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Reader Response on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

One may wonder what use there is in reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a college student. The book, after all, was written to entertain young children. Well, the book does have academic value for the literary scholar. One can argue back and forth about its symbolism and what sort of psychoanalytic themes can be found within. Its content provides insight into the historical context of its writing, as well as the context of Lewis Carroll's personal life. The "practical" reasons for reading a children's book as an adult are myriad, but sometimes, a complicated reason is not needed. An adult can read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* simply because it is fun to do so. If the story is still enjoyable as an adult, so be it. Reading the book takes the reader on an adventure loaded with childhood whimsy that is hard to find in the real world, much like how Alice's fantastic romp is unparalleled at home in England. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* evoke a sense of childhood wonder and freedom of mind.

Any and every text will connect with its reader in some way. There will always be something it has that relates to the reader -- in their past, in their present, or in their future. For me, *Alice in Wonderland* hearkens back to my childhood with its simplicity, imaginative content, and offbeat sense of humor. When I was young, fairy-tale stories fascinated me and I liked to imagine magical worlds parallel to this one where anything can happen. Reading *Alice in Wonderland* allows me to revisit those simpler days. I want to hold on to the ability to accept

chaos and “madness,” even in my adult years. I do not want to lose my imagination. Revisiting Wonderland and its nonsense helps in that. The book is nostalgic for me, even though I was seventeen when I read the actual book for the first time. I still can see my childhood in the pages of the book, despite it never having played a part in my life when I was younger. Carroll evokes nostalgia and childlike feelings not by making reference to childhood, but by creating a literary environment where those feelings associated so strongly with it -- curiosity, a mind rapidly gaining new information, a psyche less clouded with mature fears -- thrive. I am not alone in having noticed this phenomenon; Lionel Morton makes a case for this effect in his essay on memory within *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. He says of the nostalgia in Wonderland, “Carroll, then, has surrounded the two stories of Alice's adventures in a golden nostalgic haze -- deliberately evoking the sense of the past in presenting them to his readers” (Morton 288). By reading the books, one discovers that nostalgia is not, perhaps, so much events and things that one remembers from their childhood, but rather the feelings of innocence and freedom of mind associated with them.

In part, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* teaches that “mad” things in life are inevitable and a person can’t know or understand everything, which is a valuable lesson to take into adulthood. It is far too easy to fall into the trap of thinking that chaos is the end of the world and should be avoided at all costs. Problem is, a person cannot avoid nonsensical things from happening to them; the way of the world does not allow that. With *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, I have learned to accept, even embrace, nonsense and be all right with the idea that maybe life does not need a grand moral to it.

Anyone whose worldview holds order in high regard and considers everything to have meaning will see it rocked by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. As previously stated, the book is all about chaos. It has barely any plot and even less meaning. In a way, the book has an existentialist philosophy hiding behind it, whether it was intentional or not. There is, overall, no point to Alice's romp through Wonderland, but it is enjoyable; existentialism has a similar perspective on life. One can either throw a fit and complain about the lack of ultimate meaning in life, or they can embrace the time that they have. Whether one may agree with it or not, existentialism is a challenging worldview that is worth the time to examine. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* clash with philosophies of black and white morality as well; no character is ever labeled "good" or "evil" within its narrative. Even the Queen of Hearts, who is the book's antagonist, is not truly evil -- she never deliberately interferes with Alice's journey. She has no reason to do that. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* espouse a worldview of gray morality. While I am not so sure I agree with existentialism, I do see eye to eye with Carroll's story in that morality is more complicated than the black and white dichotomy that is all too popular in this day and age. Issues are complicated, and sometimes there is no clear answer. *Alice in Wonderland* teaches readers to accept nonsense and uncertainty.

Much can be learned, even from nonsense; therefore, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* can serve as a great teacher. The foremost, and best, lesson the book teaches is that life is full of nonsense. This is a difficult lesson for people accustomed to organization; it is hard to accept that life cannot be as orderly as we want. Perhaps that is why academics struggle to find hidden meanings and symbolism in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* despite Carroll's insistence that the book has no moral. It shows an attempt at finding sense in the nonsensical, as Patten puts it:

"The academic and psychotherapeutic redactors are just trying to unweave, unravel, unwind, and piece together this masterpiece...trying to make a living in an uncertain world" (Patten 112).

Humans are drawn to meaning and order, and in cases where those cannot be found, we will make our own.

