**Down The Rabbit Hole: Challenging traditional psychoanalytic theories in Wonderland within Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.**



Illustration by John Tenniel in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.*

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**Dedication**

*This piece is dedicated to you Dad for teaching me that I could achieve ‘six impossible things before breakfast’, I did it x*

25th November 1967 – 22nd July 2015

**Abstract**

Celebrating her 150th birthday last year, the timeless classic that is *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and sequel *Through the Looking-glass* has been the center of several modes of criticism. This criticism has frequently been lead by the personal life of her creator Lewis Carroll. From his conflicted sociability to his undisputable intelligence many critics have attempted to pin point an exact meaning to the nonsense of *Wonderland* with great difficulty. Criticism has been lead by its contextual perception from the logical reasoning of maths in *Wonderland* to the psychedelic drug theories of its perception in the 1960s.

Using Freudian theories of ‘The Psyche’, ‘Psychosexual Development’ and ‘Dream Analysis’. This piece journeys ‘down down down the rabbit hole’ through Alice’s birth, sexual awakening and asserts that all is but a dream.

**Introduction**

As Matthew Gorgans states “a psychoanalytical reading provides reasonable explanations for the various perplexing elements of Lewis Carroll’s work”.[[1]](#footnote-1) Traditional psychoanalytical criticism of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* has bestowed great importance onto an attempt to define Carroll by a possible inappropriate relationship with the *Wonderland’s* inspiration Alice Liddell. This approach has since been scrutinised for its obsession of depicting Lewis Carroll as more than a man whom had a particular dislike towards his context. The irony of such is that criticism of this type is based upon a particular interest for the critical writer’s context in this example it is Freudian theory. The psychoanalytical criticism of the first quarter of the twentieth century follows the publication of Freudian theories such as *The Ego and the Id* (1920), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1923) and *Dream Analysis* (1900). Yet traditionally the psychoanalytical approach to *Wonderland* has failed to acknowledge further psychoanalytical theories other than sexual ‘repression’, which is frequently used as evidence for a pedophilic Carroll. This piece extends psychoanalytic theory to further than sexual ‘repression’. It examines child development, dream theory and a defense of Carroll’s personal life, with the suggestion that he shared and promoted contextual satire through his works.

Lewis Carroll, a pen name adopted from an anagram of his own name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson helped to create a separation between Carroll as a writer and Dodgson as an academic. As a university math’s lecturer he was highly overlooked, shy and suffered with a terrible stammer. He was a private man, who hated publicity more than most. He even went as far as giving orders to any letter addressed to ‘L. Carroll, Christ Church, Oxford’ to be returned to the sender with the endorsement ‘not known’.[[2]](#footnote-2) As the eldest of ten children, Carroll spent much of his life surrounded by younger siblings. His vivid imagination was clear from a young age, with his first recorded writing being an in depth description of a train game, that he created from various items including a wheelbarrow.[[3]](#footnote-3) Carroll became the editor and chief contributor for a succession of family magazines including *The Rectory Umbrella,* which was still produced after he became an Oxford Don. [[4]](#footnote-4) From 1858 until the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* Carroll wrote and published several mathematical works including: *Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry* (1860), *The Formulae of Plane Trigonometry* (1861) and *A Guide to the Mathematical Student* (1864). Many critics have since noted the several references to maths in *Wonderland*. These references include a possible algebra equation when Alice must eat from the Caterpillars mushroom and the Latin translation of ‘hookah’ being ‘algebra’. It is clear from the beginning of his career as a writer, he had preferred a direct and private audience to which he had an intimate relationship with and no literary rivalry.

