

Questioning Victorian Mores in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*

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Abstract

The present paper explores Lewis Carroll's attempt to question the dominant mores of the Victorian era through his books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Carroll wrote at a time when the world was changing in the wake of industrialisation and capitalism. Consequently, respect for the relative autonomy of the animal kingdom as well as the tenets of co-existence with them were beginning to diminish. The paper argues that despite living in an era which was widely regarded to be the epitome of correct behaviour, Carroll had the courage to interrogate its very norms.

Keywords: Animal kingdom; Capitalism; Industrialisation; Victorian mores.

As a plural noun, the *Lexico Dictionary* defines the term 'mores' as the "essential or characteristic customs and conventions of a society or community" ("Mores"). On the other hand, Abercrombie et al. are of the view that 'mores' are "traditional, prescriptive standards which maintain the social group by regulating individual behaviour" ("Mores" 255). However, it was American sociologist William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) who coined the term 'mores' in his book *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (1906). Socio-cultural mores go a long way in sculpting the mindsets of children to suit the needs of the dominant power structure. Thus, this paper attempts to critically analyse ways in which Lewis Carroll tries to question the dominant mores of the Victorian era through his books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Common human needs such as yearnings for affection, hunger and fear

bringing individuals to work together in groups, proving to be mutually advantageous. When such a process is carried out in great numbers in order to satisfy larger interests, it appropriates the form of 'folkways'. A characteristic feature of 'folkways', another term coined by Sumner, is that it gets repeated constantly and its occurrence is fairly widespread. Furthermore, 'folkways' develop into 'mores' when two additional ideas are added to them: first, the awareness of right and wrong; and second, the policy of group welfare. "When the elements of truth and right are developed into doctrines of welfare, the folkways are raised to another plane. They then become capable of producing inferences, developing into new forms, and extending their constructive influence over men and society. Then we call them the [*sic*] mores", writes Sumner (30). While breaking a folkway may lead one to becoming an object of ridicule, including punitive action in some form, the repercussions emanating from violating mores are far more severe.

Historically, Sumner argues that the Romans implied the term 'mores' to mean customs in the widest sense containing a wealth of meaning "including the notion that customs served welfare, and had traditional and mystic sanction, so that they were properly authoritative and sacred" (37). Strangely, our modern society has not only "lost these words" but also "the significant suggestions which inhere in them" (Sumner 37). In this context, Sumner also states that the "logic of one age is not that of another", therefore, an important purpose of studying mores is "to learn to discern in them the operation of traditional error, prevailing dogmas, logical fallacy, delusion, and current false estimates of goods worth striving for" (Sumner 33). As circumstances change with time and humankind adapts itself to such changes, folkways also transform. This is how "new philosophies and ethical rules are invented to try to justify the new ways" (Sumner 36). Thus, those mores which have been generated over a period of time to "suit the system of great secular states, world commerce, credit institutions, contract wages and rent, emigration to outlying continents, etc.", eventually, "become the norm for the whole body of usages, manners, ideas, faiths, customs, and institutions which embrace the whole life of a society and characterize [*sic*] an historical epoch" (Sumner 36). As the folkways are repeated, they become "coercive" where everyone is "forced to conform" so as to gain control over society (Sumner 38). These folkways then appear to be true and fair, paving the way for them to give rise to mores as measures of social welfare (in terms of good/bad and right/wrong).

Mores and folkways are taught primarily through socialisation, that is, through interactions within the family, with friends or at school – through the interplay among students, teachers and peers. Children, in a social

setup, are generally treated as receptacles wherein the dominant socio-cultural mores are drilled. Education and other pedagogical tools can be considered as one of the many means to achieve this end. Therefore, this paper shall attempt to study the manner in which Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books critically interrogate the 'mores' of the Victorian era. Moreover, for the purpose of this paper, 'mores' are not delimited to mean just the customs and conventions of a social group in a particular time-period. Rather, they include education, the teaching-learning process, modes of instruction and the canon being produced at the time since the predominant pedagogical ideas of a specific age are adopted with the view of churning out young minds with pre-given paradigms.