The lack of a "point," for want of a more appropriate term, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* does not necessarily mean that the book is better left unread. A person can still learn from it, as I have demonstrated. It still serves its audience. Truth be told, it serves children more than it does adults, because it was written for them. This is the right time for them to be served by the story, however. Children benefit from being spoken to as equals rather than talked down to, as most children's books do. They also benefit from being able to "see" themselves in a fantastic adventure, through the perspective of a relatable protagonist, while still coming away safe at its close. Alice is very much like the average child who reads her story -- a curious and intelligent, but also naive and impulsive, young person who comes in and out of experiences by happenstance. Children understand what is like to be Alice because they are tossed about by the things that happen in their own lives. They can imagine themselves in Alice's shoes and live her adventure. This answers the question of "who cares" for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* -- its target audience cares.

Much is praiseworthy about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This book from the late 1800s would not have continued to be massively popular in the 21st century if that were not so. People are drawn to the story for many of the same reasons I enjoy it so much -- it is a simplistic, circular, and fun adventure in literary format. It can serve as a quick, enjoyable read. The book is artistic and intelligent. There is a sharp, dry wit to the book, allowing it to serve as a satire on

stuffy Victorian culture as much as a fanciful adventure story. Furthermore, it is a challenging book for reasons already stated, questioning previously-held notions of order and correctness. As John Pennington states in an analysis of the book's writing style,

“Carroll is not writing about good versus evil in the classical fantasy sense, but he is parodying the whole concept of what we can know internally—Alice has an ontological slipperiness that is integral to the book's meaning. Furthermore, Carroll is parodying the whole didactic tradition of children's writing, creating in the Alice books an original fantasy world that ridicules past narratives and conventions, a literary play with a postmodern turn" (Pennington 90).

In other words, the book is willing to experiment and that is part of what makes it so praiseworthy. It stays cohesive despite being a plotless book about nonsense because it stays true to that form, within universe and without. Instead of pretending to have substance that it does not really have, a mistake that many books in the fantasy genre make, Carroll's book acts as though it has no substance, leaving audiences to find it for themselves.

Returning to the story for literary analysis was a pleasant experience. I enjoy Carroll's book every time I read it. It never seems to get old, because its childlike attitude keeps it ageless. No matter what year it is, children will never grow tired of reading about fantastic worlds of impossibilities and making up their own stories about them. When the real world is starting to feel as oppressive as Alice's Victorian England, I can escape to Wonderland and embrace the chaos for a while.

Works Cited

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This review of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland gives readers insight into the plot of one of the most beloved children's stories ever written. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is a charming, light book, that reputedly pleased Queen Victoria. She asked to receive the author's next work and was swiftly sent a copy of An Elementary Treatment of Determinants. Synopsis. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (commonly shortened to Alice in Wonderland) is an 1865 novel by English author Lewis Carroll (the pseudonym of Charles Dodgson). It tells of a young girl named Alice, who falls through a rabbit hole into a subterranean fantasy world populated by peculiar, anthropomorphic creatures. It is considered to be one of the best examples of the literary nonsense genre. The tale plays with logic, giving the story lasting popularity with adults as well as with children. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland provides an inexhaustible mine of literary, philosophical, and scientific themes. Here are some general themes which the reader may find interesting and of some use in studying the work. Alice's initial reaction after falling down the rabbit-hole is one of extreme loneliness. Her curiosity has led her into a kind of Never-Never Land, over the edge of Reality and into a lonely, very alien world. c Pearson Education Limited 2008. Alice in Wonderland - Answer keys of 2. Answer keys. LEVEL 2. Alice in Wonderland. 4 wet; dry warm; cold different; same first; last something; nothing noisily; quietly outside; inside interesting; boring beautiful; ugly 5 a He is looking for his hat. b She goes into the White Rabbit's house. c Because she knows something interesting will. PENGUIN READERS Teacher Support Programme. 9 a The Mad Hatter b The March Hare c The gardeners d The Queen e The Knave of Hearts f Alice g The White Rabbit h The Cheshire Cat 10 a room b paper c tarts d questions e head f bigger g place h tall i fall j leave k afraid l down m wakes n sister o home 11 a. Alice's adventures in wonderland. By lewis carroll. With forty-two illustrations by john tenniel. VolumeOne Publishing Chicago, Illinois 1998. A BookVirtual Digital Edition, v.1.2. November, 2000. Navigate. Thus grew the tale of Wonderland : Thus slowly, one by one, Its quaint events were hammered out And now the tale is done, And home we steer, a merry crew, Beneath the setting sun. Alice ! a childish story take, And with a gentle hand. Lay it where Childhood's dreams are twined In Memory's mystic band, Like pilgrim's withered wreath of owens Plucked in a far-off land. Navigate.