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Nina Auerbach

ALICE AND WONDERLAND: A CURIOUS CHILD

“What—is—this?” he said at last.

“This is a child!” Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her . . . “We only found it today. It’s as large as life, and twice as natural!”

“I always thought they were fabulous monsters!” said the Unicorn. “Is it alive?”¹

FOR MANY OF US LEWIS CARROLL’S TWO *Alice* BOOKS MAY HAVE PROVIDED the first glimpse into Victorian England. With their curious blend of literal-mindedness and dream, formal etiquette and the logic of insanity, they tell the adult reader a great deal about the Victorian mind. Alice herself, prim and earnest in pinafore and pumps, confronting a world out of control by looking for the rules and murmuring her lessons, stands as one image of the Victorian middle-class child. She sits in Tenniel’s first illustration to *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* in a snug, semi-foetal position, encircled by a protective armchair and encircling a plump kitten and a ball of yarn. She seems to be a beautiful child, but the position of her head makes her look as though she had no face. She muses dreamily on the snowstorm raging outside, part of a series of circles within circles, enclosures within enclosures, suggesting the self-containment of innocence and eternity.

Behind the purity of this design lie two Victorian domestic myths: Wordsworth’s “seer blessed,” the child fresh from the Imperial Palace and still washed by his continuing contact with “that immortal

¹ Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, edited by Martin Gardner (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960), p. 287. Future references will be to this edition and will be incorporated into the text.

sea,” and the pure woman Alice will become, preserving an oasis for God and order in a dim and tangled world. Even Victorians who did not share Lewis Carroll’s phobia about the ugliness and uncleanness of little boys saw little girls as the purest members of a species of questionable origin, combining as they did the inherent spirituality of child and woman. Carroll’s Alice seems sister to such famous figures as Dickens’ Little Nell and George Eliot’s Eppie, who embody the poise of original innocence in a fallen, sooty world.

Long after he transported Alice Liddell to Wonderland, Carroll himself deified his dream-child’s innocence in these terms:

What wert thou, dream-Alice, in thy foster-father’s eyes? How shall he picture thee? Loving, first, loving and gentle: loving as a dog (forgive the prosaic simile, but I know of no earthly love so pure and perfect), and gentle as a fawn: . . . and lastly, curious — wildly curious, and with the eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when Sin and Sorrow are but names — empty words, signifying nothing!”²

From this Alice, it is only a step to Walter de la Mare’s mystic icon, defined in the following almost Shelleyan image: “She wends serenely on like a quiet moon in a chequered sky. Apart, too, from an occasional Carrollian comment, the sole medium of the stories is *her* pellucid consciousness.”³

But when Dodgson wrote in 1887 of his gentle dream-child, the real Alice had receded into the distance of memory, where she had drowned in a pool of tears along with Lewis Carroll, her interpreter and creator. The paean quoted above stands at the end of a long series of progressive falsifications of Carroll’s first conception, beginning with Alice’s pale, attenuated presence in *Through the Looking-Glass*. For Lewis Carroll remembered what Charles Dodgson and many later commentators did not, that while *Looking-Glass* may have been the dream of the Red King, *Wonderland* is Alice’s dream. Despite critical attempts to psychoanalyze Charles Dodgson through the writings of Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was too precise a logician and too controlled an artist to confuse his own dream with that of his character. The question “who dreamed it?” underlies all Carroll’s dream tales, part of a pervasive Victorian quest for the origins of the self that culminates in the controlled regression of Freudian analysis. There is no equivocation in Carroll’s first *Alice* book: the dainty child carries the threatening kingdom of Wonderland within her. A closer look at the character of Alice may reveal new

² “Alice on the Stage,” *The Theatre*, IX (1 April 1887), 181.

³ Walter de la Mare, *Lewis Carroll* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), p. 55.

complexities in the sentimentalized and attenuated Wordsworthianism many critics have assumed she represents, and may deepen through examination of a single example our vision of that “fabulous monster,” the Victorian child.

Lewis Carroll once wrote to a child that while he forgot the story of *Alice*, “I think it was about ‘malice.’”⁴ Some Freudian critics would have us believe it was about phallus.⁵ Alice herself seems aware of the implications of her shifting name when at the beginning of her adventures she asks herself the question that will weave through her story:

I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, ‘Who in the world am I?’ Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!

(p. 37).

Other little girls traveling through fantastic countries, such as George Macdonald's Princess Irene and L. Frank Baum's Dorothy Gale, ask repeatedly “*where* am I?” rather than “*who* am I?” Only Alice turns her eyes inward from the beginning, sensing that the mystery of her surroundings is the mystery of her identity.

