may be that the situations were so strange that she confounded them. At the end of the first tale she openly says “I’ve had such a curious dream!” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 109), and later “So I wasn’t dreaming, after all . . . unless – unless we’re all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it’s *my* dream” (207). When she is with the twins, Tweedledee makes Alice and the audience doubt even that she is real; suddenly reality seems to be Wonderland, and Alice and our real world fantasy. In fact, the Red King was dreaming “Why, about *you!* . . . And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you’d be? . . . You’d be nowhere. Why, you’re only a sort of thing in his dream!” (165).

Nevertheless, we are also told that Alice “told her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers . . .” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 109), which prove to her that they must have been real: “this was the one [thing] that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if it had been only yesterday” (217). Moreover, even though the adventures might not be real, the tale was. And it served Alice and her sister to escape from their reality: “[Alice’s sister] sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality” (111).

In *Alice's Adventures* there are two main sets of stories, closely connected, but with varying purposes and means. First, there are the stories which Alice is constantly telling herself. The child is mostly alone and these tales about her life and experiences frequently keep her company and help her behave and comprehend the world around her. The central trouble for Alice as she moves forward through Wonderland is “Who in the world am I?” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 14); in a sense, her physical journey is also one of finding her identity. The second set of tales occurs between Alice and some other character. A number of the animals and other creatures she comes across remind her that it is essential to know who one is: “*What* are you?” (45); “remember who you are!” (144); “tell me your name and your business . . . What does [your name] mean?” (184). After all the peculiar situations she has come through, Alice has changed so much she has lost her sense of identity: “I could tell you my adventures –beginning from this morning . . . but it’s no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then” (90). At the beginning of her adventure, Alice comes upon a caterpillar who is more relevant than it seems. The animal’s main concern is also “Who are *you*?” (37), but on this occasion, Alice tells him her story, how she no longer fathoms who she truly is. I do not think it is by chance that the precise animal which advises and guides Alice is a caterpillar. In some cultures, the insect represents evolution with no boundaries; in other words, the caterpillar is not afraid of transformation for it will eventually bring the best version of itself (“Caterpillar Symbolism”). Being so, he suggests to Alice to do the same.

Following the thread of tales between Alice and the other characters, they all seem to share the same objective. They are part of Alice’s learning process: by telling each other stories –or histories–, they empathise and even reach mutual understanding. There are numerous tales being told along Alice’s journey, but two of them stand out as best resembling traditional storytelling. The mouse’s history helps the protagonist comprehend why he does not like cats or dogs. The Mock Turtle’s one mirrors a grandparent telling the younger generation about past, and better, times. In both cases, there is a relation between teller and hearer and, as in Victorian nurseries, the latter sit around the teller and “don’t speak a word till [the teller has] finished” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 82). In addition, after telling their tale, these characters ask Alice to “hear some of *your* adventures” (90); they keep learning from each other’s life experiences. Apart from understanding them, hearing others’ stories helps Alice come to terms with herself. By defining what others are and, therefore, what she is not, she can find her true

identity: an animal asks her “What do you call yourself?”, to which she responds “I wish I knew! . . . Please would you tell me what you call yourself? . . . I think that might help a little” (154-155).

As we have seen, Alice hears many a tale during her time in Wonderland. However, those are not the only ones referred to in the novel. She remembers the stories she knew of at home on the occasions she needs them: “she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt . . .” (*Adventures in Wonderland* 10) and therefore did not get hurt; “Alice had never been in a court of justice before, but she had read about them in books, and she was quite pleased to find that she knew the name of nearly everything there” (95). These stories accompany her wherever she goes. Even when she claims that she does not know any, the truth is, as Cohen states (60), that the tales she –and all of us– heard or read during childhood stay with us forever.

Without a doubt, stories are a fundamental part of Alice’s journey and growth. They help her understand the world and herself. They play such a relevant role in her youth that, after the adventure, she will become a storyteller of her own experience, thus keeping the essence of childhood safe:

[Alice] 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 how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago. (*Adventures in Wonderland* 111)

Last, but definitely not least, the tales which Carroll’s characters tell do not come only in the traditional fashion. Songs and poems are two forms of story which also serve various purposes. Possibly the most common feature of both is that they narrate real events. The Duchess sings to her baby a tale of their own reality (*Adventures in Wonderland* 51-52), as well as the Mad Hatter does, except he completely turns it upside down (61-62). As for poetry, when the Knave of Hearts is being judged for stealing the Queen’s tarts, there appear some anonymous verses. At first glance they seem to relate the story of the theft, but Alice does not believe “there’s an atom of meaning in [them]” (107). Another poem is that of “Jabberwocky,” which to Alice “seems very pretty . . . but it’s *rather* hard to understand . . . somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t know exactly what they are” (133). Hence, from the girl’s perception, we could

deduce that poetry need not mean anything, as its main concern should be to maintain an aesthetically pleasing appearance. Nevertheless, the Duchess tells Alice that “every thing’s got a moral, if only you can find it” (77), which contradicts the idea above and portrays Victorian values, also reflected in stories.