The Victorian age was caught at the cusp of 'Doubt and Faith' and 'the Victorian Compromise'. It was a time of great social, cultural, economic, religious and political upheaval. Darwin's (1809-1882) seminal work, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), and the spirit of scientific enquiry had been instrumental in upending the age-old belief in the moral authority of the Church. Accomplishments in science, technology and engineering brought about a crisis in the Christian faith. Where, on the one hand, rapid expansion of communications such as the railways, the steamships and the invention of the telegraph system went a long way in propelling England towards economic progress; on the other, the Victorians were undergoing immense socio-psychological and moral strain. Though the British Empire was at its zenith, there were several debilitating factors to contend with at home – a rising population, unemployment, mass migration to the cities, urban squalor, the Irish Famine (1845-49), among other things. This came to be known as the Victorian Compromise. What was perhaps more significant was that, unlike their predecessors, the Victorians had come to the realisation that both doubt and faith could go hand-in-hand, along with deliberation, discussion and debate. In keeping with this spirit and in their efforts "to meet the challenge of their time, the Victorian poets, essayists, and novelists often cut across traditional genres; indeed, they may be regarded as pioneers since they responded to the many problems of their age by forging new, or at least unusual combinations of old, genres" [sic] (Timko 623-24). Where there is Matthew Arnold's (1822-1888) "Dover Beach", highlighting the Victorian loss of spiritual truth; there is also Gerard Manley Hopkins's (1844-1889) "God's Grandeur", filling one with a sense of hope for a better world. The poetry of Tennyson (1809-1892) was a poignant admixture of wistfulness reflecting the crisis of the age. Robert Browning's (1812-1889) unique use of the dramatic monologue called attention to the extent of moral ambivalence prevalent in the Victorian society.

Commenting on the status of children's literature in the Victorian Age, Deborah Thacker claims that the Victorians imagined the Romantic notion of childhood to be more spiritual. Thus, children's books written in the Victorian period often included "multilayered fantasies, which revealed more about the way societies *imagined* childhood, perhaps, than about the reading experiences of *actual* children" [sic] (Thacker 41). The child protagonists were increasingly projected as pure, virtuous and angelic juxtaposed against a wicked society, be it little Oliver in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (serialised 1837-1839; published 1839); young David in Dickens' *David Copperfield* (serialised 1849-1850; published 1850); Jane in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) or little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) – all set up as foils, more or less, to a cruel and callous adult world. It appeared as if the Victorians, through literature, were looking to remedy the ills that plagued their society. "While this might not be true of actual child readers, the need to retain an image of the child as some kind of ideal reader can be seen as a motivating force in much of the classic children's literature of the period", Thacker comments further (42).

Victorian Britain saw a surge in child labour with children as young as eight and a half being made to work in factories or in mines. In the factories, children started as "piecers, standing at the spinning machines repairing breaks in the thread" or as "scavengers, crawling beneath the machinery to clear it of dirt, dust or anything else that might disturb the mechanism" (Griffin "Child Labour"). In coal mines, children began by "minding the trap doors, picking out coals at the pit mouth, or by carrying picks for the miners" (Griffin "Child Labour"). Needless to say, whether in rural or in urban areas, children were made to labour long hours, under miserable, and often dangerous, conditions. The state of their appalling working conditions especially outraged two literary figures of the time – Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) and Charles Dickens (1812-1870). Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and Barrett Browning's famous poem "The Cry of the Children" (1844) responded powerfully to the horrible working conditions of these children which were brought to light by a parliamentary report on child labour in 1843. The combined work of Dickens and Barrett Browning, along with that of others such as Charles Kingsley's (1819-1875) *Water-Babies* (1863), helped raise awareness regarding this prevailing malaise. Consequently, mounting public pressure went a long way in garnering support for Lord Shaftesbury's "Ten Hours Bill" in Parliament, known as the Factory Act of 1847.

Some texts written for children in this period even pandered to the image of the Empire. Writers such as R.M. Ballantyne (1825-1894), H. Rider Haggard (1856-1925) and Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) painted a glorious

picture of the British Empire through their quest-narratives and adventure stories, replete with the didactic thread of the Victorian era. Thus, it becomes all the more significant to find writers such as Lewis Carroll, who “logically” disrupt “certain givens, such as time, place and the meaning of language”, belonging to the same epoch and challenging the dominant stereotypes from being reinforced (Webb 63).

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, was born on January 27, 1832 in Daresbury, Cheshire to Reverend Charles Dodgson and his wife, Frances Jane Lutwidge. Upon completing his higher education at Christ Church in Oxford, he was appointed as a lecturer in Mathematics in 1855, a post that he held until 1881. Dodgson was subsequently ordained deacon in 1862. In 1865, his classic, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, saw the light of day, followed by *Through the Looking-Glass And What Alice Found There* (1871). Since both the texts have Alice as their child-protagonist, therefore, they are together referred to as the *Alice* books. In 1881, Dodgson even resigned from his lectureship at Oxford to give more time to his writing. Though he continued to write, nothing could rival the success of his *Alice* books.