A focus on Carroll’s relationship with children leads psychoanalytical theory into a dark and poor supported area of criticism. Although Carroll did not marry or have children of his own, he was fascinated by the child’s mind and shared vast amounts of his imaginative musings with them. Carroll preferred the company of children on a one to one basis when sharing his stories; he suffered terribly from a stammer, which caused him great anxiety in social situations. His poem “Rules and Regulations” features several references to the anxiety he felt towards his stammer, ‘Learn well your grammar, And never stammer.’[[5]](#footnote-5) He is noted to have written to one mother, inviting her daughter to dinner alone, claiming girl-nature is limited ‘in the presence of [their] mothers or sisters’.[[6]](#footnote-6) A vast amount of Carroll’s stories were told in the presence of Alice Liddell whom he dedicated a lot of his time to. Alice Liddell in 1932 notes how they ‘used to sit on the big sofa on each side of him’ while he told them ‘stories, illustrating them by pencil or ink drawings as he went along’.[[7]](#footnote-7) Carroll’s first recital of *Alice’s Adventures Underground,* the original title for the 1865 classic, has been widely documented. It was a sunny 4th of July that is said to be the day the most famous of his tales was shared on an ‘expedition up the river to Godstow’.[[8]](#footnote-8) There is however no knowledge of how true this exact day was as although the day is noted as a sunny day in July, weather records have connoted that that particular day had significantly bad weather.[[9]](#footnote-9) Canon Duckworth a close friend and companion of Carroll records turning to him and asking “Dodgson is this an extemporary romance of yours?” as he told the story.[[10]](#footnote-10) Alice Liddell is further to record how the “stories he told us that afternoon must have been better than usual, because I have such a distinct recollection of the expedition”.[[11]](#footnote-11) Carroll rarely recorded any of the stories he told to his child friends as they were mostly spoken and created for the child in his company. On that day however, after some convincing from Alice Liddell, he was compelled to record this tale and presented it to her on the 26th of November 1864.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Psychoanalytical theory is quick to assume that due to Carroll’s request of being without the influence of parents or siblings, in the company of his child friends that he had ulterior motives for his encounters. Particular attention is bestowed onto his choice never to marry without regard for his undocumented relationships and friendships with adults. These friendships include Canon Duckworth, Arthur Hughes and many Oxford dons.[[13]](#footnote-13) Carroll is noted to have shared great relationships with his sisters in adult life and visited them for frequently prolonged periods of time at their home, The Chestnuts, Guildford. Florence Becker Lennon has gone as far as to claim that Carroll was in fact in love with Alice Liddell but the likelihood of this is very small.[[14]](#footnote-14) Instead, Oxford Undergraduates had disputed that Carroll had proposed to Alice’s sister Lorina and was even said to use the Alice and her sisters to continue flirtation with their governess Mrs. Prickett.[[15]](#footnote-15) A focus of *Wonderland* as a source for criticism without a wider regard for Carroll’s further works leads psychoanalytical theory towards a series of assumptions. Carroll’s romance poetry for example is not devoid of adult love as Lennon presumes. His dedication to notably ‘mature’ love and the form of delicate women is perhaps the most overlooked aspect of psychoanalytical theory. His first poem ‘Faces in the Fire’ is a fantasy about a man reflecting on the love he once shared for an already mature woman. In many ways, his appreciation for the innocence of childhood is completely justifiable towards his erratic and wicked representation of women in *Wonderland*. Carroll as a sexual deviant is an attempt by academic vultures to cling onto one small reputation based on a belief that Carroll not only preferred the company of young children but also had further sexual motives; psychoanalytical critics have assumed this for over seventy years.

Anthony Goldschmidt in his four-page article published in the *New Oxford Outlook* entitled “*Alice in Wonderland* Psycho-Analysed” draws the first comparisons to ‘The Rabbit Hole’ and several other symbols of sex.[[16]](#footnote-16) He sparked a series of sexual symbolism claims that spanned over a twenty-year period, with the assumption that ‘The Rabbit Hole’ was a symbol for Carroll’s apparent repressed sexuality. His friend and fellow Carroll scholar, Derek Hudson asserts that this attempt to draw Freudian concepts into *Wonderland* was done so with his tongue “halfway into his cheek”.[[17]](#footnote-17) The effect of this possible ‘joke’ have thus been damaging to the reputation of Carroll as a writer. Although the connotations with ‘The Rabbit Hole’ and *Wonderland* with sex are hard to dispute, scholars of this sort fail to acknowledge other motives for these possible sexual references. For example these references could connote a celebration of the female form and sexuality, not a ‘repression’ of it.

