



LUND UNIVERSITY
Humanities and Theology

Childhood in Wonderland:

Child Development in Lewis Carroll's Books *Alice's
Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*

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ENGK01
Degree essay in English Literature
Spring semester 2015
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Lund University
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Abstract

Lewis Carroll's books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) are both set in the young girl Alice's dream worlds. For more than a hundred years, adults as well as children have enjoyed losing themselves in the nonsensical stories. But is there more to the stories than mere nonsense? Using Anna Freud's theory on child development to delve deeper into the protagonist and her worlds, a fascinating journey through the experiences of growing up is unravelled. Alice's fall down the rabbit hole can indeed be interpreted as a fall back into the first years of childhood, a child experimenting with regression. And the young girl's discovery of looking-glass land can be seen as an exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of growing up.

Keywords: Alice in Wonderland, children's literature, fantasy fiction, child development, child psychology.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Theoretical Framework: Child Development	2
Dreams and Journeys – Significance of the Frame-Stories	5
Mushrooms and Duels – Relations to Food and Physical Threats	8
Cats and Chess-Games – Relations to People and Employment	13
Conclusion	17
Works Cited	19

Introduction

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was first told by the mathematics professor Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, on a picnic in 1862 (Auden 15-16). Young Alice Liddell, whom Dodgson was very fond of, liked the story so well that she asked him to write it down (Jones and Gladstone 7). The book was published in 1865, under the pen-name Lewis Carroll, and the sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, was finished and printed six years later (Jones and Gladstone 8). Today the books have been widely loved and cherished for more than a century. People of all ages have enjoyed losing themselves in the nonsensical worlds of Wonderland and looking-glass land together with the young, plucky protagonist. Scholars too have enjoyed the books, exploring the stories from a myriad of different angles. However, focus has often been placed on the author, instead of the stories themselves and their protagonist. This is surprising as the tales are very inviting to look at, especially from a psychological perspective.

At first glance both books seem to be completely nonsensical, made simply to amuse the reader and with no deeper connotations than that. However, examining the books with the help of child developmental psychology, it is possible to find sense in these nonsense worlds. Both of the stories are set in Alice's dreams, thus the journeys can be seen as journeys through her mind, making this approach particularly appropriate. And though the notion of sense in Wonderland may not appeal to everyone, exploring the psychological development of Alice might open up a new and exciting way of reading the books.

This essay will attempt to delve into the mind of Carroll's child protagonist, using developmental psychology to learn more of the heroine's motivations and fears in the two stories. The essay will argue that the journeys Alice undertake can be seen as more than pointless daydreams and fantasies, and that they may symbolise changes and experiences that most of us go through as children. The theoretical framework used will be based on Anna Freud's concept of developmental lines. However, as much of what Freud wrote is outdated, to put it mildly, a very restricted segment of her developmental theories will be employed in the analysis. Focus will be put on four developmental categories which are particularly relevant to Carroll's books. These will be presented briefly in a separate chapter. In addition to Freud, a number of articles from authors exploring Alice from different psychological perspectives will be used throughout the essay to add width and depth to the analysis.

The first part of this essay's analysis – Dreams and Journeys – is different from the following two, as the developmental lines are not used in this part of the essay. In –

Dreams and Journeys what Freud writes about the child's relation to dreams and daydreams, in combination with articles written by Ann Lawson Lucas (1999), Judith Little (1976), Phyllis Stowell (1983), Anna Helle-Valle and Per-Einar Binder (2009), and Jo Elwyn Jones and J. Francis Gladstone (1998), will be used to interpret the texts.

Theoretical framework: Child Development

Looking for a theoretical framework for this essay, Anna Freud's theory on child development came up as a strong option. The essay needed a theory which dealt with child development in a manageable way, and which was compatible with the Alice-books. Since several of the articles which have been written on the Alice-books use the theories of Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud's theory seemed promising, as it was influenced by her father's work (Freud 3-11). The decision made was to use an abbreviated version of Anna Freud's theory. In her book *Normality and Pathology in Childhood – Assessments of Development* (1965), Freud presents a number of developmental lines. These lines present the child's development in a number of different categories relating to eating, playing, social interaction etc.

In the book *Psychoanalysis and Developmental Therapy* (1998), Anne Hurry points to how neurological studies have shown that the early years in life are important from a psychological as well as neurological point of view (34). She also writes that "Psychic development is a lifelong process, subject to both inner and outer influences, the outcome of a continuous interaction between what is innate [...] and the relationships and circumstances that we encounter"(32). She goes on to say that today, interest is often focused on what can be seen as innate (32). Hurry believes that the increasing knowledge in this area should help to offer suitable treatments. However, she adds that too much emphasis on the innate can lead to an oversimplification of complex phenomena. This is one of the reasons why Anna Freud's theories are still relevant in psychology today. As Hurry puts it "we are not doomed [...] to enact [innate psychological] patterns. Brain modifications do occur throughout life, and, as Anna Freud indicated, relationships and events in day-to-day life can provide an opportunity for change and growth at all stages" (33-34). In the foreword of the same book, Anne-Marie Sandler writes that Anna Freud's developmental approach is much like the object relational approach which the Independent Analysts in the United Kingdom use (Hurry xiv).