Even the above-ground Alice speaks in two voices, like many Victorians other than Dodgson-Carroll:

She generally gave herself very good advice, (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people.

(pp. 32–33).

The pun on “curious” defines Alice's fluctuating personality. Her eagerness to know and to be right, her compulsive reciting of her lessons (“I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things”) turn inside out into the bizarre anarchy of her dream country, as the lessons themselves turn inside out into strange and savage tales of animals eating each other. In both senses of the word, Alice becomes “curiouser and curiouser” as she moves more deeply into Wonderland; she is both the croquet game without rules and its violent arbiter, the Queen of

⁴ Letter to Dolly Argles, 28 November 1867. Quoted in *A Selection From the Letters of Lewis Carroll (The Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) to His Child-Friends*, edited by Evelyn Hatch (London: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 48–49).

⁵ See Martin Grotjahn, “About the Symbolization of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*,” *American Imago*, IV (1947), 34, for a discussion of Freud's “girl=phallus equation” in relation to Alice.

Hearts. The sea that almost drowns her is composed of her own tears, and the dream that nearly obliterates her is composed of fragments of her own personality.⁶

As Alice dissolves into her component parts to become Wonderland, so, if we examine the actual genesis of Carroll's dream child, the bold outlines of Tenniel's famous drawing dissolve into four separate figures. First, there was the real Alice Liddell, a baby belle dame, it seems, who bewitched Ruskin as well as Dodgson.⁷ A small photograph of her concludes Carroll's manuscript of *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, the first draft of *Wonderland*. She is strikingly sensuous and otherworldly; her dark hair, bangs, and large inward-turned eyes give her face a haunting and a haunted quality which is missing from Tenniel's famous illustrations. Carroll's own illustrations for *Alice's Adventures under Ground* reproduce her eeriness perfectly. This Alice has a pre-Raphaelite langour and ambiguity about her which is reflected in the shifting colors of her hair.⁸ In some illustrations, she is



CARROLL'S ALICE

⁶ Edmund Wilson's penetrating essay, "C. L. Dodgson: The Poet Logician," is the only criticism of *Alice* to touch on the relationship between dream and dreamer in relation to Alice's covert brutality: "But the creatures that she meets, the whole dream, *are* Alice's personality and her waking life. . . . she . . . has a child's primitive cruelty. . . . But though Alice is sometimes brutal, she is always well-bred." Wilson cites as examples of brutality her innuendos about Dinah to the mouse and birds. *The Shores of Light*, 2nd ed. (1952; rpt. New York: The Noonday Press, 1967), pp. 543-44.

⁷ See Florence Becker Lennon, *The Life of Lewis Carroll*, revised edition (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 151, for Ruskin's beatific description of a secret nocturnal tea party presided over by Alice Liddell.

⁸ Lewis Carroll knew the Rossetti family and photographed them several times. Dante Gabriel Rossetti later claimed that Carroll's Dormouse was inspired by his own pet wombat. Perhaps his elongated, subtly threatening heroines had a deeper, if more indirect, impact on Carroll.

indisputably brunette like Alice Liddell; in others, she is decidedly blonde like Tenniel's model Mary Hilton Badcock; and in still others, light from an unknown source hits her hair so that she seems to be both at once.⁹

Mary Hilton Badcock has little of the dream child about her.¹⁰ She is blonde and pudgy, with squinting eyes, folded arms, and an intimidating frown. In Carroll's photograph of her, the famous starched pinafore and pumps appear for the first time – Alice Liddell seems to have been photographed in some sort of nightdress – and Mary moves easily into the clean, no-nonsense child of the Tenniel drawings. Austin Dobson wrote,

Enchanting Alice! Black-and-white
Has made your charm perennial;
And nought save "Chaos and old Night"
Can part you now from Tenniel.

But a bit of research can dissolve what has been in some ways a misleading identification of Tenniel's Alice with Carroll's, obscuring some of the darker shadings of the latter.¹¹ Carroll himself initiated the shift from the subtly disturbing Alice Liddell to the blonde and stolid Mary Badcock as "under ground" became the jollier-sounding "Wonderland," and the undiscovered country in his dream child became a nursery classic.