### 3. J. M. Barrie

In his translation of *Peter Pan*, Julen Gabiria briefly describes J. M. Barrie’s life, and underlines that “amaren ahotik entzundako istorioek bete zuten haren hartzaroa” (“his childhood was filled with the stories he heard from his mother”; 7). The ninth of ten children, James Matthew Barrie was born in Kirriemuir, Scotland, in 1860. David Barrie, his father, worked as a hand-loom weaver, and his mother Margaret Ogilvy was the daughter of a stonemason. His childhood was tainted by grief caused by the loss of his older brother David, who died at the age of 14, when James was only six years old. It is said that Margaret did not overcome David’s death, as he was her dearest child. As in the case of Carroll, there is no doubt that stories played an immensely relevant role during Barrie’s life: he managed to make a living of his gift for storytelling when he was an adult, but, most importantly, stories saved him in his childhood.

After David’s death, Barrie tried to fill his mother’s emptiness by dressing as her lost child and pretending to be him. Devastating as that experience appears, Barrie managed to create a strong bond with his mother, and it was not in some other way but through stories. As Lisa Chaney writes in her *Hide and Seek with Angels: A Life of J. M. Barrie*, “Margaret talked to Jamie about her own childhood spent around their little town. It eased the pain of loss to recall a happier time . . . she told vivid stories of the past, and James would eventually retell something like them” (23). In telling these stories to her son, Margaret became the heroine of her memories, and brought back a distant time when she was a joyful child.

This special relation between Margaret and James could also be seen through the lens of Tolkien’s *Escape*: “Margaret’s solace and escape in reliving her childhood with Jamie in turn helped him to forget his own pain as he became absorbed in her past. His mother was a gifted storyteller and Jamie was entranced” (Chaney 23). Margaret’s stories were not only important in order for her to come to terms with her new reality, but for



Barrie too. With the help of his mother's words he could fly away from the pain, and make the suffering bearable.

Moving some years forward in the life of the Scottish author, we find ourselves in Kensington Gardens, home of Peter Pan, where Barrie used to walk his dog. It was during one of his walks that Barrie came upon the Llewelyn Davies children –George, John, Peter, Michael and Nicholas– and their parents Arthur and Sylvia. In a matter of weeks, the family became of great importance for Barrie, both in his personal life and in his career. The children loved spending time with the man, who joined them in their play and acted as another one of them. However, what made the bond between them so strong were the stories which Barrie invented for the children. The Llewelyn Davies boys lost their parents when they were still young. Once again, as in Barrie's childhood, stories served the children as a means of escaping from their reality.

Without a doubt, the story of Peter Pan is the most well-known of all the ones that Barrie told the Llewelyn Davies. Even though *Peter Pan* was published as a novel in 1911, the story was originally written as a play and first performed in 1904. In the dedication of the script, Barrie makes the audience aware of the relevance of the boys. In fact, the first line reads "To the five" (*Peter Pan and Other Plays* 75), which clearly alludes to George, John, Peter, Michael and Nicholas. The text that follows is almost a letter of gratitude from the author to the children, without whom Peter Pan and Neverland would have never existed. As I have mentioned, Barrie came up with Peter's story to tell it to the Llewelyn Davies brothers; however, it was also inspired by them, by the dreamed childhood that Barrie could never have: "I suppose I always knew that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. That is all he is, the spark I got from you" (75).

It is not surprising to note that Barrie left pieces of his soul in his works, and thus there are numerous autobiographical elements in all of them. As Ana Ramos states, Peter Pan was born "de las aventuras corridas junto a los hermanos Llewelyn Davies, pero también del trato con la adorable Sylvia, de la presencia tremenda de la madre, de la notable ausencia del hermano, todo aderezado con el innegable talento del escritor, sus dioses íntimos y fantasmas" (28).

### 3.1. *Peter Pan*

The story of Peter Pan we know today has traditionally been labelled as children's literature. However, even in the play – the earliest version of the tale – Barrie was most certainly including adults as part of the intended audience. As I have mentioned before, Tolkien and C. S. Lewis did not believe the two collectives should be differentiated when it comes to literature or storytelling. In fact, *Peter Pan* is meant for adults and children alike: as Patricia Horan comments in the introduction to *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, “This is not merely a children's book. This is one of the few works of art that may succeed in rescuing us from our adulthood.”