Though A. Freud's developmental lines can still be useful today, large parts of her book are outdated (especially the sections on homosexuality and the way she defines

normality). Therefore, the abbreviated theory used in this essay will consist mainly of four of the developmental lines presented in her book. This is viable as the purpose of the essay is not to determine whether or not Alice is a “normal” child, but to explore her development through the books. Freud presents five different developmental lines, separately dealing with the child’s development in relation to: eating, bowel and bladder control, self-preservation, relating to other individuals, and playing and working. Out of these, the one dealing with bowel and bladder control has been omitted in this essay as it did not appear relevant to the analysis.

The first of Freud’s developmental lines referred to in this essay deals with the child’s developing relation to food. Freud titles this category “From Suckling to Rational Eating” (Freud 69), and divides it into six developmental stages which the child goes through from infancy to early/pre-adolescence (69-72). Only stages 4-6 will be explained here, as the earlier stages will not be dealt with in the essay. The fourth stage of the child’s relation to food is largely defined by “the disagreements with the [parent] about the quantity of intake being shifted to the form of intake, i.e., table manners...”(Freud 70). In this stage the meals become an opportunity for the child to express general dissatisfactions with the parents. At the same time, the child usually develops food fads and a sweet-tooth. In the fifth stage, the child should start to separate the concepts “food” and “mother”. During this period the child might develop a number of “irrational attitudes towards eating” (Freud 71), for example: fear of poison, fear of overeating, and fear of both eating in general and going to the toilet. When the child has reached the end of the sixth and final stage of this development, it should “increase in the rational attitudes to food and self determination in eating...” (Freud 71). The individual should have retained its pleasure in eating, and the foundation for adult preferences and eventual addictions should be formed (72).

The second developmental line, which Anna Freud titles “From Irresponsibility to Responsibility in Body Management” (76), focuses on the child’s idea of self-preservation. This line is comprised of three stages. The first of these stages should according to Freud take place during the first months of the child’s life. During this period the child learns to redirect physical actions of aggression (biting, scratching etc.) from the own body to external objects. This progress should take place partly as a result of the development of the pain barrier in the child, and partly as a reaction to correct parenting. The second stage encompasses a much larger span of development. During this stage, while the child’s ego develops, it should become increasingly self-aware and start to understand concepts such as cause and effect, and the dangers of for example heights, water and fire. Thus, by the end of this stage, the child

should have acquired at least a basic instinct of self-preservation. Reaching the third stage, the child learns to see the advantages of properly looking after its own hygiene, and avoiding ill-health. Still, Freud states, when not under the influence of threats in the form of guilt, anxiety or fear, most “normal” children can be exceedingly careless and uncompromising about their own health. All the way into adolescence, the child can use threats to its own health as a means of controlling its parents (76-77).

The developmental line dealing with the child’s changing relation to play contra work, by Freud entitled “From the Body to the Toy and From Play to Work” (79) is divided into six separate stages. The first of these stages is not really relevant to this essay, and so that stage will be disregarded. At stage two the child’s activities and play are no longer exclusively connected to its own or a parent’s body. It is during this stage that the child starts to form a relation to a so called transitional object, usually a blanket, or soft toy. The focus of the child’s play is then slowly transferred from the parent to the object. Reaching the third stage, the child’s relationship to the one transitional object develops into a more indiscriminate fondness of toys, which the child uses to act out its emotions. The inanimate objects can be treated roughly and without consistency. This enables the child to be inconsistently loving or aggressive without risking reprisals. During the fourth stage, soft toys are marginalised, in favour of toys which serve more constructive purposes (79-83). At this stage children tend to prefer playthings which either promote ego-activities such as opening-shutting/filling-emptying, provide pleasure in mobility (for example toys with wheels), can be used for construction and destruction (building blocks etc.), or toys that can be used in role-play. Once the child enters the fifth stage it becomes increasingly interested in problem solving and task completion (Freud 81). According to Freud, the pleasure in achievement is present already in the very young child, though unless properly encouraged, it can stay latent until a fairly late age. However, it is not until the child has entered this stage that it will profit from schooling. Though at this stage, the child’s pleasure in performance is still tightly linked to gratification in the form of approval or praise from its surroundings. The sixth and final stage on the play-work developmental line is largely characterised by a transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. This change enables the child to use materials more positively and constructively, and reduces the impulses to throw, take apart and make a mess of things. It will also become able to see the advantages of overcoming initial frustration and lack of pleasure for the pleasure of the final achievement. During this period things like daydreaming and games will gain importance to the child. As role-playing, and activities connected with toys become less important, the fantasies etc. which used to be expressed in

play now take the form of conscious daydreams and fantasies. These continue to be important all through adolescence and often into adulthood (80-83).

