



ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS IN WONDERLAND: A CURIOUS CHILD

Reading *Through the Looking Glass* becomes a futile exercise unless one has read *Alice in Wonderland*. The two Alice books of Carroll are the finest examples of “children’s literature” of the Victorian era. The dreams of the child Alice gel into the literal mindedness, there is formal etiquette and a curious logic in all abnormalities portrayed, that serve to provide the adult readers of the books with an insight into the Victorian mind. Alice is the typical Victorian child, in her dress (pinafore and pumps) and her concerns with her lessons (that she dislikes). The illustrations of the Alice books are very much a part of the story; without them the stories are uninteresting to children and half the meaning of the stories is lost up on adults. The first picture of *Through the Looking Glass* has Alice seated in a comfortable position in the armchair. However, a close observation reveals her position to be semi-foetal with the armchair as the protection (the uterus). The illustration gives a clear impression of a small child, but her face remains unclear. Alice is every neo bourgeois Victorian child.

In the picture Alice holds a ball of wool yarn, a plump kitten encircles her, and in the very first chapter Alice talks of a raging snow-storm outside. The whole setting suggest a protected childhood, a childhood that religiously preserves innocence. Alice will grow up to become the *Pure* woman, the ideal of Victorian womanhood. Carroll had a phobia about the uncleanliness of little boys, and fancied little girls to be of pristine beauty and purity. For Carroll, little girls were embodiments of original innocence in this mundane world of everyday ugliness, the fallen world.

The dream sequence of the two Alice tales may be the Victorian quest for the origin of the self. Wonderland of the first book and the topsy-turvy world of the *Looking Glass* are internal topographies of Alice. Alice is anything but the Wordsworthian child basking in the eternal glory that she carries along with her. The mystery of Alice’s surroundings in Wonderland or the skewed *Looking Glass* world reflects the mystery of her identity (the first picture of the *Looking Glass*). In the second book, Alice appears a little passive. The Red Queen, the talking Flowers, Tweedledum and Tweedledee ... all in the Looking Glass wall either shouts at Alice or makes her do tasks almost impossible. She is left wanting for breath. The Looking Glass Walrus who weeps for the Oysters while devouring them behind the cover of hid handkerchief reminds the readers of Alice’s own hunger in the first book.



Through the Looking Glass, published a long six years after Wonderland, begins where the former left off. Wonderland ended in an ambiguous trial (where Alice played all the roles) without a verdict. *Looking Glass* begins with a verdict from Alice:

"One thing was certain, that the white kitten had nothing to do with it-it was the black kitten's fault entirely".

This contrast of colours, black vs white in the beginning, transforming to Red vs White a while later, is a predominant trope in the book. Alice is identified with the white Lily and the white pawn, suggesting her eternal innocence and her passivity, virtues of the approaching womanhood.

The game of chess becomes a predominant metaphor of the *Looking Glass* book. The invisibility of the players, the chess-board gobbling up the whole landscape is suggestive of Alice's sense of helplessness and passivity. A sense of pre-destination lurks over the book especially when characters from popular nursery rhymes appear. Alice in the Looking Glass world is haunted by a sense of extinction that she is in a hurry to escape. Death jokes also surround Alice frequently in this second book.

The Alice books significantly portray the Victorian concepts of childhood that oscillated between the extreme extent of original innocence and original sin. Real life children became the centre of such conflicting attitudes and thus became the source of awkwardness to adults. Children were thus taught to remain silent; they shouldn't be seen. Alice is that Victorian child of the literature of the times, who isn't really a child, and yet she never grows up.