Moving on to the process of storytelling itself, the Llewelyn Davies boys were not the only ones who took part in it; even though we physically read the story of Peter, it seems that it is being told to us by Barrie himself. As we become listeners, the bond between us, the narrator and the story tightens, to the point where we are brought to the nursery of the Darlings' home. Moreover, when Barrie addresses the reader, he treats the whole audience as one and the same: “You ordinary children can never hear it, but if you were to hear it you would know that you had heard it once before” (*Peter Pan* 27). The aforementioned way in which Pinkola Estés connects story and life is most certainly applicable to *Peter Pan* too: “I wish for the moment I could pretend that this was such a story . . . but truth is best, and I want to tell only what really happened” (112). The line between reality and tale is nearly imperceptible, as Barrie merely tells the truth about Peter's life and the adventures of the Darling children and the lost boys.

Related to the two points above, storytelling seems to belong to children. They hear tales from a very young age, and these remain in their memories forever. Apparently they may have forgotten, but stories are always part of them. Thus, we could say that story is common to all children. When Tinker Bell is poisoned at one point during the adventure, we are told that “she thought she could get well again if children believed in fairies” (*Peter Pan* 153). Her words could also be interpreted as referring to stories: as long as children believe in them, they will be true. Furthermore, the fact that Mr and Mrs Darling do not believe in the tale of Peter when Wendy, John and Michael talk about it shows a lot about adulthood: they are blind to their children's reality, and that is the cause for them to fly away.

At first Mrs Darling did not know, but after thinking back into her childhood she just remembered a Peter Pan who was said to live with the fairies. There were odd stories about him . . . [and] she had believed in him at the time, but now that she was married and full of sense she quite doubted whether there was such any person. (*Peter Pan* 9)

Once again, this quote demonstrates that Peter, together with most other stories, stays solely with the young; as you grow old and become an adult, you lose the connection with the tale and probably the belief in magic too. “The bearded man who doesn’t know any story to tell his children was once John” (*Peter Pan* 199); as a proper adult, and maybe related to the fact that he is a man, he is no longer part of the story.

Even though Mrs Darling might not truly believe Peter Pan to be real, she does believe in the relevance of telling stories to her children. As Fortún and Tolkien explained, traditional stories are inextricably linked not only to children, but also to women and the nursery: mothers, grandmothers and nurses are the keepers and tellers of lore. Peter “admitted that he came to the nursery window . . . to listen to stories” (*Peter Pan* 36), as well as “swallows build in the eaves of the houses . . . to listen to stories” (37). As occurred with Alice, Wendy resorts to stories when she needs them. Apart from learning about culture and bonding with Mrs Darling, the stories which she was told in her younger years provide her with tools to confront real life situations: “there crowded upon her all the stories she had been told of Marooners’ Rock” (97).

If we are to analyse the various stories told within the main story of *Peter Pan*, we should definitely explore the role of Wendy as a storyteller, through whom, once again, we are reminded of Alice. Wendy is a fundamental character: she is the motherly figure who protects Peter and the lost boys and helps them grow. Even Peter assures that “one girl is more use than twenty boys” (*Peter Pan* 31). The young children regard her as “a lady to take care of us at last” (73) and they beg “O Wendy lady, be our mother” (83). Nevertheless, Wendy’s value resides not in that she provides for her newfound family, prepares the meals and tucks the children in at night; truly, stories give her the role of mother. Anyone of the boys could keep the house and be in charge of the chores, but not one of them can tell stories as Wendy, that is to say, as a mother, does. There are many reasons why storytelling is essential when it comes to mother-children relationships. First, as previously stated, a bond is created between teller and hearer; second, it might give the young a sense of comfort and safety. In the latter case, not only is the story itself

significant, but also the mother's voice, which babies associate with those feelings since they are in the womb.

Why are Wendy's stories so important for the lost boys? Tolkien's ideas of *Escape* and *Consolation* could serve as an explanation to that question: Peter and the other boys need to hear the happy endings of the tales, to convince themselves that everything will be alright. From the moment the Darling siblings arrive at the island, tales and joy come hand in hand: "they sang and danced in their night-gowns . . . [and] stories they told, before it was time for Wendy's good-night story!" (*Peter Pan* 124). At the end of the day, even though their life is a constant adventure, they are a group of young children surrounded by danger, who need the protection of a family: "I am the only one who is not afraid of the pirates . . . but I wish [Peter] would come back, and tell us whether he has heard anything more about Cinderella" (65); the truth is, they do not need to hear "anything more" (65), they need to hear that Cinderella and the prince "lived happy ever after" (37).