The demure propriety of Tenniel's Alice may have led readers to see her role in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as more passive than it is. Although her size changes seem arbitrary and terrifying, she in fact directs them; only in the final courtroom scene does she change size without first wishing to, and there, her sudden growth gives her the power to break out of a dream that has become too dangerous. Most of Wonderland's savage songs come from Alice: the Caterpillar, Gryphon and Mock Turtle know that her cruel parodies of contemporary moralistic doggerel are "wrong from beginning to end."¹² She is almost always threatening to the animals of Wonderland. As the

⁹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures under Ground: A Facsimile of the 1864 manuscript*, edited by Martin Gardner (New York: Dover Publications, 1965).

¹⁰ There is some debate as to whether Tenniel actually used the photograph of Mary Badcock as a model for his illustrations. Carroll, who was never fully satisfied with Tenniel's work, claimed he did not and so the head and feet of his drawing were sometimes out of proportion. But the resemblance between drawing and photograph is so great that I think we must assume he did.

¹¹ George Shelton Hubbell, "Triple Alice," *Sewanee Review*, XLVIII (April 1940), 174-196, discusses some of the differences between Tenniel's Alice and Carroll's.

¹² It is significant that the Alice of *Looking-Glass*, a truly passive figure, is sung at more than she sings; the reverse is true in *Wonderland*. Tweedledum and Tweedledee sing the most savage song in *Looking-Glass*, "The Walrus and the Carpenter," which seems to bore Alice.

mouse and birds almost drown in her pool of tears, she eyes them with a strange hunger which suggests that of the *Looking-Glass* Walrus who weeps at the Oysters while devouring them behind his handkerchief. Her persistent allusions to her predatory cat Dinah and to a “nice little dog, near our house,” who “kills all the rats” finally drive the animals away, leaving Alice to wonder forlornly – and disingenuously – why nobody in Wonderland likes Dinah.



TENNIEL'S ALICE

Dinah is a strange figure. She is the only above-ground character whom Alice mentions repeatedly, almost always in terms of her eating some smaller animal. She seems finally to function as a personification of Alice's own subtly cannibalistic hunger, as Fury in the Mouse's tale is personified as a dog. At one point, Alice fantasizes her own identity actually blending into Dinah's:

“How queer it seems,” Alice said to herself, “to be going messages for a rabbit! I suppose Dinah'll be sending me on messages next!” And she began fancying the sort of thing that would happen: ““Miss Alice! Come here directly, and get ready for your walk!” “Coming in a minute, nurse! But I've got to watch this mousehole till Dinah comes back, and see that the mouse doesn't get out.””

(p. 56).

While Dinah is always in a predatory attitude, most of the Wonderland animals are lugubrious victims; together, they encompass the two sides of animal nature that are in Alice as well. But as she falls

down the rabbit hole, Alice senses the complicity between eater and eaten, looking-glass versions of each other:

“Dinah, my dear! I wish you were down here with me! There are no mice in the air, I’m afraid, but you might catch a bat, and that’s very like a mouse, you know. But do cats eat bats, I wonder?” And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself, in a dreamy sort of way, “Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?” and sometimes, “Do bats eat cats?” for, you see, as she couldn’t answer either question, it didn’t matter which way she put it.

(p. 28).

We are already half-way to the final banquet of *Looking-Glass*, in which the food comes alive and begins to eat the guests.

Even when Dinah is not mentioned, Alice’s attitude toward the animals she encounters is often one of casual cruelty. It is a measure of Dodgson’s ability to flatten out Carroll’s material that the prefatory poem could describe Alice “in friendly chat with bird or beast,” or that he would later see Alice as “loving as a dog . . . gentle as a fawn.” She pities Bill the Lizard and kicks him up the chimney, a state of mind that again looks forward to that of the Pecksniffian Walrus in *Looking-Glass*. When she meets the Mock Turtle, the weeping embodiment of a good Victorian dinner, she restrains herself twice when he mentions lobsters, but then distorts Isaac Watt’s *Sluggard* into a song about a *baked* lobster surrounded by hungry sharks. In its second stanza, a Panther shares a pie with an Owl who then becomes dessert, as Dodgson’s good table manners pass into typical Carrollian cannibalism. The more sinister and Darwinian aspects of animal nature are introduced into Wonderland by the gentle Alice, in part through projections of her hunger onto Dinah and the “nice little dog” (she meets a “dear little puppy” after she has grown small and is afraid he will eat her up) and in part through the semi-cannibalistic appetite her songs express. With the exception of the powerful Cheshire Cat, whom I shall discuss below, most of the Wonderland animals stand in some danger of being exploited or eaten. The Dormouse is their prototype: he is fussy and cantankerous, with the nastiness of a self-aware victim, and he is stuffed into a teapot as the Mock Turtle, sobbing out his own elegy, will be stuffed into a tureen.