Further to this, this ‘psycho-analysis’ fails to recognize several key concepts of Freudian metapsychology. It fails to acknowledge theories of child development, which Carroll due to his close contact with many of his child friends as they grew up, would be aware of. Carroll had a great appreciation for the treatment of children in Victorian England; his satirical references to Victorian punishments are frequent as well as his criticism of the role of adults in society. He is noted to have extended the trial of the tarts in *Wonderland* from a few pages to a whole chapter after witnessing some ‘very petty cases’ on his visit to Assize Court on the 13th of July 1863.[[18]](#footnote-18) Traditional psychoanalytical responses also fail to acknowledge psychosexual stages of development, which Alice is arguably consumed into, as well as the ways in which Carroll bestowed importance onto this. This is apparent within his criticism of female sexuality from the erratic behavior of the Queen of Hearts and the submissive nature of the Red King towards her. It also fails to acknowledge the notion of ‘Dream Analysis’ and the unconscious, which is a key concept of Freudian psychoanalysis. It is more accurate to examine the ways in which these theories are lead by a belief about the Rabbit Hole through wider psychoanalytical theories. These include the Rabbit hole as Birth, Sex and a Dream with chapter of ‘The Rabbit Hole’ as the main source of analysis.

**Down the Rabbit Hole: Birth and ‘The Psyche’**

The concept of the *puer aeternus* or *puer* child, a child-god who is eternal and forever young became increasingly popular within Victorian Literature. As Franz notes the *puer* child has ‘a certain kind of spirituality which comes from a relatively close contact with the collective unconscious’. [[19]](#footnote-19) This is arguably something that Carroll’s relationship with children suggests. Victorian concepts of childhood were of extremes. From theories of “original innocence” to “original sin”, from ideas of Rousseau to Calvin. Ultimately there was no outright theory of childhood other than that little girls were “the purest members of a species of questionable origin”.[[20]](#footnote-20) Due to the innocence and positivity bestowed onto childhood alongside the contextual expectations of Victorian life, many adult readers of children’s literature may have felt closer to the idea of the *puer* child. Sigmund Freud’s study on the effect of child development on the adult ‘psyche’ is conclusive that; adults who are unable to lead regular adult lives due to a need to relive child years relates to possible poor development in early childhood. Further to this, George Boas and Nina Auerbach, theorise that adults are “urged to retain their youth” because the “child is the paradigm of the ideal man” or ‘ideal self’.[[21]](#footnote-21) The child’s innocence, pureness and naivety is something that Victorian adults may have wished to maintain but have been unable to do so due to the demands of adulthood in society. This arguably accounts for the vast popularity and appeal of *Alice* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the timeless nature of the books to both adults and children.

Carroll was similarly fascinated with the child’s mind and its development. Dr. Martin Grotjahn in a psychological analysis of *Ferdinand the Bull* draws comparisons between Ferdinand and Carroll’s character.[[22]](#footnote-22) He highlights the ways in which Ferdinand refused to become an adult bull fighting in a ring, instead remaining as an eternal child. Carroll similarly to Ferdinand, disassociated himself from his child friends when they became married or ‘sexualised’ adults.[[23]](#footnote-23) His poem ‘My Fairy’ indicates a strong resistance to adulthood when the voice of youth cries out against adulthood in the last verse:

“What may I do” at length I cried

Tired of the painful task.

The fairy quietly replied,

And said, “You must not Ask”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Carroll arguably did not wish to engage in adult life (much like the adults in *Wonderland*) and he fumbled for his identity, only to find comfort when he could express a soft feminine presence in the company of young children whom welcomed him despite his social flaws in particular his stammer.[[25]](#footnote-25) In his preface dated Christmas day 1871, Carroll talks about his love for ‘innocent amusement’:

The thought of the many English firesides where happy faces have smiled her a welcome and of the many English children to whom she has brought an hour of (I trust) innocent amusement, is one of the brightest and pleasantest thoughts of my life.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In his lifetime Carroll had become increasingly interested in photography and alongside Harry Furniss, the artist who illustrated several editions of his stories, he produced artwork on the form of young children regularly. Carroll was said to consider the age of twelve to be the ideal age for children in his artwork claiming, “children were too thin who were younger”.[[27]](#footnote-27) In his letters to Harry Furniss, he confesses that he wished to dispose of ‘with all costume: naked children are so perfectly pure and lovely’. However he did not ‘admire naked boys, in pictures. They always seem to need clothes’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Carroll’s relates to the idea of the *puer* child through his love for the child’s mind and the child’s form. Psychoanalytical criticism has attempted to claim that this illustrates a repressed pedophilia but fails to note that on the controversy surrounding these letters to Furniss, Carroll refused to photograph again after July 1880.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The connotations between the rabbit hole and birth or rebirth require little explanation. Alice is plunged into an unfamiliar world, through a long and dark tunnel. This is arguably comparable to the journey of a baby from the fetal symbiotic safety inside its mother’s womb to the secluded independence of the external world.[[30]](#footnote-30) In the process of giving birth during the period, the descent through the cervix when it became dilated was often referred to as ‘confinement’. Alice is arguably ‘confined’ within the walls of the room in chapter one and two as well as *Wonderland* itself which she constantly seeks escape. The birthing metaphor is resonant as she struggles to get her head through the doorway; ‘“and even if my head would go through” thought poor Alice, “it would be of very little use without my shoulders.”’[[31]](#footnote-31) As a result, she cries tears like a newborn when she attempts to enter *Wonderland*, swimming within the amniotic salt water of her tears. The significance of birth and rebirth is subsequently apparent throughout *Wonderland* as a result. For example, the Caterpillar whom is reborn as a butterfly and arguably the pool of tears which could be symbolic of baptism or Christian rebirth. This constant celebration of new life relates well to Carroll’s love for children, he too similarly sought escapism or rebirth back into his childhood.

This journey of ‘self’ discovery and child development from birth runs parallel to Freud’s theory of ‘The Psyche’. Freud theorised that there were three main aspects of the mind each of which developed during the early years of childhood, helping to shape our minds into adulthood. The idea of the ‘id’, which is a primitive, unconscious and an impulsive area of the psyche, usually develops in the early years of life.[[32]](#footnote-32) After Alice’s birth into Wonderland, Alice’s ‘id’ is respondent to these characteristics. She seeks to quench her thirst, “this bottle was not marked with ‘poison’ so Alice ventured to taste it” and uses reasoning, when she decides if the liquid is safe to consume.[[33]](#footnote-33) Further to this, she seeks to discover her ‘self’ and develop her ‘ego’. As Jung states the child “represents the strongest, the most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realise itself”.[[34]](#footnote-34) The ‘ego’ in this example works to control the ‘id’ with compromise and reasoning. We see Alice’s development of the ego through “I knew who I was when I got up this morning but I think I must have changed several times since then” and the previous quote as she becomes aware of her changing self.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Comparisons have been made to Oscar Wilde and Carroll through the clear similarities between Alice and Jack in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Like Jack, Alice is confused by her own self and wonders “But if I’m not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?”[[36]](#footnote-36) She confuses herself with Mabel by temporarily forgetting her own name, ironically symbolic of whom she is and we see how her ego identity is also under threat, a genuine fear of a child changing from childhood to adolescence. Towards the end of her journey (with little idea of her goals), the reader follows Alice as she develops from a crying baby after birth into a confident young girl, much like Carroll’s experience of Alice Liddell. The pool of tears is also claimed to resemble the time that Alice