"And then at last they all got into bed for Wendy's story, the story they loved best, the story Peter hated . . ." (*Peter Pan* 124). This quote reminds us of Pinkola Estés's statement that the stories we genuinely need are those about our own lives. The tale which the boys love and long for is the most real one. It is about Wendy's parents, about herself and about Neverland. As she tells it, she turns into "our heroine" (128), and the boys become part of it as well: "O Wendy . . . was one of the lost children called Tootles? . . . I am in a story. Hurrah, I am in a story" (128). Coming back to Barrie's life, we could say that Wendy resembles Margaret in her role of mother and storyteller, both of whom needed to tell and hear stories and become the main heroines in them.

Notwithstanding, we cannot overlook the fact that this was "the story Peter hated" (*Peter Pan* 124). Instead of finding comfort in it, he feels left out. Wendy tells the truth about growing up and reaching adulthood, along with praising the love of a mother. The one thing which Peter is certain about is that he does not "want to be a man" (194); furthermore, Peter feels deceived by his mother, so he does not believe in Wendy's story. In relation to the main character, there are various stories which have a strong impact on him, to the point where they determine his fate. The first one of those is the one that made him flee from home: "Wendy, I ran away the day I was born . . . because I heard father and mother . . . talking about what I was to be when I became a man" (32). In a sense,

Peter's parents made up a story about his life, as we sometimes do to imagine the future. However, this was a dangerous one to tell, because after hearing it Peter was afraid it may actually come true.

The character of Peter Pan first appears in *The Little White Bird* and in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. If Alice sought guidance from a caterpillar, Peter tells his story to a bird in *Kensington Gardens*: "Solomon . . . listened quietly to Peter's adventures, and then told him their true meaning" (27). Solomon represents wisdom or, at least, he knows more than Peter does. In telling the story of his life, Peter seeks –and receives– advice. The last set of tales is probably the most revealing of the boy's truth: "Sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys . . . They had to do, I think, with the riddle of his existence" (*Peter Pan* 148). These dreams could reflect the unconscious stories surrounding Peter, that is, his truth. He does not want to face it, so he builds a character and tells himself other stories which he likes better; he creates a new reality. During the last night of the adventures in Neverland, "he had one of his dreams . . . and cried in his sleep for a long time, and Wendy held him tight" (179). Maybe he dreamt that the lost boys and Wendy would fly back home, which in fact they would do. Once more, Wendy was there as the mother to keep him safe.

Another story which everyone in Neverland knows about is that of Captain Hook and the crocodile. The pirate lost his hand to the animal, and since then, it has been looking for him, in order to eat the rest of him. All this time, Hook has been able to escape from the predator because it swallowed a clock and he could hear it approaching: "It was the terrible tick-tick of the crocodile . . . All knew that what was about to happen concerned [Hook] alone" (*Peter Pan* 164). Beyond the literal, we could read this as a story about adults having to face time, and never being able to win the battle: "They had no thought of fighting it. It was Fate" (165).

The aforementioned fine line between story and reality is also visible when the narrator wants to tell Mrs Darling the ending of the tale, to give her hope: "One thing I should like to do immensely, and that is to tell her, in the way authors have, that the children are coming back" (*Peter Pan* 182). Barrie also thinks about entering her dreams: "Suppose, to make her happy, we whisper to her in her sleep that the brats are coming back" (185). This reminds us of Peter's dreams, depicted here as stories whispered to one's dreams. Indeed, for Mrs Darling truth, dream and tale are no longer easy to

distinguish: “She saw [her children], but she did not believe they were there. You see, she saw them in their beds so often in her dreams that she thought this was just the dream hanging around her still” (191).

The last point I would like to comment on is the actual tale about Peter Pan. Nowadays, it is well-known all over the world, but we are told that the fictional characters also tell his story over and over. In spite of the fact that she is not the only one who keeps it moving, Wendy is the main storyteller. “. . . it was Wendy’s part to put Jane to bed. That was the time for stories” (*Peter Pan* 200); the one tale that her daughter wants to hear is that of Peter. Here again, we find there is no distinction between what Wendy experienced and the story she tells: “The way I flew! Do you know, Jane, I sometimes wonder whether I ever did really fly” (201). As she grows up, Wendy has doubts about the veracity of her adventures as a child. Nevertheless, she proudly says that “many girls hear [Peter’s voice] when they are sleeping, but I was the one who heard it awake” (202). For a time, she is the only one who experienced the story of Peter, but, in the end, all the women in her family are bound to hear the tale and become part of it too.