The final developmental line used in the analysis in this essay deals with the child's way of relating to other people. Freud titles this development "From Egocentricity to Companionship" (78) and it consists of four stages. The infant, in the first stage does not relate to anyone but the self and the parent/parents. Other individuals are either not acknowledged, or seen simply as rivals to the attention of the parent. As the child moves into the second stage, it starts to acknowledge other children, but relates to them as physical objects which can be handled without regard, and without expectance of reprisals. It is not until the third phase that the child is really able to interact with other children. This phase is entered when the child begins to see other children as helpmates. Now the child should be able to cooperate to carry out tasks such as building, playing and causing mischief. Once the child reaches the fourth phase, it starts to view other children as individuals in their own right. Around this time the child can form real friendship and feel love, hate, admiration, fear etc. towards others (78-79).

According to Freud, a child is expected to have a fairly even development to be seen as a harmonious personality. This means that when a child has reached one stage on the scale of emotional maturity, it should also have reached the corresponding stages of bodily independence. However, Freud points out that even though there is the expectation of children keeping to this norm, in reality many children deviate from this even development (84-85).

Dreams and Journeys – Significance of the frame-stories

According to Freud, daydreaming is an important part of the child's development. This is interesting as well as relevant in relation to the Alice-books, as they both take place in some sort of dream-dimension. The stories both start off with Alice being bored or drowsy in the real world, they proceed to her entering the dream-world, and end very clearly with her waking up (Carroll 11,125, 136,140, 267). As mentioned earlier, daydreams enable the child to live out fantasies which used to be acted out in the play (Freud, 83). Assuming that Alice is about seven years old in the first book (Jones and Gladstone, 7) it is reasonable to assume that she would just be entering the developmental phase where daydreams begin to take over the role of playing. Looking at these books from a Freudian developmental perspective thus means that we should regard both of the dream-worlds as images of Alice's wishes, fears and fantasies.

In the article “Enquiring mind, Rebellious Spirit: Alice and Pinocchio as Nonmodel Children”, Ann Lawson Lucas claims that the trials of Wonderland are shocking to Alice, as she is used to privilege and comfort in her normal life. Lucas also states that the trials of Wonderland derive from members of an elevated social order, whom Alice does not always respect (166). The claim that Alice is very shocked by Wonderland seems mildly overstated. Alice rarely appears more than slightly surprised or possibly annoyed with her experiences in either of the dream worlds. For example, when the white rabbit orders the lizard-gardeners to “...burn the house down!” (Carroll 42) with Alice in it, Alice’s reaction is to loudly yell back: “If you do. I’ll set Dinah at you!” (42). Upon meeting the Queen of Hearts, one of Alice’s first reflections is that “they’re only a pack of cards [...] I needn’t be afraid of them!” (81), and when the Queen questions Alice, she answers rudely and without a hint of either fear or shock (81).

There are however two instances, one in each book, where Alice is seriously taken aback. In Wonderland, Alice is shaken enough to start crying after she’s grown so large she is stuck in the room with all the doors (20). In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice is upset enough to start crying when Tweedledum and Tweedledee claim that she is not real, but only a thing in the Red king’s dream (Carroll 185). In the first book, the reason for Alice’s breakdown seems to be a combination of not knowing who she is, and a fear of being lost and forgotten (23). In the second story, her fear is of a more existential nature – She is afraid that she might not exist at all (185). On both of these occasions, Alice’s experience of identity is shaken. This is something which Anna Helle-Valle and Per-Einar Binder claim to be an important theme throughout *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (17).

Alice’s confusion in relation to identity can easily be connected to another theme which Helle-Valle and Binder, as well as the scholar Phyllis Stowell find to be present in the first story. These scholars all agree that Alice’s first adventure can be seen as a metaphor of growing up (Helle-Valle and Binder 19) (Stowell 5). While Wonderland can seem rather a far cry from what most people might call healthy or normal, this interpretation is rather close to the initial conclusions which can be drawn from applying Anna Freud’s theories to parts of both books.

Looking at Alice’s dream-worlds in general, it is relevant to briefly address some other expressions of the heroine’s psyche and intellect throughout the two books. As Lawson Lucas points out in her article, Alice is a very intellectual character (159). The fact that Alice’s thoughts are presented, throughout both stories, as being of equal interest to the reader as the actual events taking place, makes it seem like the two are equally important to

the stories (Lawson Lucas 159). There appears to be a connection between thoughts and events in the two worlds. What Alice thinks and what happens around her is presented side by side as if there was nothing separating the one from the other. Continuing this line of thought, it is easy to discover signs of magical omnipotence (Helle-Valle and Binder 19), primarily in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice's dream-world changes ever so often in accordance with her desires. For example after she has lost her way again, leaving the Mad Hatter's tea party, a door magically opens in a tree to let Alice back into the room with all the doors (Carroll 77). Just like many children much younger than Alice can experience the world as adjusting to their thoughts and wishes, Wonderland changes to accommodate Alice.