In the midst of their expedition to Nuneaton had burst into tears and was thus accused of causing a flood by her crying. Alice’s growing ego is comparable to Alice Liddell’s request that Carroll recorded this particular story on paper; both Alice Liddell and Alice simultaneously grow in confidence and demands. Similar to Alice’s search for her ego identity, as Charles L. Dodgson, Carroll was an intellect, ‘openly presenting himself to the world’ but as Lewis Carroll he was seen as an unmarried adult and secluded spinster. Carroll was not however quiet and shy, he lived and protested his views through his stories while as Professor Dodgson he lived and protested in adult pamphlets and letters to newspapers.[[37]](#footnote-37) These include two open letters, one named ‘The Evaluation of II” which deals with the controversy over the salary of the late Professor Jowett. The other ‘The Dynamics of a Parti-cle’ gives an account of Mr. Gladstone’s election campaign.[[38]](#footnote-38) These paradoxical characters of Carroll are confused and opposing like the opposites of *Wonderland*, such as the red and white roses, the Red and White Queens and the black and white kittens, whom Queen Alice unites on her lap. The unification of these opposites are all progressive towards the idea of Alice or children in general as ‘mediators, bringers of healing, that is, one who makes whole’ in the adult world. *Wonderland* is therefore a celebration of Alice Liddell’s unification of the two characters of Carroll[[39]](#footnote-39).

*Wonderland* also encourages the development of Alice’s ‘super ego’, which is said to incorporate the inbuilt or taught morals of society from the parents. The society norms Alice is familiar with from outside of Wonderland are conflicted by the nonsense within *Wonderland*, thus making Alice’s super-ego development laboured. This is apparent when she intrinsically insults the Dormouse by speaking of Dinah having not met a talking mouse before. In this example her ego influences her ‘id’ by the guilt she feels when she cries as a result of distressing the mouse, whilst also teaching her super-ego how she should respond to animals in *Wonderland*. Further to this her recital of Isaacs Watt’s ‘How doth the little busy bee’ seeks to apply her societies norms of didacticism, a key feature of Victorian education. Her recital however becomes ‘How doth the little crocodile’ and complete nonsense.[[40]](#footnote-40) This is a direct criticism by Carroll of didacticism as this recital suggests the ridiculousness of the superego’s knowledge. Alice tries to find her intelligence by repeating what her context has taught her to, much like traditional psychoanalytic critics and Freud. However the reader is made aware that Alice is particularly clever from her knowledge of Galileo’s theory of the center of the earth when he questions her fall.[[41]](#footnote-41)

This criticism of Victorian society and the importance of correct child development are apparent throughout *Alice’s Adventures*. Alice’s growth through *Wonderland* from her birth down the Rabbit hole to becoming royalty in *Through The Looking Glass* is ironically contributed to by a series of less mature and erratic characters, this is a ‘truism of criticism to remark’.[[42]](#footnote-42) The growth of Alice in a world where the adults are somewhat ridiculous and highly unhelpful towards her journey helps portray the opinion of Carroll towards adults in his personal life. In a conversation between the Red and White Queens and Alice, the Red Queen states:

That's just what I complain of! You should have meant! What do you suppose is the use of a child without any meaning? Even a joke should have some meaning — and a child's more important than a joke, I hope. You couldn't deny that, even if you tried with both hands.[[43]](#footnote-43)

This is an example of “Schizophrenese”, language used by schizophrenics that ‘leaves it up to the listener to take his choice from among many meanings’.[[44]](#footnote-44) The confusing nature of such an exchange is common throughout the books, in which the adults of *Wonderland* attempt to control and alter the super-egos knowledge of linguistic meaning. A further example is the Mad Hatter’s riddle ‘Why is a raven like a writing desk?’[[45]](#footnote-45) The result of this is that Alice is unable to take any meaning from the adults in the society around her, much like satirical view of adults in Carroll’ s personal life and also a criticism of Victorian education as a whole.

On further reflection of the adults in *Wonderland*, a large proportion of them seem to portray Freud’s effects of poor child development and adult personality disorders as a result. For example, the White Rabbit is consistently anxious about time, which not only mirrors the hustle of Victorian society but also suggest he may suffer from an underlining anxiety disorder. The Dormouse, shares characteristics of posttraumatic stress disorder on reflection of his response to Alice talking about Dinah the cat. Further to this the Mad Hatter displays features of de-personalisation disorder and schizophrenia by the ways in which his watch is persistently stuck on 6 o’clock. This is also apparent when he states ‘Your hair wants cutting’ in response to Alice’s comments about the table, a phrase Carroll often heard from adults, the Mad Hatter displays a lack of acknowledgement for the social situation around him.[[46]](#footnote-46) The Queen and Duchess both display erratic responses to food and are persistently violent and angry. Finally the Cheshire Cat, who appears and disappears throughout the book even goes as far as claiming “We’re all Mad here”.[[47]](#footnote-47) Arguably, the author is seemingly persistent in his acknowledgement of the importance of child development through Alice. Further to this, by criticising the adults of Victorian society who display characteristics of poor child development, psychoanalytical theory can significantly assert that the Rabbit Hole is a birthing metaphor and a celebration of the child’s mind.