Alice’s courteously menacing relationship to these animals is more clearly brought out in *Alice’s Adventures under Ground*, in which she encounters only animals until she meets the playing cards, who are lightly sketched-in versions of their later counterparts. When expanding the manuscript for publication, Carroll added the Frog Footman, Cook, Duchess, Pig-Baby, Cheshire Cat, Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse, as well as making the Queen of Hearts a more

fully developed character than she was in the manuscript.¹³ In other words, all the human or quasi-human characters were added in revision, and all develop aspects of Alice that exist only under the surface of her dialogue. The Duchess' household also turns inside out the domesticated Wordsworthian ideal: with baby and pepper flung about indiscriminately, pastoral tranquillity is inverted into a whirlwind of savage sexuality. The furious Cook embodies the equation between eating and killing that underlies Alice's apparently innocent remarks about Dinah. The violent Duchess' unctuous search for "the moral" of things echoes Alice's own violence and search for "the rules."¹⁴ At the Mad Tea Party, the Hatter extends Alice's "great interest in questions of eating and drinking" into an insane *modus vivendi*; like Alice, the Hatter and the Duchess sing savage songs about eating that embody the underside of Victorian literary treacle. The Queen's croquet game magnifies Alice's own desire to cheat at croquet and to punish herself violently for doing so. Its use of live animals may be a subtler extension of Alice's own desire to twist the animal kingdom to the absurd rules of civilization, which seem to revolve largely around eating and being eaten. Alice is able to appreciate the Queen's savagery so quickly because her size changes have made her increasingly aware of who she, herself, is from the point of view of a Caterpillar, a Mouse, a Pigeon, and, especially, a Cheshire Cat.

The Cheshire Cat, also a late addition to the book, is the only figure other than Alice who encompasses all the others. William Empson discusses at length the spiritual kinship between Alice and the Cat, the only creature in Wonderland whom she calls her "friend."¹⁵ Florence Becker Lennon refers to the Cheshire Cat as "Dinah's dream-self" (p. 146), and we have noticed the subtle shift of identities between Alice and Dinah throughout the story. The Cat shares Alice's equivocal placidity: "The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought: still it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect" (pp. 87-88). The Cat is the only creature to make explicit the identification between Alice and the madness of Wonderland: "' . . . we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.' 'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice. 'You must be,'

¹³ In *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, Queen and Duchess are a single figure, the Queen of Hearts and Marchioness of Mock Turtles.

¹⁴ Donald Rackin makes the same point in "Alice's Journey to the End of Night," *PMLA*, LXXXI (Oct. 1966), 323.

¹⁵ In *Looking-Glass*, the pathetic White Knight replaces the Cheshire Cat as Alice's only friend, another indication of the increasing softness of the later Alice. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950).

said the Cat, ‘or you wouldn’t have come here.’ Alice didn’t think that proved it at all . . .” (p. 89). Although Alice cannot accept it and closes into silence, the Cat’s remark may be the answer she has been groping toward in her incessant question, “who am I?”¹⁶ As an alter ego, the Cat is wiser than Alice – and safer – because he is the only character in the book who is aware of his own madness. In his serene acceptance of the fury within and without, his total control over his appearance and disappearance, he almost suggests a post-analytic version of the puzzled Alice.

As Alice dissolves increasingly into Wonderland, so the Cat dissolves into his own head, and finally into his own grinning mouth. The core of Alice’s nature, too, seems to lie in her mouth: the eating and drinking that direct her size changes and motivate much of her behavior, the songs and verses that pop out of her inadvertently, are all involved with things entering and leaving her mouth.¹⁷ Alice’s first song introduces a sinister image of a grinning mouth. Our memory of the Crocodile’s grin hovers over the later description of the Cat’s “grin without a Cat,” and colors our sense of Alice’s infallible good manners:

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

(p. 38).

Walter de la Mare associates Alice with “a quiet moon” which is by implication a full moon. I think it is more appropriate to associate her with the grinning crescent that seems to follow her throughout her adventures, choosing to become visible only at particular moments, and teaching her the one lesson she must learn in order to arrive at a definition of who she is.