According to Helle-Valle and Binder, the child's play and exploration of creativity are vital to its discovery of the surrounding world. Through dreaming and pretending, the child can discover things "between subjectivity and objectivity, where inner reality and conventional truth meet" (17). This makes it possible to argue that Alice's daydreams might advantageously be seen as more than idle fantasies. They can be interpreted as her attempt at understanding and explaining of the world around her. What part of her reality then might it be that Alice is exploring, and what conclusions, if any, does she come to?

The events in the first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are interesting, as they resemble an image of birth, or rather the opposite, a reversed birth. Alice's journey begins unexpectedly and unintentionally. She enters Wonderland by falling through a long, dark tunnel, something that several scholars have interpreted as a symbol of birth (Little 196). However, this interpretation would be more convincing if Alice came out at the end of the tunnel. As it is, Alice falls into the tunnel, goes through a dark corridor, and ends up in a confined room. This room she later ends up filling completely, after which she is immersed in water. The first real hardship which Alice comes across is finding the very small door into "the beautiful garden". Upon first finding it locked, she miraculously gets hold of the key through a display of what can be interpreted as magical omnipotence (Helle-Valle and Binder 19). Finding herself much too large to fit through the door, she tries to wish her way out of the situation again. But instead of succeeding in her endeavour, she ends up growing to grotesque proportions.

Close-reading the book from this perspective, a strong regressive symbolism can be found throughout the story. There is actually no indication that Alice ever leaves the large room with all the doors during the first part of the book. After shrinking and falling into her own pool of tears at the very beginning of the story, Alice eventually manages to get to shore.

All sorts of animals and other creatures appear around her, but there is no indication that she ever leaves the room with the doors until the second part of the story when she finally succeeds in entering the garden. This makes it possible to argue that the garden is essentially different from the rest of Wonderland, as it is located outside the confines of the room.

Turning our eyes to *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice enters the new world by going through her own mirror image. This can be interpreted as a symbol of entering the self, or seeing past one's own reflection. Once on the other side, Alice does not go through any obvious, sudden changes. Instead, she works to achieve one major change: to go from being a pawn to being a queen. In this book Alice gives the impression of being more determined than in the last one. Even though she encounters one strange character after the other, Alice keeps her eyes on the eighth square, and eventually manages to get there.

In her article "Liberated Alice: Dodgson's female hero as domestic rebel", Judith Little calls Alice's adventures "a comic compendium of feminist issues" (Little 195). She argues that the two adventures form a journey during which Alice "advances towards, and ultimately resists, Victorian womanhood" (195). The claim that the books are essentially about rejection of Victorian womanhood might seem to be a bit of a stretch. However, Alice exploring the idea of growing up does fit well with the storyline of *Through the Looking-Glass*. In the frame-story of *Through the Looking-Glass* Alice is playing the parent with her kitten, scolding it and handing out punishments (Carroll 135-140). This pretend-play leads on to Alice's dream exploration of a world where everything is backwards and she can grow from pawn to queen in only eight steps. At the end of the journey, Alice succeeds in her endeavour to transform only to realise that that things are not easier for a queen. The characters around her still will not live up to her expectations. Alice ends up losing her temper with the disorderly dinner guests and shaking the Red Queen, who shrinks and turns into a kitten thus bringing Alice back to reality.

Mushrooms and Duels – Relations to food and physical threats

According to Anna Freud's developmental lines, Alice ought to have gained at least stage six on the developmental line in relation to food, already in the first book. She should have a fairly sober or possibly somewhat enthusiastic attitude towards food and eating. When it comes to the developmental line relating to self preservation, it is reasonable to suggest that she should have reached the third, or at least, the second stage. This means that Alice (in Wonderland) should be aware of as well as cautious about dangers around her (Freud 71, 76-

77). In looking-glass land, being only about 6 months older (Carroll 196), Alice would not be expected to have developed much from the last book.

There appear to be some decided differences between how foodstuffs as well as physical threats are portrayed in the two books. Looking at the beginnings of the stories, the categories of eating, and physical risk seem slightly more applicable to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* than to *Through the Looking-Glass*. Alice's first experiences in Wonderland are connected to physical danger; she falls down a deep hole, grows so small she is on the verge of disappearing, and slips into a lake. Many of these experiences take place in connection to eating or drinking, for example drinking from the bottle marked "drink me" and eating the cakes saying "eat me" (Carroll 12-24). Further into the stories however, there are plenty of references to both physical danger and foods in looking-glass land as well. Upon meeting the Red Queen, Alice is offered a biscuit which is so very dry that Alice "had never been so nearly choked in all her life" (161). Sometime later, Alice comes upon the looking-glass insects, two of which are made out of food stuffs. One of Alice's first reflections is wondering what they live off, to which she gets the answer that they always starve to death (170).

