



“Who Am I”: Alice’s Quest for Knowledge and Identity in Wonderland

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss Alice’s search for knowledge and identity in her dream adventures in Wonderland. In her dream journey in Wonderland, Alice undergoes emotional upheaval and physical transformations, encounters various creatures, and experiences a loss of and quest for identity, and finally gains self-confidence and returns back to the reality. Her journey can be said to be a quest for knowledge and identity, and also a process of maturity and growth. Alice grows more and more confident and autonomous, which is atypical of the Victorian ideal female.

Key words: Alice; Quest; Identity; Autonomy

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INTRODUCTION

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) stands out as a shining pearl in writing for children. Darton called the publication of this fantasy “the spiritual volcano of children’s books” (Darton, 1932, p.267). The tale was originally told for the amusement of the three Liddell girls, especially Alice Liddell. Clearly Lewis Carroll wrote the story for children, yet his tale is widely enjoyed by adult readers as well. Surrounded by children for most of his life, Carroll seems to know

children very well, and he is in deep sympathy with them. His tale revolutionizes the way children’s books were written. It has often been said that two contrary impulses dominate in children’s literature, especially during the nineteenth century—the wish to instruct and the wish to amuse (Manlove, 2003, p.18). Instead of following the didactic trend that dominated the children’s books in the 19th century, Carroll intended to amuse rather than instruct his young readers. In fact, he satirizes the process of instruction in his book. As a result, children find his amusing tale irresistible. Children can easily sympathize and identify with Alice the heroine and experience all the “wonderful” things together with her in the Wonderland. The adults, on the other hand, can find immense pleasure in the intricate Carrollian nonsense, numerous puns, parodies and allusions. Through the Alice books, adult readers are reminded of their own childhood and become children again. According to Gerard Senick, “the stories about Alice are often praised as the first children’s books that could be read with equal pleasure by both children and adults” (Senick, 1989, p.38).

According to the *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, *Alice* is “the first literary fairy tale for children with no moral purpose whatever. Alice moves in a dreamworld, remote from ordinary laws and principles” (Zipes, 2000, p.88). Carroll’s Wonderland story is an amusing tale that entertained a bored society. It “cleared away the dead wood in children’s literature and marked the arrival of liberty of thought in children’s books” (Carpenter, 1985, p.68). What is most unusual is the creation of a young heroine different from the typical girls in the dominant children’s books in Victorian time. Lewis Carroll portrays vividly Alice’s dream journey in Wonderland, where she experiences emotional upheaval and physical transformations, encounters various creatures, undergoes a loss of and quest for identity, and finally gains self-confidence and returns back to the reality.

1. LOSS OF IDENTITY

In this tale, Alice follows a talking White Rabbit, down a well, through a pool of tears, and into a garden where she encounters a Mad Hatter's tea party, a game of croquet played with living things, and a trial of the Knave of Hearts. Alice is a child entering a world of adults ranging from the neurotic White Rabbit, to the officious Duchess and psychopathic Queen of Hearts. These mad, absurd creatures attempt to order Alice about, but Alice manages to answer them back. Despite the insistence of the Duchess that "Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it" (Carroll, 1993, p.89), Alice finds no moral here in Wonderland, unless the idea that you must learn to be on your own to fight your own battle in a hostile environment. Alice's engagement in the various episodes with such characters as the Cheshire Cat, the Caterpillar, the Hatter and the Queen cause her to question her own identity and power.

Carroll begins Alice's quest with her considering in her own mind how bored she is. Feeling very bored because she is "tired of having nothing to do," Alice is ready for the quest. Languishing on the riverbank, Alice contemplates whether or not to get up and gather flowers, "when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her" (Carroll, 1993, p.17). Boredom and the feeling of being "very sleepy and stupid" cause her to think it not odd that she can hear the Rabbit talk to itself about being late. It is "when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat pocket*" that Alice jumps to her feet "burning with curiosity" (Carroll, 1993, p.18) and begins to chase the Rabbit. When the rabbit jumps down a hole, Alice follows suit without a moment's hesitation or a thought as to how she will return. After falling a tremendously long time, Alice is not hurt and simply jumps up to continue her chase underground.