#### **4. Conclusion**

After analysing *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, it cannot be denied that both works reflect the idea that stories must be acknowledged for the value they hold. Either in the fictional world or in real life, tales are powerful companions in the journeys of children growing up and, also, of adults evolving. Alice tells herself stories over and over, in a quest to find her identity; moreover, through the *histories* she shares with the characters she encounters, she opens her eyes to other realities. Both things are common to most –if not all– humans. In a sense, Peter mirrors universal childhood: a time when we feel vulnerable and in need of clues to make sure everything will come out right in the end. As for Alice and Wendy, even though they travel in magical lands, at some point during their adventure they both become the tellers of stories. They resemble all the mothers, grandmothers and nurses who over the centuries have kept and transmitted the essence of lore and childhood.

In regards to the real world, Carroll and Barrie are two examples of a recurring current of behaviour: adults who, in some way or another, are unable to deal with adulthood. Instead, they develop a strong relationship with certain children around them

and become storytellers for them. Thus, they owe their literary creations to the Liddell sisters, the Llewelyn Davies boys and all the other children who inspired and first heard those stories which then became famous. Besides, the argument that stories are fundamental in the development of children and adults alike is once again proved both with Carroll's and Barrie's personal life.

Ultimately, there is still plenty of room for further analysis of the overall significance of stories. Other books aimed at children could be examined in search of the presence of tales within them. Moreover, the lives of various writers pertaining to the aforementioned current could be studied, in order to see what role stories played during their younger and older years and overall life journey, and how their experience of relating stories to children set the basis for a literature that blurs the lines between the real and the imagined, childhood and adulthood, and eventually helped them come to terms with their own place in society as writers and human beings.

## Works cited

- Ackerman, Ann Trugman. *Victorian ideology and British children's literature, 1850-1914*. PhD thesis. North Texas State University, 1984, [https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc330655/m2/1/high\\_res\\_d/1002779498-Ackerman.pdf](https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc330655/m2/1/high_res_d/1002779498-Ackerman.pdf).
- Ashliman, D. L. *Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook*. Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan*. 1911. Puffin Books, 2013.
- . *Peter Pan*. Translated by Julen Gabiria, Alberdania & Elkar, 2004.
- . *Peter Pan and Other Plays*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. 1906. Weathervane Books, 1975.
- Beagley, David, narrator. "Once Upon a Time..." *History of Children's Literature*, iTunes app, 12 February 2018.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. 1865. Penguin English Library, 2012.
- . *Alice's Adventures under Ground*. Evertype Publishing, 2009.
- "Caterpillar Symbolism and Meaning." *Universe of Symbolism*. [www.universeofsymbolism.com/caterpillar-symbolism.html](http://www.universeofsymbolism.com/caterpillar-symbolism.html). Accessed 11 May 2018.
- Chaney, Lisa. *Hide and Seek with Angels: A Life of J. M. Barrie*. St. Martin's Press, 2006.
- Clarke, John. "Histories of Childhood." *Childhood Studies: An Introduction*, edited by Dominic Wyse, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004, pp. 3-12.
- Cohen, Morton N. "Lewis Carroll as He Was." *Alice in a World of Wonderlands. The Translations of Lewis Carroll's Masterpiece*, edited by Jon A. Lindseth and Alan Tannenbaum, Oak Knoll Press, 2015, pp. 51-64.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Wordsworth Classics, 1993.
- Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert. *The Story of Alice. Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland*. Vintage Books, 2016.
- Fortún, Elena. *El arte de contar cuentos a los niños*. Espuela de Plata, 2003.
- Horan, Patricia. Introduction. *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, by J. M. Barrie, Weathervane Books, 1975.
- Lewis, C.S. *On Stories: and other essays on literature*. HarperOne, 2017.
- Montero, Rosa. *Pasiones*. Suma de Letras, S. L. 2000.
- Pinkola Estés, Clarissa. *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. Ballantine Books, 1997.
- Ramos, Ana. "El cuento de hadas de J. M. Barrie." *Cuadernos de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil*, July-August 2010, pp. 25-29.



- Reidhead, Julia, editor. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Seventh Edition, volume 2, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. "Perceptions of Childhood." *British Library*, 15 May 2014, [www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/perceptions-of-childhood](http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/perceptions-of-childhood). Accessed 12 April 2018.
- "Story" (n. 1). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. [www.etymonline.com/word/story](http://www.etymonline.com/word/story). Accessed 17 April 2018.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-Stories." *On Fairy-stories*, edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, Harper Collins Publishers, 2014, pp. 27-84.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Lewis Carroll." Afterword. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, Penguin English Library, 2012, pp. 245-247.