By 1862, the time of the famous boating trip down River Thames, which subsequently led to the creation of *Alice’s Adventures under Ground* [sic], Dodgson had been at Christ Church for eleven years, seven of which as a lecturer in mathematics. Although he had already published books, articles and papers relating to his field; for his lesser academic work, Dodgson chose the pen name of ‘Lewis Carroll’ around the year 1856. In this paper, henceforth, Dodgson will be referred to by his pen name, Lewis Carroll.

On July 4, 1862, Carroll, along with a friend, Reverend Robinson Duckworth, was on a picnic with the three daughters of Henry Liddell, the Dean at Christ Church. The idea of the story came to Carroll, while rowing up the Thames, because the girls insisted upon hearing a story from him. Months later, at Alice’s insistence, Carroll strove to recapture the story in all its detail. The result was a hand-written manuscript replete with hand-made sketches, gifted to Alice Liddell for the Christmas of 1864. The lone copy, lying at the Liddells’, was so captivating that Carroll was encouraged to publish the story in a more permanent form. In order to prepare the book for publication, the author spent considerable time re-working certain parts and adding more to the original story. Where *Alice’s Adventures under Ground* consisted of only four chapters, its subsequent version, read the world over, comprised of twelve chapters. The first printed edition of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* came out in 1865. Commenting upon Carroll’s shyness and his skills as a writer, Austin Warren avers that

the author “could speak out, become Carroll, only under the mask of the story-teller” [sic] (337).

Though the gap between the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* was only six years, yet Victorian England was changing continually. By 1871, the country had become more affluent, more extravagantly wasteful and a little more frenzied in pace. Carroll’s interests had also changed. He had become more attuned towards politics and the events occurring around him. It appears as if Carroll, like many of his fellow countrymen, was disillusioned by the failed promise of a contented life through industrial progress. Undoubtedly, though technology did make life more comfortable, but the consequent by-product was loneliness and isolation of the individual. Moreover, humankind was increasingly being alienated from nature and other living beings. These were matters of concern for Carroll and, perhaps, he wished his readers also to be cognisant of such issues.

The next section of the paper attempts to study education and the prevalent mores as found in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* in the context of the Victorian age.

One of the guiding ideas that propelled the Victorian era was the concept of Utilitarianism. It was a philosophical concept widely related to Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), though Hobbes, Locke and Hume can also be regarded as its forerunners. Bentham, in his book, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), states that utility is “that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness ... to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered”, irrespective of whether the concerned ‘party’ is a community or an individual (2). Additionally, he elucidates that the principle of utility is that “which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it, appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question” [sic] (Bentham 2). For each individual, according to Bentham, happiness is equivalent to pleasure and unhappiness to pain. The human endeavour centres round maximising pleasure and minimising pain.

Further, with reference to utilitarianism, Abercrombie et al. claim that “[i]ts main impact on the social sciences has been via its model of social action in which individuals rationally pursue their own self-interests, and its conception of society as the aggregation of atomized [sic] individuals united by self-interest” (“Utilitarianism” 407). The concept has been used

in various disciplines like Economics, Sociology as well as Behavioural Psychology. The “utilitarian approach suggests that it is in the self-interest of all individuals to maintain social order, particularly in complex societies where the DIVISION OF LABOUR is high and the people are inter-dependent. UTILITARIANISM has had less influence on social than on economic theory...”, opine Abercrombie et al. [*sic*] (“Social Order” 359). In this context, John Stuart Mill writes that the “creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure” (186). Moore and Bruder point out that utilitarianism is where “one ought to seek the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people over other things” (238).

The early nineteenth century saw important reform movements being pushed by scholars of the time, especially by contemporaries of Bentham – James Mill (1773-1836), father of young John Stuart Mill, and David Ricardo (1772-1823). James Mill strove for reforms in the British parliamentary system of representation and “argued” for “universal male suffrage on utilitarian grounds” (Duignan and West “Utilitarianism”). John Stuart Mill, on the other hand, was a staunch advocate for women’s suffrage and “state-supported education for all” (Duignan and West “Utilitarianism”). In fact, Terence Ball refers to the friendship between Jeremy Bentham and James Mill when he writes that “Mill helped to make Bentham’s ideas and schemes more palatable and popular than they might otherwise have been” (“James Mill”). Consequently, “[w]ith Mill’s energy and Bentham’s ideas and financial backing, Utilitarian schemes for legal, political, penal, and educational reform gained an ever wider audience and circle of adherents” (Ball “James Mill”). Thus, utilitarianism became the basis of a movement for radical reforms that would later “test all institutions and policies by the principle of utility” including legal reforms, parliamentary reforms, reforms in education and in economic policies, among others (Duignan and West “Utilitarianism”).