The reason why Alice is the chosen hero is revealed when the narrator says that Alice was a "curious child [who was] very fond of pretending to be two people" (Carroll, 1993, p.23). Alice is a little girl of seven years old who has the tendency to search for meanings from her surroundings. From the very beginning, she expresses a keen curiosity about growing up and adulthood. When she was sitting by her sister on the bank, she peeped into the book her sister was reading; to her great disappointment, she found there were no pictures or conversations in it. Her wonder about the meaning of adult's book suggests her curiosity about the adult world, which she believes is a universe quite different from hers. Boredom with her familiar surroundings makes her keener on adventures, so when a white rabbit with pink eyes runs close by, she immediately follows it into the rabbit hole with no drop of hesitation, and not considering how she is going to get out again.

Alice's curiosity is displayed throughout her quest in Wonderland. When Alice reaches the bottom of the hole

she finds herself in a long, low hall. The hallway is lined with many doors all of which are locked. She discovers a small door she hadn't seen before, which leads to a beautiful garden full of fountain and flowers. The most beautiful garden she has ever seen symbolizes Alice ideal of the adults' world. Curiosity motivates her to access the garden. Then Alice comes upon a small table with a tiny golden key on it which she assumes would enable her to open the door to the lovely garden. Alice makes gaining entry to this garden her immediate goal. The lovely garden in Wonderland fascinates Alice to wander within at her leisure. For Alice, the garden appears to hold promise of pleasure and order, and it seems to be the entrance to a wonderful world that holds the knowledge Alice seeks. Alice "longed to wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains" (Carroll, 1993, p.21). However, the garden remains tantalizingly out of reach until she can successfully control her body size. In her first attempts to reach the garden, Alice drinks the potion marked "Drink Me", which reduces her size enough to fit through the door to the garden. But in the process, she leaves the golden key on the table, now looming farther away beyond her. Reduced to tears, she soon collects herself and sees a small box under the table with a small cake in it labeled "Eat Me". She follows the instructions, and which produces the opposite effect—now she is she follows and changes to nine feet tall, which is too big for her to enter the garden through the small door. Now, she has the key, but lacks the diminutiveness to enter the garden. With events so frustratingly beyond her control, she sits down and cries. Alice expresses her doubts about her identity: "...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?" (Carroll, 1993, p.26). She wonders whether she has been changed for Mabel, which would be unfortunate since Mabel is not very smart in her lessons and Alice would have to live in her "poky little house, and have next to no toys to play with" (Carroll, 1993, p.27). She decides that, if indeed she is Mabel, she will refuse to come back up the rabbit hole. She imagines in her mind a confrontation with parents or other authority figures: "It'll be no use their putting their heads down and saying 'Come up again, dear!'" She'll answer that she'll stay down there until she is somebody else. But with another burst of tears, Alice adds: "I do wish they *would* put their heads down! I am so *very* tired of being all alone here!" (Carroll, 1993, p.28). Soon she finds herself shrinking in size again, and realizes the cause is the White Rabbit's fan she had taken up in her hand. She drops it hastily. Although frightened, she is thankful not to have shrunk out of existence altogether.

Alice goes through a series of bodily changes in Wonderland. Interesting enough, almost all the changes

are linked with drinking and eating. Food is very closely connected with the everyday life of the children, and children’s strong interest in food also makes them pay special attention to it. After all, food is crucial in the process of children’s growing up, and children may find it hard to resist. When Alice comes to the Rabbit’s house, she happens to see a bottle near the looking-glass, and intuitively thinks that something curious is sure to happen if she drinks it. The drink enlarges her to a preposterous degree and as a result, she is trapped in the small house, unable to move. Then the falling pebbles that turn into cakes attract her attention and she immediately eats them which reduces her again and makes her smaller than a puppy. Her frequent changes of body size puzzles her, leading to her great anxiety about who she really was and whether she is still the same person she was when she woke up in the morning.

Her frustrating feeling of loss is best shown in her encounter with the Caterpillar. When the sleepily smoking Caterpillar sitting on a mushroom asks Alice, “Who are you?” with an impertinent tone, Alice feels more puzzled than ever. She attempts to explain: “I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then” (Carroll, 1993, p.49). Unsatisfied, the Caterpillar utters a curt order to ask Alice to explain herself, which is beyond Alice: “I can’t explain *myself*, I’m afraid, Sir...because I’m not myself, you see.” (Carroll, 1993, p.50) And of course, the Caterpillar can not see that precisely because he has no previous version of Alice to compare the present one with. Considering the fact that constant metamorphosis is the very nature of the caterpillar, the unlucky Alice stumbles upon the one creature in the world who simply cannot offer empathy for her countless changes in size and shape, since bodily transformation is a norm for the caterpillars. The Caterpillar objects to her saying that changing many shapes in one day is confusing. Alice tries to drive home her point to the caterpillar: certainly once he’s changed into a chrysalis and butterfly, then he will feel a “little bit queer.” However, he insists that he won’t. Exasperated, Alice states: “Well, perhaps your feelings may be different, ...all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*”. The Caterpillar manages to belittle even this qualified claim: “You! Who are *you*?” (Carroll, 1993, p.50). This leads Alice to nowhere since it is the very question that puzzles her. Alice endures more ridicule from the creature before it asks her what size she wants to be to which Alice responds that she isn’t particular as to size; the only problem is, “one doesn’t like changing so often, you know” to which the Caterpillar curtly replies, “I *don’t* know” (Carroll, 1993, p.54).