Martin Gardner pooh-poohs the “oral aggressions” psychoanalysts have found in Carroll’s incessant focus on eating and drinking by reminding us of the simple fact that “small children are obsessed by

¹⁶ Jan B. Gordon, “The *Alice* Books and the Metaphors of Victorian Childhood,” relates the *Alice* books to Michel Foucault’s argument that in the nineteenth century, madness came to be regarded as allied to childhood rather than to animality, as it had been in the eighteenth century. *Aspects of Alice*, edited by Robert Phillips (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1971), p. 101.

¹⁷ Does it go too far to connect the mouth that presides over Alice’s story to a looking-glass vagina? Carroll’s focus on the organ of the mouth seems to have been consistent throughout his life: it is allied to both his interest in eating and the prodigious number of kisses that run through his letters to his child-friends. Kissing and cats seem often to have been linked together in his mind.

eating, and like to read about it in their books" (p. 9). Maybe his commonsense approach is correct, but Lewis Carroll was concerned with nonsense, and throughout his life, he seems to have regarded eating with some horror. An early cartoon in *The Rectory Umbrella* depicts an emaciated family partaking raptly of a "homoeopathic meal" consisting of an ounce of bread, half a particle of beer, etc.; young Sophy, who is making a pig of herself, asks for another molecule. Throughout his life, Carroll was abstemious at meals, according to his nephew and first biographer, Stuart Dodgson Collingwood: "the healthy appetites of his young friends filled him with wonder, and even with alarm." When he took one of his child-friends to another's house for a meal, he told the host: "Please *be careful*, because she eats a good deal too much."¹⁸ William Empson defines his attitude succinctly: "Dodgson was well-informed about foods, kept his old menus and was wine-taster to the College; but ate very little, suspected the High Table of overeating, and would see no reason to deny that he connected overeating with other forms of sensuality" (Empson, pp. 263-264). To the man who in *Sylvie and Bruno* would define EVIL as a looking-glass version of LIVE, "gently smiling jaws" held teeth which were to be regarded with alarm; they seemed to represent to him a private emblem of original sin, for which Alice as well as the Knave of Hearts is finally placed on trial.

When the Duchess' Cook abruptly barks out "Pig!" Alice thinks the word is meant for her, though it is the baby, another fragment of Alice's own nature, who dissolves into a pig. The Mock Turtle's lament for his future soupy self later blends tellingly into the summons for the trial: the lament of the eaten and the call to judgment melt together. When she arrives at the trial, the unregenerate Alice instantly eyes the tarts: "In the very middle of the court was a table, with a large dish of tarts upon it: they looked so good, that it made Alice quite hungry to look at them — 'I wish they'd get the trial done,' she thought, 'and hand round the refreshments!'" (p. 143). Her hunger links her to the hungry Knave who is being sentenced: in typically ambiguous portmanteau fashion, Carroll makes the trial both a pre-Orwellian travesty of justice and an objective correlative of a real sense of sin. Like the dog Fury in the Mouse's tale,²⁰ Alice takes all the parts. But unlike Fury, she is

¹⁸ Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), p. 134. [Italics mine.]

¹⁹ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), pp. 263-264.

²⁰ "'I'll be judge, I'll be jury,' said cunning old Fury; 'I'll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death'" (p. 51). Fury, of course, is also plaintiff.

accused as well as accuser, melting into judge, jury, witness, and defendant; the person who boxes on the ears as well as the person who “cheats.” Perhaps the final verdict would tell Alice who she is at last, but if it did, Wonderland would threaten to overwhelm her. Before it comes, she “grows”; the parts of her nature rush back together; combining the voices of victim and accuser, she gives “a little scream, half of fright and half of anger,” and wakes up.

Presented from the point of view of her older sister’s sentimental pietism, the world to which Alice awakens seems far more dream-like and hazy than the sharp contours of Wonderland. Alice’s lesson about her own identity has never been stated explicitly, for the stammerer Dodgson was able to talk freely only in his private language of puns and nonsense, but a Wonderland pigeon points us toward it:

“You’re a serpent; and there’s no use denying it. I suppose you’ll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!”

“I have tasted eggs, certainly,” said Alice, who was a very truthful child; “but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.”

“I don’t believe it,” said the Pigeon; “but if they do, why, then they’re a kind of serpent: that’s all I can say.”

This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two . . . (p. 76).²¹

Like so many of her silences throughout the book, Alice’s silence here is charged with significance, reminding us again that an important technique in learning to read Carroll is our ability to interpret his private system of symbols and signals and to appreciate the many meanings of silence. In this scene, the golden child herself becomes the serpent in childhood’s Eden. The eggs she eats suggest the woman she will become, the unconscious cannibalism involved in the very fact of eating and desire to eat, and finally, the charmed circle of childhood itself. Only in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was Carroll able to fall all the way through the rabbit hole to the point where top and bottom become one, bats and cats melt into each other, and the vessel of innocence and purity is also the source of inescapable corruption.