In the context of education, the application of the principle of utility as an educational strategy is based on the premise that education can be used as a tool to achieve individual and social well being. Thus, one way of generating happiness for the greatest number of people in a society would mean preparing children from a young age to fit in well into the ways and mores of the world. Or, in other words, to serve as proverbial cogs in the social machine. One of the key objectives of education then becomes readying students, akin to an assembly line, drilling them with facts and encour-

aging rote memorisation, irrespective of their innate abilities or aptitude. In reference to this, John Stuart Mill states that the “[c]apacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance” (189). He further contends that, in most young people, this capacity “speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favourable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise” (Mill 189). The goal of such kind of utilitarian form of education, it seems, is not to nurture the individual talents of the young but rather to mediate and finally co-opt their minds into believing that societal assumptions and norms are to be reinforced and carried forward without any doubts or questions. Robin Gilmour, in this regard, states that “[t]o many Victorians, education was a means of social control; in the face of revolutions on the Continent and unrest at home it became imperative that the people be taught respect for the inevitable community of interest that bound a commercial society together” (213-214).

Here, it would be appropriate to mention what Ronald Reichertz has to say about Alice in his work *The Making of the Alice Books*. Reichertz claims that before the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, informational literature was widely considered as an official form of literature for children. In direct contrast, literature that was imaginative was considered nonsensical and of little value (Reichertz 21). The utilitarian nature of the dominant literature provided “a lively background of combativeness for the rise and consolidation of imaginative literature and, especially, of fantasy” (Reichertz 22). It is within this literary frame of reference that Carroll wrote *Alice in Wonderland* – a significant factor to bear in mind while analysing the texts.

Alice tries hard to bring in her above-ground Victorian sensibilities to each situation that she faces in her new surroundings. She is unable to achieve the desired results because neither in Wonderland nor in the Looking-Glass world is there any “social context” where the prim and proper Victorian era rules can be practised (Gabriele 383). From the very beginning in *Wonderland* till the very end of the *Looking-Glass* world, there is a “rupture of the standard conduct that is intimately wed with the definition of a social context”, which in turn indicates that neither of these worlds abides by any rules (Gabriele 383). This is the chief reason why none of the norms, so well-ingrained into Alice above-ground, work to her satisfaction. Alice dismally fails at her attempts to recall tables of multiplication as well as capitals of different countries: “‘I’ll try if I know all the things I used to know. Let me see: four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is – oh dear.... let’s try Geogra-

phy. London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome, and Rome—no, *that's* [sic] all wrong, I'm certain''' (*Wonderland* 18-19). This indicates that Alice has had her fair share of informational literature though she is unable to recollect any of the facts once she is in Wonderland.

In the subsequent pages, Alice's encounter with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle might appear absurd, as does everything in Wonderland, but Carroll again uses it to ridicule the Victorian education system:

MOCK TURTLE. '[W]e went to school in the sea. The master was an old Turtle—we used to call him Tortoise—'

ALICE. 'Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?'

MOCK TURTLE. 'We called him Tortoise because he *taught* us' (*Wonderland* 93-94; emphasis added)

The Mock Turtle blames Alice for being "'very dull'" while the Gryphon tells her "'to be ashamed'" of herself "'for asking such a simple question'" (*Wonderland* 94). The ways of Wonderland are indeed bizarre when the Mock Turtle and Alice discuss their school:

MOCK TURTLE. 'We had the best of education—in fact, we went to school every day—'

ALICE. '*I've* [sic] been to a day-school, too.... You needn't be so proud as all that'

MOCK TURTLE. 'With extras?'

ALICE. 'Yes ... we learned French and music'

MOCK TURTLE. 'And washing?' (*Wonderland* 95)

Upon Alice's indignant reply of "'[c]ertainly not!'", the Mock Turtle proudly declares "'Ah! Then yours wasn't a really good school'" (*Wonderland* 95). "'Now, at *ours*, they had, at the end of the bill, 'French, music, and washing—extra [sic]'" claims the Mock Turtle (*Wonderland* 95). Scott Herring explains that the 'washing' listed as 'extra' was not an activity as Alice initially believes but rather the expenses of laundry incurred at boarding schools (Notes 275). Further, the Mock Turtle tells Alice about the "'regular course'" that he took including "'Reeling and Writhing'" accompanied by "'different branches of Arithmetic—Ambition [sic], Distraction, Uglification and Derision'" (*Wonderland* 95). The Gryphon is astounded when Alice is unable to understand 'uglification':

GRYPHON. 'Never heard of uglifying.... You know what to beautify is, I suppose?'