It is a disturbing and frightening sensation to be reminded of one’s difference and separateness. Alice experiences this sensation once again when she is attacked as a serpent by a pigeon. Alice is told by the Caterpillar

that by eating one side of the nearby mushroom, she can grow taller while the mushroom from the other side will make her reduce in size. She takes advantage of this advice to aid her in changing her bodily size and getting what she wants. A pigeon happens upon Alice with her telescopic neck reaching into the trees, and mistakes her for a serpent spying for eggs. When Alice tries to protest with proofs—saying she is a little girl and does not eat eggs raw, the pigeon insists that given appearances, she must be a serpent, for she has exactly a neck of a serpent. The Pigeon refuses to accept the idea that Alice does not want to eat her eggs, and it shouts at Alice indignantly and orders her to leave. Alice becomes more frustrated and puzzled. Alice realizes that “it was much pleasanter at home” (Carroll, 1993, p.41) and she has become very tired of being all alone there. The loss of her sense of self causes her to feel isolated and lonely in a strange, hostile world where she knows no one and no one cares enough in Wonderland to take a personal interest in her. Although in the end Alice manages to get into the lovely garden by adapting her size with the aid of the mushroom, she is very disappointed to realize that the most beautiful garden full of bright flower-beds and cool fountains turns out to be a mere illusion. Instead of being the Eden in her dream and imagination, the garden turns out to be a false paradise.

2. WONDERLAND AS A MAD WORLD OF ADULTS

While in Wonderland, Alice is confronted with more than the questioning of who she is and whether she is still the same person she was when she woke up in the morning. Alice must also deal with a world in which the majority of the creatures she encounters share the traits of adults. It seems that besides the Duchess’s baby, Alice is the only child in Wonderland. Those adult figures within the underground, human and animal, animate and inanimate, try to exert their power over Alice and control her. They attempt to marginalize Alice, put her in an inferior position and within their control. Those inhabitants exhibit a bewildering unpleasant scene to Alice as rude, harsh and very unhelpful. In real life, a child grows accustomed to heeding the directions of parent-figures. The friendly, polite, obedient little girl of the Victorian upper class is no exception.

During the Caucus-Race, Alice argues with the Lory as to the way to get them dry from her pond of tears. The Lory ignores her idea and impatiently interrupts her by saying that “I am older than you, and must know better”(Carroll, 1993, p.32). In Lory’s eyes, Alice’s advice amounts to nothing since she is only an immature child. The fact that he is older than Alice means he has more power, therefore, Alice should submit to his authority.

Finally, Alice and the animals adopt the proposal of the Dodo, who seems to be the oldest and most authoritative figure. When the running race is over, the animals ask the Dodo about the winner and the reward. The Dodo announces solemnly that everybody has won and everyone must have prizes. He also appoints Alice to be the prize giver, with the result that the whole crowd of animals gather around her and call out for prizes. Alice pulls out a box of sweets from her pocket and hands them all around except for herself. Then she is forced to hand over her own little thimble to the Dodo as her race prize. What is ridiculous is that the thimble is presented to Alice through a solemn ceremony of prize giving. The reward of the race should be provided by the adults, but here Alice sacrifices her own personal belongings for the whole party, which is definitely unfair for the child. The relationship between adults and children is never equal in real life, more so in the underground. The powerless child has to endure all the injustice in an adult-dominant world.