Alice’s adventures in Wonderland foreshadow Lewis Carroll’s subsequent literary career, which was a progressive dissolution into his component parts. Florence Becker Lennon defines well the schism that came with the later books: “Nothing in *Wonderland* parallels the complete severance of the Reds and Whites in *Through the Looking-Glass*. In *Sylvie and Bruno*, author and story have begun to disintegrate. The

²¹ Empson, p. 270, refers to this passage as the Pigeon of the Annunciation denouncing the serpent of the knowledge of good and evil.

archness and sweetness of parts, the utter cruelty and loathsomeness of others, predict literal decomposition into his elements" (p. 156). The Alice of *Through the Looking-Glass*, which was published six years after *Wonderland*, represents still another Alice, Alice Raikes; the character is so thinned out that the vapid, passive Tenniel drawing is an adequate illustration of her. *Wonderland* ends with Alice playing all the parts in an ambiguous trial which concludes without a verdict. *Looking-Glass* begins with an unequivocal verdict: "One thing was certain, that the *white* kitten had nothing to do with it—it was the black kitten's fault entirely" (p. 175). Poor Dinah, relegated to the role of face-washer-in-the-background, has also dissolved into her component parts.

Throughout the books, the schism between Blacks (later Reds) and Whites is developed. Alice's greater innocence and passivity are stressed by her identification with Lily, the white pawn. The dominant metaphor of a chess game whose movements are determined by invisible players spreads her sense of helplessness and predestination over the book. The nursery rhymes of which most of the characters form a part also make their movements seem predestined; the characters in *Wonderland* tend more to create their own nursery rhymes. The question that weaves through the book is no longer "who am I?" but "which dreamed it?" If the story is the dream of the Red King (the sleeping embodiment of passion and masculinity), then Alice, the White Pawn (or pure female child) is exonerated from its violence, although in another sense, as she herself perceives, she is also in greater danger of extinction. Her increasing sweetness and innocence in the second book make her more ghost-like as well, and it is appropriate that more death jokes surround her in the second *Alice* book than in the first.

As Carroll's dream children became sweeter, his attitude toward animals became increasingly tormented and obsessive, as we can see in the hysterical antivivisection crusade of his later years. In one of his pamphlets, "Vivisection as a Sign of the Times," cruelty to animals, which in the first Alice was a casual instinct, becomes a synecdoche for the comprehensive sin of civilization:

"But the thing cannot be!" cries some amiable reader, fresh from an interview with that most charming of men, a London physician. "What! Is it possible that one so gentle in manner, so full of noble sentiments, can be hardhearted? The very idea is an outrage to common sense!" And thus we are duped every day of our lives. Is it possible that that bank director, with his broad honest face, can be meditating a fraud? That the chairman of that meeting of shareholders, whose every tone has the ring of truth in it, can hold in his hand a "cooked" schedule of accounts? That my wine merchant, so outspoken, so confiding, can be supplying me with an adulter-

ated article? That my schoolmaster, to whom I have entrusted my little boy, can starve or neglect him? How well I remember his words to the dear child when last we parted. "You are leaving your friends," he said, "but you will have a father in me, my dear, and a mother in Mrs. Squeers!" For all such rose-coloured dreams of the necessary immunity from human vices of educated men the facts in last week's *Spectator* have a terrible significance. "Trust no man further than you can see him," they seem to say. "Qui vult decipi, decipiatur."

(Quoted in Collingwood, p. 162).

"Gently smiling jaws" have spread themselves over England. The sweeping intensity of this jeremiad shares the vision, if not the eloquence, of Ruskin's later despairing works.

As the world becomes more comprehensively cruel, the Carrollian little girl evolves into the impossibly innocent Sylvie in *Sylvie and Bruno* and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, who is more fairy or guardian angel than she is actual child. Here, the dream belongs not to Sylvie but to the strangely maimed narrator. Any hint of wildness in Sylvie is siphoned off onto her mischievous little brother Bruno, whom she is always trying to tame as the first Alice boxed her own ears for cheating at croquet; and any real badness is further placed at one remove in the figure of the villainous Uggug, an obscenely fat child who finally turns into a porcupine. Uggug's metamorphosis recalls that of the Pig-baby in *Wonderland*, but in the earlier book, the Cook let us know that Alice was also encompassed by the epithet — a terrible one in Carroll's private language — "Pig!"