ALICE. 'Yes ... it means – to – make – anything – prettier.'

GRYPHON. 'Well, then ... if you don't know what to uglify is, you *are* [sic] a simpleton.' (*Wonderland* 95)

Towards the end of this interaction, Alice asks the Mock Turtle about the number of hours they had lessons at school. He wisely replies:

MOCK TURTLE. 'Ten hours the first day ... nine the next, and so on.'

ALICE. 'What a curious plan!'

GRYPHON. 'That's the reason they're called lessons ... because they *lessen* from day to day.' (*Wonderland* 96; emphasis added)

Alice's poor view of education in schools can be gleaned from an observation she makes during her interaction with these two creatures: "[h]ow the creatures order one about, and make one repeat lessons.... I might just as well be at school at once'" (*Wonderland* 103). Carroll's novel and ingenious way of perceiving things, via the Mock Turtle and other characters, remains unparalleled. It is as if the author is trying to depict a world filled with different possibilities.

In the *Looking-Glass* world, Haigha introduces Alice as "'a child'" to the Unicorn, stating that "'[w]e only found it to-day [sic]. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!'" (224). The Unicorn, in turn, asks if "'it'" is "'alive'", for he had always regarded children as "'fabulous monsters!'" (*Looking-Glass* 224). Martin Gardner terms this to be a "part of the philosophic dullness of our time that there are millions of rational monsters walking about on their hind legs, observing the world through pairs of flexible little lenses ... who see nothing fabulous whatever about themselves" (Introduction 14-15). Children, deprived of fantasy and imagination, can surely turn into dull, walking 'rational monsters'. Thus, it can be argued that imagination is as essential as any rational faculty to make us truly human.

Victorian mannerisms are so thoroughly ingrained in Alice that even when she finds herself in strange situations, the so-called proper decorum remains instilled in her mind. Jean Webb puts it quite aptly when she comments: "What Alice discovers is that her course of action is inappropriate. The manners she has learnt are inapplicable to her needs in this world, a discovery to be reinforced as she wanders through Wonderland" (65). Alice, thus, is neither able to control her circumstances nor is she able to predict them. It seems as if Carroll has juxtaposed rationality with fantasy. The logic of the world in which Alice lives does not match with

that of Wonderland.

This becomes evident when, time and again, Alice ends up committing multiple faux-pas by behaving in Wonderland as she would above-ground. For instance, when she encounters the Mouse, whom she presumes to be French, she quotes the first line that she can recall from her French schoolbook and enquires about her cat (*Wonderland* 22). Asking a mouse about one's cat is bound to frighten it – a phenomenon that Alice is unmindful of. She begins to regale the timid Mouse with the exploits of her pet cat, Dinah: “‘she’s such a capital one for catching mice – oh, I beg your pardon!’” (*Wonderland* 22). It is only when she notices the Mouse “‘bristling all over’”, does she realise that she has “‘offended’” it (*Wonderland* 22-23). She then begins to talk about dogs, particularly about a terrier in their neighbourhood who is extremely “‘useful’” since “‘it kills all the rats’” (*Wonderland* 23). Alice becomes aware of her gaffe immediately, for she says: “‘ – oh dear.... I’m afraid I’ve offended it again!’” (*Wonderland* 23). A little later, not having learnt her lesson yet, Alice once again commits a similar mistake while conversing with the Lory, a bird: “‘Dinah’s our cat. And she’s such a capital one for catching mice, you can’t think! And oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she’ll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!’” (*Wonderland* 30-31).