The adult figures Alice encounters in Wonderland are far from being pleasant. Most of them are rude, indifferent and aggressive in front of Alice. Alice is mistreated and belittled from time to time. The White Rabbit takes her for a maid and orders her about on errands. The Frog-Footman treats Alice arrogantly and ignores her query about the way of getting in the house by looking up in the sky all the time. The contemptuous Caterpillar questions her identity, demanding her to hold her tempers, ordering her to recite nursery rhymes and then criticizing her for doing it all wrong. The March Hare and Hatter leave no room for her at the tea party, judging her hair and manners, accusing her of being rude while they are rude themselves. The Pigeon mistakes Alice for a serpent and attacks her, refusing to listen to her protest and explanation. The Mock Turtle stands on the ledge of a rock to tell his story while Alice sits in front of him, mirroring that of a classroom in which a teacher positions himself in the front to deliver lessons. For Alice's question, the Turtle scolds her angrily: "Really you are very dull"; at the same time, the Gryphon says that "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for asking such a simple question"(Carroll, 1993, p.95). They stare at Alice in angry silence, thus degrading Alice to a subordinate position, and then ordering her to recite moralistic poems. Despite unwillingness, Alice is forced to the authority of the adults and dare not challenge their authority. What the adults are doing is trying to repress Alice the child and assure their own mastery. In order to attain this goal, they sometimes resort to threats of violence, so that the child might be frightened to submission. The Duchess and the Queen of Red Hearts are very good examples.

The Duchess, a mother figure, is in brutal mania and treats her child in an abusive way. When Alice enters the Duchess's house, she finds her sitting in the middle of the kitchen with a baby in her arms. With the pepper in the air, the noises from the cook and the baby's howling,

the Duchess becomes very tense and loses her temper. Noticing the Cheshire-Cat, Alice approaches the Duchess and asks her why it is that the cat grins. The irritated Duchess responds that if Alice doesn't know that all Cheshire-Cats have grins, then she doesn't know much. However, considering the fact that there is only one in existence, the Duchess's retort throws Alice off balance. The Duchess also bursts out a very scornful and insulting word to Alice: "Pig!" (Carroll, 1993, p.62) Alice warns the cook to be careful with her cooking appliances lest the baby get hurt, but the Duchess tells her to mind her own business and says violently: "Chop off her head!" (Carroll, 1993, p.63) The verbal threat intends to silence the innocent child Alice and ask no questions with the adults when they are busy. The Duchess also sings a lullaby to the baby in an effort to quiet it and make it stop crying: "Speak roughly to your little boy, /and beat him when he sneezes: / He only does it to annoy, / because he knows it teases..." (Carroll, 1993, p.64). Meanwhile, she gives the baby a violent shake, and finally tosses the baby violently up and down to frighten it into silence and submission. To the Duchess, if the baby dares to challenge the parents' authority by teasing and howling, he surely deserves to be beaten. The children must submit to the power and wills of the adults, for they have no power to compete with the bigger and stronger adults. If they dare to defy the authority of adults, they will receive violent and terrible threats of death.

The Queen of Hearts is a most threatening adult figure in Wonderland. When Alice refuses to satisfy the Queen's demands to know who the cards are the Queen flies into a rage and threatens to chop off her head. She also constantly orders the execution of her subjects and commands with "off with his head!" Later in the trial scene, when Alice criticizes the Queen's judgment "Sentence first, verdict afterwards" (Carroll, 1993, p.121) and refuses to obey her order, the Queen shouts at her loudly and angrily "Off with her head!" in an attempt to make her surrender.

Those adult figures in Wonderland order, ignore or belittle Alice. The way they treat Alice is what the adults behave to children in real life. When Alice ventures into the Hatter's house, she finds there is a large table at which the March Hare and the Hatter are having tea while a Dormouse is sitting between them. Although the table is very large, the three are all crowded together at one corner of it. At seeing Alice's coming, the March Hare and the Hatter refuse to offer a seat to her and shout out "No room! No room!" (Carroll, 1993, p.70). When Alice indignantly sits down in a large armchair at one end of the table, the Hatter criticizes her for bad manners and then comments on her hair. The Hatter also asks Alice a riddle "why is a raven like a writing desk" which nobody can figure out. He also wears a watch which tells the date instead of the exact time, advising Alice to get along well

with Time and never waste it for fear that they should be punished. During the course of Dormouse’s absurd story-telling, Alice poses many questions, for which there is no answer and she is accused of as being stupid. Realizing that this party is the “the stupidest tea party” (Carroll, 1993, p.78) in her life, Alice finally summons up her courage to walk off and never come back again. Now she has come to understand why the Cheshire-Cat has told her that creatures there are all mad. When she encounters the Cheshire-Cat sitting on a bough of a tree with his ever mysterious grins and keen observance of the place and inhabitants like a detached outsider, she asks him politely for direction: “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” The Cheshire-Cat responds elusively by saying: “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to” (Carroll, 1993, p.67). When Alice tells the Cheshire-Cat that she’d prefer not to go among mad people such as the Hatter or the Hare, the cat replies that she can not help that because, “we’re all mad here...”and that Alice must be mad too if she is there. The cat must be mad when compared with a dog, which is not mad in itself. The Cat serves in the role of tutor to Alice the heroine in her quest, preparing her for more strange and absurd situations that will confront her. Indeed, whichever way she takes, she will encounter nothing but madness. The creatures there are mad; the cat is mad; she is also mad; otherwise, she would not be there. Only when she recognizes this fact, will she be able to make sense of and escape from the crazy world, find her sense of self and successfully return to her own world.