Ann Lawson Lucas writes that Alice is "experimental with the physical world" (160). According to Lawson Lucas, Alice does not take physical risk just for the sake of sheer adventure. Instead, she argues, Alice takes risks because they engage her mind (160). Alice does seem to be experimental with her surroundings, tasting, touching and exploring everything around her. Helle-Valle and Binder give another reason for Alice's heedless reactions to the physical risks she encounters. They argue that the reason Alice "does not think twice about jumping down the rabbit-hole" (Helle-Valle and Binder 18) is that the serene environment she seems to have grown up in has created a sense of security which promotes her independent exploration.

The first physical danger which Alice is subjected to is falling down the deep hole (Carroll 12). It seems slightly exaggerated to claim that Alice is "jumping down the rabbit-hole" (Helle-Valle and Binder 18). Alice is curious, but crawling after a rabbit is hardly synonymous with taking a conscious physical risk. In the room with all the doors Alice slips and falls into the pool of tears, possibly due to carelessness, but hardly on purpose (Carroll 23). In Wonderland, Alice grows and shrinks more or less uncontrollably as she drinks and eats. But eating cake and drinking lemonade is not normally connected to this type of danger, and on finding the first bottle labelled "drink me", Alice looks carefully to see that it is not marked poison (16). Attending the Queen of Hearts' croquet game, Alice is threatened with decapitation without having done much to provoke the Queen. In looking-glass land Alice is

offered biscuits when she is thirsty, is told she does not exist, and ends up in the middle of a duel much by chance (161,184, 231). Physical danger does seem to come her way without her being able to prevent it. Alice falls, slips and is threatened, still it seems as if she only rarely takes physical risks intentionally, in either of her adventures.

However, the way Alice reacts to threats, once they become obvious, is rather interesting as it can tell us something of her development. The fact that Alice does not reflect on the danger in falling from such a great height when tumbling down the rabbit-hole can be connected to the child's distancing itself from the protection of its own body (Carroll 12-14, Freud 77). According to Freud, a child should have acquired a fair amount of self-preservation already at the second stage on this developmental line. This stage ought to have been achieved at a fairly young age, and Alice definitely seems to be of an age where she should have reached this stage some time ago (77). Still, when she is exposed to the risk of physical harm in Wonderland she never seems to see the real danger. A striking example besides the fall down the rabbit-hole is Alice's sober reflection after she falls into the tear-lake: "I wish I hadn't cried so much!" [...] 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears! That *will* [sic] be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer today" (Carroll 24). She does not appear the least bit frightened.

Since it seems safe to assume that Alice is neither so very young as the developmental stages would point to, nor so very foolhardy as Helle-Valle and Binder would imply, how then could her reactions be analyzed? One way to interpret Alice's seemingly infantile oblivion to concrete physical danger in the first book, in combination with her eagerness to check bottles for labels marked poison, is that she is in fact regressing in this story. This perspective matches the deductions made about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in the last chapter. According to Freud, regression is to some extent part of a child's "normal" development (93-107). It seems logical that the combination of daydreaming and experimental regression which appears to be present in Wonderland would occur at Alice's age. She has started taking lessons at home (Carroll 13), and expectations from her parents and other adults might be increasing. This would make it appealing to dream of a simpler time without homework and with more time to play. The safe environment from which she comes enables Alice not to explore the physical world, but to calmly take on her subconscious, and deal with the transition from earlier developmental stages.

The second dream-world, looking-glass land, appears to be somewhat more violent than Wonderland. Here, there are several physical conflicts, for instance Tweedledee and Tweedledum's duel (Carroll 188), the fight between the Red and the White Knight (232),

the Lion and Unicorn's fight (223), and the story of the Jabberwocky (148). However, compared to the first book Alice herself is subjected to very few physical threats in *Through the Looking-Glass*. In this book, the heroine appears to be more of an observer, witnessing the other characters' violence and physical risk-taking.

Food appears problematic in both worlds. In Wonderland, food is capricious, as it makes Alice shrink or grow seemingly at random. Many inhabitants of Wonderland also seem to have very problematic relations to food; the Mad Hatter and March Hare's never ending tea party, the Mock turtle crying while singing of soup, and the Queen of hearts threatening to execute the knave of hearts over a plate of tarts. Food seems almost threatening in a way. The story seems to imply a somewhat ambiguous relation to food. On the one hand, Alice will drink an unknown substance, and snack on a mushroom so long as it is not marked poison. But some part of her, the part represented by Wonderland, seems to harbor some of the fears characteristic to the fifth food phase.