Alice’s remark causes quite a commotion with birds hurrying off on different pretexts, leaving her alone. She, then, observes: “‘I wish I hadn’t mentioned Dinah!’” (*Wonderland* 31). Further on, when Alice meets the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, the pair expound upon the finer points of a Lobster-Quadrille dance. The Mock Turtle tells her about lobsters: “‘[y]ou may not have lived much under the sea.... And perhaps you were never even introduced to a lobster – ’”, when Alice interjects, “‘I once tasted – ’”, however, she halts mid-sentence and says instead: “‘No, never’ ...” (*Wonderland* 97). She is learning, by and by, not to offend the creatures of Wonderland. The culmination, however, occurs towards the end of *Through the Looking-Glass* when, at Queen Alice’s feast, she is introduced to her food – a leg of mutton and the pudding. As Alice offers to serve a slice of mutton to the other Queens, the Red Queen rebukes her: “‘it isn’t etiquette to cut any one you’ve been introduced to’” (*Looking-Glass* 257). A similar episode is repeated during the dessert course when the pudding angrily replies: “‘[w]hat impertinence.... I wonder how you’d like it, if I were to cut a slice out of *you*, you creature!’” [*sic*] (*Looking-Glass* 258). It is clear that Alice is at odds in this world below-ground. It further appears as if the author, through the creation of an absurd world populated with eccentric characters, attempts to bring home the point that objects/ animals are also alive and possess ample grey matter.

With reference to the relationship between Alice and the animal world in the *Alice* books, John Berger's (1926-2017) observations in his essay, "Why Look at Animals?" (1977), are quite pertinent in the context of the inevitable change that was on the way. Berger explores the ways in which the relationship between human beings and animals has evolved, especially after the nineteenth century. He claims that in the nineteenth century, the West saw the ushering in of a process which was later to be "completed by 20th century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken. Before this rupture, animals constituted the first circle of what surrounded man. Perhaps that already suggests too great a distance. They were with man at the centre of his world" (Berger 1). A special case in point would be fables with animal characters who come alive at every page of such tales. These fables have been a vital part of children's literature across all cultures imparting valuable lessons to young children for hundreds of years.

However, the nineteenth century witnessed a tectonic shift in the relationship between the human and the animal world. Post-industrialisation, respect for the relative autonomy of the animal kingdom as well as the tenets of co-existence with them began to diminish. "Zoos, realistic animal toys and the widespread commercial diffusion of animal imagery, all began as animals started to be withdrawn from daily life", claims Berger (24). Carroll, living in the tumultuous Victorian era, must have witnessed, first hand, the changing contours of this relationship in the wake of industrialisation and capitalism. The *Alice* books can be regarded as the author's attempt to question this reconfigured connection. Through the perspective of his child protagonist, Carroll created a novel way of looking at the animal world. It can be claimed that in the process, he tried to revive, in the reader, alternate possibilities of learning to live in harmony with nature. It would not be incorrect to say that the *Alice* books were Carroll's attempt to examine the contemporaneous ways of thinking within the broader arc of the Victorian mindset.

There is, of course, no denying the fact that the *Alice* books go *far beyond* the Victorian era. Carroll's Alice is a child who conforms to the Victorian mores above-ground. However, upon entering the imaginary worlds, there emerge two distinct facets of her personality: one, Alice as the innocent child-protagonist who is best trying to cope with the strange situations and quirky characters; second, Alice as a child-protagonist who questions the peculiar eccentricities of these worlds. It is, however, significant to note that it is not so much that Alice challenges the world below-ground, but rather that the author, through his child-protagonist, questions the predominant precepts of Victorian society. Neither in Wonderland nor

in the Looking-Glass world does Alice ever feel threatened or unsafe. Despite their quirky behaviour, the creatures come across as delightful and endearing. As Alice learns the art of survival in both the worlds, Carroll hints at the possibilities of a harmonious co-existence between the animal world and the world of humans.

While analysing the *Alice* texts, it is important to remember that the perennial appeal of these books lies in the fact that Carroll dared to include his own time period in them *also* rather than simply passing over it. Hence, it goes to the credit of Carroll that, despite living in the prim and proper Victorian era, he had the courage as well as the vision to interrogate its customs as also its notions of education. He wrote neither to educate the young nor to inculcate in them a moral code of behaviour. By using a plot that appears to be seemingly nonsensical, he is able to deftly evade being cornered into a tight spot. Furthermore, Carroll has been superbly successful in creating a third space that is neither normative nor pragmatic. A mathematician by profession and holding a teaching position in such a venerable institute, Carroll must have been extremely well-versed in logic. Yet, by depicting an unconventional world, he has tried to allocate a space for what is non-logical, imaginative, innovative and all that can be achieved when we move away from the realm of logic. It is important to remember that what appears as seemingly-nonsensical is perceived so by readers who are situated within the hegemonic and ideological arc of the Victorian viewpoint. That is, it seems nonsensical to us if our frame of reference remains blinkered within the Victorian perspective. Once one steps out of the Victorian frame of reference, this alternative space opens vistas of new understanding and perception for readers young and old.

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