Auden points out: “According to Lewis Carroll, what a child desires before anything else is that the world in which he finds himself should make sense.”(Auden, 1962, p.11) A senseless world is frustrating enough, but if the fact is recognized and borne in mind, it might not be impossible to handle. Alice gradually changes her role from passive to active, from a sufferer of the mad adult society to a girl of self-reliance. Her feelings also convert from frustration to confidence. Even the very unhelpfulness of the Hatter and Hare seems to inspire determination in Alice. After leaving them, she succeeds in finding what she had hoped the two tea companions would provide for her: a way into the garden. She soon happens upon a door in the trees that leads to the familiar long hall with the three-legged table and the golden key. Confident she’ll be able to “manage better this time” (Carroll, 1993, p.78), Alice proceeds to take the key, unlock the door, and eat enough of the mushroom she had set aside to walk through the little passage. In the following episodes Alice does manage better. She stops looking for directions from others and instead begins to take control of her fantasy-quest.

3. QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND AUTONOMY

In Wonderland, Alice expresses more than once her fear of darkness. The narrator says: “How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains”(Carroll, 1993, p.21). Here, Alice wants to get out of the dark hall to enter the bright garden with beautiful flowers and cool fountains. It seems that human beings have the intrinsic fear of darkness. This fear that the invisible darkness brings can be explained with the importance of light for humans at literal and metaphorical levels. At a literal level, light brings the sense of security; and light at a metaphorical level is tantamount to knowledge with which we make sense of the irrational world that once was dark to us. Entering the garden can not only provide a sense of security to Alice, but also satisfy her bursting curiosity for knowledge.

However, in Alice’s dreams, the garden is not the idyllic Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis where Adam and Eve freely eat from every tree until they disobey God’s order and incur His wrath and punishment. No sooner has Alice entered than she discovers that the beautiful flowers are painted, the ruling Queen is a mad Fury, and the croquet game is played in chaotic confusion. It is definitely not men’s nostalgic and idyllic garden of Eden, but the very opposite, full of chaos and madness. Still, Alice matures in the process. Equipped with the mushroom which can help Alice change her body size the way she wants and the directions from the Cheshire-Cat, Alice becomes more independent, especially after she enters the garden.

Alice’s bodily transformations can be interpreted as a realization of the child’s dream to get rid of the control from the adults. We all know children like to imagine themselves different than they really are. Sometimes they dream of becoming tiny enough so that they can evade the control from the authoritative figures, either parents or teachers; sometimes they yearn to become so huge that the adults can do nothing about them for their enormous size and power. In the beginning of her arbitrary body changes after drinking or eating things, Alice is much confused about her identity. However, she gradually comes to realize being big is better than being small. When she is in White Rabbit’s house, Alice is tired of being so little and therefore ordered about by the rabbit as a maid. She looks around in hope of finding something to make her grow. After she drinks a potion, she gets very huge indeed and the little house can hardly hold her. She has to lie down to make herself comfortable. In spite of the inconvenience, she enjoys the delight of being tall and big, for it gives her power to fight. As a matter of fact, she nearly destroys the White Rabbit’s house. When the Rabbit comes near the window, Alice stretches her hand out of the window to prevent it from entering the house, which causes great

panic among the animals. When the Rabbit sends his servant Bill to go down the chimney, Alice kicks him up the chimney like a sky-rocket and hurts him. When the Rabbit suggests burning down the house, Alice poses a verbal threat: "If you do, I'll set Dinah at you." (Carroll, 1993, p.45). When they attack her with little pebbles, Alice shouts at them loudly to make them stop. Here Alice becomes the powerful one and completely relies on her own to resolve conflicts with the adults. Due to the large size of her body, she has overcome her former fears about them, adopts the adult language and behavior to fight with them. Her physical growth "is apparently symbolic of her personality growth, her growth in confidence, assertiveness, and courage" (Honing, 1998, p.84). When Alice learns to control her body at will, she gets more aggressive and powerful. The empowered Alice can boldly challenge the adult values, even when the adult comes from the royal family—the Queen herself.