In his paper, Schilder calls attention to how oral frustration in combination with a constantly changing body-image causes Alice anxiety throughout her adventure in Wonderland (Grotjahn 309). Schilder's classical Freudian reading fits well together with Anna Freud's views on the child's relation to food. I will not go as far as Schilder's connecting Alice's oral frustration to "extreme aggressivity" (Grotjahn 309), but from the perspective of Anna Freud's developmental lines, there are clear signs of regression in Alice's way of relating to food and drink in Wonderland.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, food does seem to be less problematic than in Wonderland. At the very beginning of the story Alice does half-choke on a biscuit, but apart from that food does not appear to be a common threat to her physical wellbeing. Most food in looking-glass land is animated; bread-and-butterflies, snap-dragon-flies, the oysters, Humpty Dumpty and the Mutton and Pudding at the banquet. Alice starts out fascinated by the food-insects, she feels some pity for the oysters, she is baffled by Humpty Dumpty, and finally ends up very much annoyed that she is not allowed to eat neither the mutton nor the pudding. There has obviously been some change in Alice's relation to food from the first story, but wherein lies the change? Strictly looking at Freud's stages, Alice does seem to have reached the sixth food-stage in the looking-glass story (Freud 69-72). Unlike in Wonderland, looking-glass-food does not bring about any drastic changes, and Alice does not feel a need to check for poison before she eats or drinks. There are however a couple of instances in *Through the Looking-Glass* where Alice seems ill at ease in relation to eating and drinking.

The first mentioning of food is at the very beginning of the story, when Alice is scolding the black kitten for having pushed before its sister to get to the milk (Carroll 138). Alice proceeds to contemplate over punishments and her own punishments when she has been naughty:

“You know [Kitty] I’m saving up all your punishments for Wednesday week – Suppose they had saved up all *my* [sic] punishments! [...] I should have to go without fifty dinners all at once! Well, I shouldn’t mind *that* [sic] much! I’d far rather go without them than eat them!” (138)

This sober reflection on starvation seems rather dark for a child of seven. Freud (72) writes that once food intake has become a personal concern, after food stage six, what used to be feeding confrontations with the mother can manifest itself in internal conflicts. Alice’s being seemingly far advanced on the food developmental line, while still manifesting clear issues in relation to eating, seems to correspond to this development.

In two of the most distinct conflicts relating to food in *Through the Looking-Glass*, food is rather a means for the adults to vex Alice than anything else. This can easily be connected to Alice’s musings on food and punishment in the frame story. At the beginning of her journey through looking-glass land Alice complains that she is thirsty and is in response offered a very dry biscuit. The complication here, in relating to this backwards reality, is that Alice refuses to seem rude and therefore eats the biscuit (Carroll 161). In this instance it is worth questioning whether or not it is the biscuit in itself that is problematic. It could be argued that it is rather the adult figure, the Red Queen, who is the cause of Alice’s discomfort. This can be connected to similar cases later on in the story, when Alice meets the White Queen. The White Queen wants to hire Alice as a lady’s maid, stating that she will have “Twopence a week, and jam every other day” (192). Alice explains that she is not interested in the position and adds that she does not want any jam “today, at any rate”. Upon hearing this the Queen retorts that Alice “couldn’t have it even if [she] *did* [sic] want it [...] The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today.” (193). Later on, the same Queen, now in the shape of a sheep, sells Alice an egg: “The sheep took the money [...] then she said, ‘I never put things into people’s hands – that would never do [...]’ And so saying, she went off to the other end of the shop, and set the egg upright on a shelf.” (203) Before Alice can get to the egg it has turned into Humpty Dumpty, and so she never gets to eat it (204). These

events indicate that in *Through the Looking-Glass*, food can be seen as a symbol for grownups methods of controlling children.

Just like in the real world, situations relating to food often end in some sort of conflict. Alice is told that she is in the wrong, or how things are done. She is held back and made to listen though what she really wants is to move forwards to a place where she will no longer have to be subjected to the authority of others. The next couple of confrontations with food are all instances of food being or becoming alive. Alice is inquisitive and pensive in her relation to the animated food. Her reactions vary slightly between the encounters, but what seems to carry through in all of them is her anxiousness to please and not give offence, in combination with fear at the idea that the food might be hurt or even die (Carroll 168-205). Having been shown the Looking-Glass-insects, Alice expresses a keen interest in what they live off. Upon being told that the insects rarely find enough food and always die, Alice seems genuinely taken aback (170). Later on, upon meeting Tweedledee and Tweedledum, Alice really wishes to press on (178), but as she hates to seem rude, she stays on to hear the entire story of the walrus and the carpenter. As soon as the story is done Alice is quick to try and decide which of the two characters is the least bad. When she is told that both of them were just as interested in eating the oysters, Alice quickly decides that they are “both very unpleasant characters” (183).

However, later on in the story Alice contradicts herself, becoming indignant when the Red Queen prevents her from eating any of the banquet food – “it isn’t etiquette to cut anyone you’ve been introduced to” (259). Here, at the very feast celebrating Alice’s entry into adulthood, etiquette prevents her from eating anything. Alice realises that no matter her age she will always be subjected to other people’s rules and requirements and that there is no merit for her in growing up. The anger Alice displays at the turmoil around the table can easily be connected to Freud’s fourth stage in the developmental line concerning eating. According to Freud, the child might quite naturally use mealtimes to display general dissatisfaction with its parental figures (Freud 72).

Cats and Chess-Games – Relations to people and employment

Having decided on Alice being seven years old in the first book, and seven and a half in the second, it is reasonable to argue that she is old enough to have entered Freud’s fourth stage in relating to other people, and at least the fifth stage on the developmental line from play to work (Freud 78-80). This would mean that she should be able to identify with other

individuals, acknowledge their feelings and be able to respect them. Alice should also have begun to feel pleasure in accomplishment, and so her activities should have started to become slightly more achievement oriented.