Like Alice's, Sylvie's essential nature is revealed by her attitude toward animals. But while Alice's crocodile tears implicated her in original sin, Sylvie's tears prove her original innocence. In a key scene, the narrator tries to explain to her "innocent mind" the meaning of a hare killed in a hunt:

"They hunt *foxes*," Sylvie said, thoughtfully. "And I think they *kill* them, too. Foxes are very fierce. I daresay men don't love them. Are hares fierce?"

"No," I said. "A hare is a sweet, gentle, timid animal — almost as gentle as a lamb." [Apparently no vision of the snappish March Hare returned to haunt Lewis Carroll at this point.]

"But, if men *love* hares, why — why —" her voice quivered, and her sweet eyes were brimming with tears.

"I'm afraid they *don't* love them, dear child."

"All *children* love them," Sylvie said. "All *ladies* love them."

"I'm afraid even *ladies* go to hunt them, sometimes."

Sylvie shuddered. "Oh, no, not *ladies*!" she earnestly pleaded. . . . In a hushed, solemn tone, with bowed head and clasped hands, she put her final question. "Does GOD love hares?"

"Yes!" I said. "I'm *sure* He does. He loves every living thing. Even sinful *men*. How much more the animals, that cannot sin!" [Here the whole *Wonderland* gallery should have risen up in chorus against their creator!]

"I don't know what 'sin' means," said Sylvie. And I didn't try to explain it.

"Come, my child," I said, trying to lead her away. "Wish good-bye to the poor hare, and come and look for blackberries."

"Good-bye, poor hare!" Sylvie obediently repeated, looking over her shoulder at it as we turned away. And then, all in a moment, her self-command gave way. Pulling her hand out of mine, she ran back to where the dead hare was lying, and flung herself down at its side in such an agony of grief I could hardly have believed possible in so young a child.²²

Sylvie's weeping over a dead hare is an unfortunate conclusion to Alice's initial underground leap after a live rabbit. Dodgson has been driven full circle here to embrace the pure little girl of Victorian convention, though he is ambivalent in this passage about "ladies." But his deterioration should be used as a yardstick to measure his achievement in the first of the *Alice* books, which a brief survey of some typical portraits of children in nineteenth-century literature may help us to appreciate.

Victorian concepts of the child tended to swing back and forth between extremes of original innocence and original sin; Rousseau and Calvin stood side by side in the nursery. Since actual children were the focus of such an extreme conflict of attitudes, they tended to be a source of pain and embarrassment to adults, and were therefore told they should be "seen and not heard." Literature dealt more freely with children than life did, so adult conflicts about them were allowed to emerge more openly in books. As Jan Gordon puts it:

The most amazing feature of, say, Dickens' treatment of children, is how quickly they are transformed into monsters. Even *Oliver Twist's* surname forces the reader to appreciate the twisting condition normally associated with creatures more closely akin to the devil! One effect of this identification with evil adults . . . is that the only way of approaching childhood is by way of the opposite of satanic monstrosities — namely, the golden world of an edenic wonderland whose pastoral dimension gives it the status of a primal scene.²³

In its continual quest for origins and sources of being, Victorian literature repeatedly explores the ambiguous figure of the child, in whom it attempts to resolve the contradictions it perceives much as *Sylvie and Bruno* does: by an extreme sexual division.

Little boys in Victorian literature tend to be allied to the animal, the Satanic, and the insane. For this reason, novels in which a boy is the central focus are usually novels of development, in which the boy evolves out of his inherent violence, "working out the brute" in an

²² Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1890), I, 319-20.

²³ "The *Alice* Books and the Metaphors of Victorian Childhood," *Aspects of Alice*, p. 109. Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, revised edition (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967) is the most famous and comprehensive survey of Victorian attitudes to childhood. See especially pp. 291-292 for a discussion of these two conflicting currents.

ascent to a higher spiritual plane. This tradition seems foreshadowed by the boy in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, whose complexity undercuts the many Victorian sentimentalizations about Wordsworth's children. The predatory child in the first two books, traveling through a dark landscape that seems composed largely of his own projected fears and desires, has in fact a great deal in common with Carroll's Alice.²⁴ Carroll is truer than many of his contemporaries to the ambiguities of Wordsworth's children, but he goes beyond Wordsworth in making a little girl the focus of his vision. Wordsworth's little girls tend to be angelic, corrective figures who exist largely to soothe the turbulence of the male protagonists; his persona in the *Prelude* is finally led to his "spiritual eye" through the ministrations of an idealized, hovering Dorothy.