The beautiful garden Alice longs for is full of disorder, madness and rage. After Alice enters the garden, she finds the gardeners busily paint the white roses red just because the Queen wants it that way. In the presence of the Queen, Alice acts respectfully but thinks to herself: "Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!" To the Queen's demands to know who the cards are, facing down in the grass, Alice retorts: "How should I know? ... It's no business of *mine*." Alice proceeds to interrupt the order from the Queen that the girl's head be chopped off: "Nonsense!" She pronounces the word so "very loudly and decidedly" that the Queen is silenced (Carroll, 1993, p.82). Alice wins her first battle with the adult. When the adult happens to be a queen, it takes on a deeper meaning. Alice even takes the role of a protector for the gardeners. When the Queen orders to chop off their heads, they run to Alice for protection. During the Queen's croquet tournament, in a conversation with the Duchess, Alice keeps a polite demeanor while harboring thoughts of how unpleasant and ugly she is. When the Duchess chides, "Thinking again?" Alice answers severely, "I've a right to think" (Carroll, 1993, p.91). It is indeed of great significance for Alice to boldly assert her right to think. The child not only is aware that she has a right to think, but also a right to speak out what she thinks.

In the trial of the Knave of Hearts, many witnesses are summoned, interrogated and threatened by the King and the Queen to give evidence or face execution. At this moment, Alice feels that her body is growing larger. When the Dormouse argues with her: "You have no right to grow *here*" (Carroll, 1993, p. 99), Alice boldly retorts to his criticism by saying that is nonsense since he is growing too. When Alice is called to the witness stand and asked to give her evidence, she honestly replies she knows "Nothing whatever"(Carroll, 1993, p.116). The truth is that Alice does not even know the accused Knave of Hearts and whether he has stolen tarts is not to her knowledge or concern. The King deliberately invents

a rule in an attempt to banish her out of the courtroom, but clever Alice sees through his trick and questions the validity of his rule. When the Rabbit shows the court an unsigned letter as the most important evidence, the eager King is ready to charge the accused with theft, but Alice declares that there is no meaning in the rhyme at all. She also suspects the whole court's ability to interpret it. When the King asks the jury to consider their verdict, the Queen flies into a rage and demands "Sentence first-verdict afterwards", which is scolded by Alice as pure "nonsense", since a sentence can only come after the verdict is made.

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

"I won't!" said Alice.

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

"Who cares for you?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). "You are nothing but a pack of cards!"(Carroll, 1993, p. 121)

When the whole pack of cards come flying at her, Alice gives "a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister" (Carroll, 1993, p.121). Threatened with execution, Alice boldly shows the injustice of the trial, the invalidity of the law, and absurdity of the adult world. By defying the order of the adults, Alice has deconstructed their authority and asserted her own right as an independent, courageous and self-confident child. Alice faces the circumstances so calmly and bravely that she even fights back with anger by beating the cards off. She throws away her fear and emerges as triumphant and victorious to return happily to her afternoon tea and carefree days in reality.

CONCLUSION

It is important that rather than providing a moralizing conclusion, works of Victorian fantasy play out the child's successful experience of autonomy and independence. With the mode of fantasy, writers "began to portray little girls who were allowed to express hostility without the curbs on female rebelliousness that had been placed earlier, in children's literature"(Knoepflmacher, 1983, p.14). Alice's adventure in Wonderland allows her to get into trouble, to meet, debate with, and even talk back to adult creatures, to explore new places by herself, and most importantly, to boldly assert who she is.

Taken as a whole, Alice's fantastical adventure of magical transformation in size and encounters with animals and animated playing cards reenacts the archetypes of initiation and transition into adolescence, where the adolescent preparing for adulthood must begin to experiment with autonomy. For the seven-year-old pre-adolescent Alice, her dream adventure hints at her future self. The dream enacts in a symbolic way the future confrontations of her development, thus preparing her for the growth and emotional changes brought about during

puberty. Her question about her identity “who am I” is quite meaningful. In Wonderland, Alice learns to be the girl she wants to be and the necessity of making choices, thinking for herself, and affirming self-knowledge. The statement “You’re nothing but a pack of cards” (Carroll, 1993, p.121) crowns Alice’s achievement and marks her out as a rebellious, autonomous and courageous girl who is quite different from those Victorian ideal female preceding her.

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