The frame-stories provide a hint of there being changes in Alice's motivation in relation to work and play between the two books. In these frame-stories, Alice is presented much the same. She sits half idle, drowsily contemplating some activity (Carroll 11, 135-136). In the first story Alice never gets around to making her wreath. The white rabbit interrupts her train of thought, and she enters the dream-world much by chance (Carroll 12). In comparison to the second story, there seems to be some significant differences. Here, Alice goes back to winding yarn after the kitten has made a mess (Carroll 136). She seems mildly intent on getting the job done. Here Alice's work is interrupted by her train of thought wondering off to the looking-glass (Carroll 140-141), and it is much in the spirit of empirical enquiry that she finds her way into Looking-glass land.

We are told in the first book that Alice has attended day-school, and that she takes pleasure in showing off her knowledge (Carroll 96). Freud (81) states that children do not start to receive pleasure from finishing a task until they reach the fifth play to work-phase. Thus it would seem that Alice is rather far advanced on Freud's play to work-scale already in Wonderland. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the entire structure of the story could reasonably form an argument for Alice having entered fully into the last play-work-phase. This book takes on the form of a game of chess, a rather complicated and very means-to-an-end-oriented game which could not be understood or carried out by any child in the earlier developmental stages (Freud 83-84). Very early on in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice takes on a decided goal – to become queen – and her motivation for achieving this goal is entirely her own, not dependent on the praise or approval of an adult (Carroll 159). These are strong indications of Alice being fully mature in her relation to occupation (Freud 82-83).

Both stories contain experiences of futile exertions, of Alice trying to get somewhere only to end up where she started. In Wonderland Alice travels for most of the story just to end up back in the room with the many doors. And in *Through the Looking-Glass* her journey starts out with her walking and walking only to end up at the door of the house over and over again. The main difference between the two stories, from this aspect, is that in the second book Alice soon figures out how to get where she wants to go, while in the first book it seems to be pure chance that she finally gets to the beautiful garden.

Taking into consideration the more obvious examples of play and work presented in the two journeys, one can easily spot decided differences. In Wonderland for

instance, Alice comes across several variations of traditional games which all seem to have lost their point. There are no clear goals. The most obvious examples would be the Caucus race and the game of croquet. Both the race and the croquet-game have been reduced to characters running about without any pattern, cheating and behaving like small children (Carroll 30, 83-84). In addition, Alice's chase after the white rabbit, and the Cheshire cat's appearing and disappearing give an impression of a game of tag or hide and seek. The games in Looking-Glass land give an altogether different impression. Here the entire world is a game of chess, with the rules laid out and properly presented beforehand by the Red Queen (161-162). Moving through this all-encompassing game, Alice does not come across very many characters playing. Most examples of what can be defined as games in Looking-Glass land have the character of war- or fighting-games. For instance there is the White Knight dueling the Red Knight, and there is Tweedledee and Tweedledum fighting over the broken rattle (188-189, 231-232). The overall impression of the worlds provided by the representation of games is that Wonderland is a more childish place than Looking-Glass land.

The characters which Alice comes across in the two stories all seem rather nonsensical, but taking a closer look it turns out that there are some significant overall differences between the inhabitants of the two worlds. In Wonderland most characters are rude. They seem fond of trying to boss Alice around, for instance; the rabbit telling Alice to fetch new gloves (Carroll 36), the caterpillar telling her off (51), the duchess telling her to look after the baby (61), the Cheshire cat telling her she is mad and the Queen of Hearts ordering her around first at the game of croquet and then at the trial (65, 81, 82, 120-124). At a first glance Alice can seem almost mature in relation to all the madness around her. Looking closer however, one can clearly see Alice's childishness and defiance shining through. She often talks back to the other characters, and she does not seem to respect any of them, saying things like "he's perfectly idiotic!" (58), "Nobody asked *your* [sic] opinion" (75), and "How should I know? [...] It's no business of *mine* [sic]." (81). When Alice does as she has been asked in Wonderland, her most frequent motivation seems to be fear of some kind. According to Freud younger children's motivation is usually connected to the praise or threats of their surrounding, while more mature children can motivate themselves (81-82).

Throughout *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* Alice seems to find herself in conflict with almost every other character she meets. Some of the most obvious examples of this are her meeting with the caterpillar, her visit with the Mad Hatter, and her final row with everyone in the courtroom. Looking at Freud's developmental line dealing with companionship, she points out that children have a hard time relating to each other before the

fourth and final stage (Freud 78-79). Alice's difficulty in interacting with the inhabitants of Wonderland can thus be read as a sign of her exploring earlier developmental phases. This becomes even more convincing when taking note of a number of incidents between other Wonderland-characters. There are some very clear examples of characters treating each other as lifeless objects. For example the Duchess throwing the baby at Alice, and The Mad Hatter and March Hare trying to stuff the Dormouse into a teapot, are both examples of characters behaving as if they had not left the second developmental stage (Carroll 61, 77) (Freud 78). Assuming that Alice is in fact exploring regression in Wonderland, her meeting with the caterpillar takes on a new and interesting meaning. Just like Helle-Valle and Binder write, Alice tries to relate to the Caterpillar (22). Alice is afraid of the changes connected to growing up, and wants to have this feeling confirmed as reasonable. Alas, the endeavour to connect to the other character fails as the Caterpillar refuses to admit to the strangeness of his future metamorphosis (Carroll 46).