David Copperfield must also develop out of an uncontrolled animality that is close to madness—early in the novel, we learn of him that "he bites" — and he can do so only through the guidance of the ghostly Agnes, pointing ever upward. Dr. Arnold's Rugby, which reflected and conditioned many of the century's attitudes toward boys, was run on a similar evolutionary premise: the students were to develop out of the inherent wickedness of "boy nature" into the state of "Christian gentleman," a semi-divine warrior for the good. In the all-male society of Rugby, Dr. Arnold was forced to assume the traditionally female role of spiritual beacon, as the image of the Carlylean hero supplanted that of the ministering angel. Thomas Hughes' famous tale of Rugby, *Tom Brown's School Days*, solves this problem by making Tom's spiritual development spring from the influence of the feminized, debilitated young Arthur and his radiantly ethereal mother: only after their elaborate ministrations is the young man able to kneel by the Doctor's casket and worship the transfigured image of the-Doctor-as-God. Women and girls are necessary catalysts for the development of the hero out of his dangerously animal state to contact with the God within and without him.

Cast as they were in the role of emotional and spiritual catalysts, it is not surprising that girls who function as protagonists of Victorian literature are rarely allowed to develop: in its refusal to subject females to the evolutionary process, the Victorian novel takes a significant step backward from one of its principle sources, the novels of Jane Austen. Even when they are interesting and "wicked," Victorian heroines tend to be static figures like Becky Sharp; when they are "good," their lack of development is an important factor in the Victorian reversal of

²⁴ I am indebted to Edward Dramin for suggesting this similarity to me.

Pope's sweeping denunciation — "most women have no characters at all" — into a cardinal virtue. Little girls in Victorian literature are rarely children, nor are they allowed to grow up. Instead, they exist largely as a diffusion of emotional and religious grace, representing "nothing but love," as Dodgson's Sylvie warbles. Florence Dombey in Dickens' *Dombey and Son* may stand as their paradigm. Representing as she does the saving grace of the daughter in a world dominated by the hard greed and acquisitiveness of men — the world that kills her tender brother Paul — Florence drifts through Mr. Dombey's house in a limbo of love throughout the book, waiting for her father to come to her. She ages, but never changes, existing less as a character than as a "spiritual repository into which Mr. Dombey must dip if he is to be saved."²⁵ Dickens' Little Nell and Little Dorrit are equally timeless and faceless. Though both are in fact post-pubescent — Little Nell is fourteen, Little Dorrit, twenty-two — they combine the mythic purity and innocence of the little girl with the theoretical marriageability of the woman, diffusing an aura from a sphere separate from that of the other characters, a sphere of non-personal love without change.

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver are two more sharply-etched little girls who grow into women, but even they represent, in an angrier and more impassioned way, "nothing but love." Neither develops in the course of her book, because neither needs to change: all both need is acceptance of the love they have to offer, which in Jane Eyre's case is fervently erotic and ethical, and in Maggie Tulliver's is passionately filial and engulfing. Both triumph at the end of their novels because they are allowed to redeem through their love the men they have chosen, who, as Victorian convention dictated, have undergone a process of development up to *them*. This reminds us once more that in Victorian literature, little boys were allowed, even encouraged, to partake of original sin; but little girls rarely were.

We return once more to the anomaly of Carroll's Alice, who explodes out of Wonderland hungry and unregenerate. By a subtle dramatization of Alice's attitude toward animals and toward the animal in herself, by his final resting on the symbol of her mouth, Carroll probed in all its complexity the underground world within the little girl's pinafore. The ambiguity of the concluding trial finally, and wisely, waives questions of original guilt or innocence. The ultimate effect of Alice's adventures implicates her, female child though she is, in the troubled

²⁵ I am indebted for this fine phrase to an unpublished undergraduate Honors thesis by Harry Baldwin, of California State College, Los Angeles.

human condition; most Victorians refused to grant women and children this respect. The sympathetic delicacy and precision with which Carroll traced the chaos of a little girl's psyche seems equalled and surpassed only later in such explorations as D. H. Lawrence's of the young Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow*, the chaos of whose growth encompasses her hunger for violence, sexuality, liberty, and beatitude. In the imaginative literature of its century, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* stands alone.

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