On her second journey, Alice appears to relate to the other characters in a more mature way. She is trying hard to avoid being rude, and she shows some amount of respect of authority. At the very start of the story, upon meeting the Red queen, Alice curtsseys and attempts to keep on the sovereign's good side (Carroll 157-162). This is a clear change from how Alice first greeted the Queen of Hearts in Wonderland, when she refused to bow, and commented on the court being nothing but part of a deck of cards (81). Alice's way of treating these two queens is rather representative of the difference in her way of relating to characters in the two worlds. In Looking-Glass land Alice gives the overall impression of not wanting to offend people. Alice's concern with other characters' feelings and welfare in this book makes her seem rather more mature than she was in Wonderland.

Alice is not the only one who appears to have changes in *Through the Looking-Glass*, in this dream-world, far fewer of the characters take on strong authoritarian roles in relation to the heroine. There are the kings and queens, but it is only the Red Queen who can act convincingly as Alice's superior. Many of the characters seem to need Alice's help, and Alice appears rather willing to do what she can. Indeed, in relation to many of the Looking-Glass characters Alice seems to take on a rather caring role (Carroll 187-188, 192, 207, 232-239). Judith Bloomingdale claims that "Alice assumes increasingly maternal characteristics in her journey" (Bloomingdale 389), and upon first looking at Alice's way of relating to the other characters, this might seem true. Indeed it might be true throughout most of the journey. However, the heroine is still rather impatient with the people surrounding her. And in the end she acts anything but maternal when she loses her temper at the banquet.

Conclusion

Reading the two books about Alice from the perspective of child developmental psychology does open up some rather interesting possibilities of interpreting the stories. Even though Alice does not seem to have developed much herself between the two stories, the dreams themselves can be interpreted as important stages in her psychological development.

In the first book, Alice takes a trip down the rabbit hole into her earlier childhood. She explores her fear of growing up, of physical as well as psychological transformation. Alice grows larger than a tree and is shrunk smaller than a mouse, she forgets all she knew before and learns new things. However this new knowledge is often nonsensical and pointless. Alice is scared of growing up, and dreams of the possibility of going back to earliest childhood, to experience the bliss of ignorance and no responsibilities. But as it turns out, going back is not as easy as it seems. Coming eye to eye with earlier developmental phases makes Alice realise that permanent regression is not an option. Having re-experienced the ignorance, confusion and meaningless conflicts of infancy, Alice realises that in the end she will grow up, and this might not be all bad. Having come to this realisation Alice literally grows out of the absurd playing card courtroom and wakes up.

The journey through the looking-glass is similar, only here Alice does not explore her past, but her future. She longs to be in charge, not only over her kitten but over herself. Alice identifies the way in which adults use, among other things, food to control and discipline her. She goes through the reflection of herself, on a fantasy-trip towards adulthood in the form of becoming queen. Alice enters looking-glass land as a child, a pawn. She is treated like a child by the adults of looking-glass land, the royalties. They offer her food when she is thirsty, and refuse to give her food that she has paid for. They try to discipline and instruct her, even though Alice often seems to have more common sense than they do.

Alice struggles to stay on the good side of everyone, helping out where she can, and keeping her eyes on the goal. But throughout her journey characters will not stop their attempts at controlling her. Still, Alice presses on, finally reaching the eighth square. But when she at long last gets her crown she can not get into her own castle, and the banquet arranged to celebrate her is a mess. The Red Queen still attempts to control her intake of food, and by extension Alice herself, telling her she may not eat what she wishes. It is not easier to be a queen than it was to be a pawn – a grown woman may not have an easier life than a little girl. Alice sees that she might as well stay a child for as long as possible – she wrecks the party, wakes up and goes back to playing with her kitten.

It is doubtful whether or not Charles Dodgson (or Lewis Carroll as we have come to know him) wrote either of the Alice books with the child's mental development in mind. It is more likely that he simply wanted to amuse people with his whimsical stories. However, this does not render the conclusions drawn by this essay any less valid. The notion that Alice travels through her own subconscious, exploring her past and future, brings out something new in a familiar story, making it pristine and exciting again, even to those who know the story well. The combination of Anna Freud's theories with Carroll's story, and the idea of a journey into the subconscious opens up to the idea of looking into possible connection between the author's childhood and the child he has imagined and brought to life. Further explorations might bring out even more exciting aspects and possibilities from the book we thought we knew.

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