**Down the Rabbit Hole:**

**‘Off with their heads!’ Psychosexual Development**

Anthony Goldschmidt draws comparisons between the White Rabbit whom is feeble and shy with that of the stammer and apparent unsociability of Lewis Carroll. When the White Rabbit leads Alice down the rabbit hole within the first chapter he claims that it is “perhaps the best known symbol for coitus”.[[48]](#footnote-48) On further consideration, when Alice cries it could also symbolise the pain of losing her virginity. Further to this, the salt-water in ‘The Pool of Tears’, could be compared to semen. Psychoanalysis of this kind relates to Freud’s theory of ‘Psychosexual Development’. Similar to his theory of ‘The Psyche’, he theorises that conditions of childhood influence the sexual experiences of adulthood. Carroll’s perceived poor relationship with adults extends further towards menopausal women, similar to his appreciation of childhood failing to extend to young boys. These assumptions of Carroll’s personal preference in the company of people, fail to acknowledge the importance he bestowed onto the development of children and his appreciation of them. Instead it is more accurate to examine the possible sexual connotations of the Rabbit Hole with sexual awakening. *Wonderland* could also be seen as a celebration of the female form and the importance of sexual moderation in Victorian society, particularly within women.

Psychosexual examples of the Oedipus Complex, poor development and sexual deprivation are apparent throughout *Alice’s Adventures in* *Wonderland*. Freud theorised that there were five stages of development; oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital and during each of these stages of development, ‘libido’ exists but is fulfilled by the named process.[[49]](#footnote-49) In the ‘Oral’ stage of psychosexual development, children fulfill their sexual desire through sucking and swallowing during consumption. If feeding from a young age is difficult or too lax, then an adult may struggle to attain regular sexual relationships or become too dependent on oral satisfaction. Consumption is central to the narrative of *Wonderland*; food controls Alice’s size, surrounds the Mad Hatter and causes the violence of two women in the book. It has been widely acknowledged that Carroll himself had a fixation with food; he would regularly decline social gatherings, which involved eating stating:

I always decline luncheons. I have no appetite for a meal at that time, and you will perhaps sympathise with my dislike for sitting to watch others eat and drink.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Carroll’s dislike towards food endorsed social gatherings is further evident in his satire of Victorian etiquette books including ‘*Hints for Etiquette; or Dining Out Made Easy’*.[[51]](#footnote-51) In *Wonderland*, the civility of dinner etiquette is criticised in the madness of the Mad Hatter’s tea party and the banquet in *Through the Looking Glass,* in which little is consumed due to the nonsense.

Lorraine Gamman has also connoted that Carroll is an example of the Victorian pressures of body image and eating disorders as a result.[[52]](#footnote-52) Alice herself has a conflicted relationship with food in *Wonderland*, she wishes to “shut up like a telescope” and frequently consumes food that increases and decreases her body size.[[53]](#footnote-53) Like a bulimic Alice binges upon food and drink, “I suppose I ought to eat or drink something or other” and in the White Rabbit’s house in which she consumes a bottle with no label she states ‘“I know something interesting is sure to happen” she said to herself, “whenever I eat or drink anything; so I’ll just see what this bottle does”’.[[54]](#footnote-54) In several further examples the first bout of consumption increases Alice’s size but the second reverses this change, much like the consumption patterns of a bulimic who consumes a vast amount of food in order to inflict nausea. In one particular example Alice asks herself “Which way? Which way?” in relation to the effect on her body, to which Carroll argues that physical size is usually maintained when “one eats cake” but we see again the mindset of a person suffering from an eating disorder.[[55]](#footnote-55) It could therefore be argued that Carroll tranvestises his concerns about eating through Alice.

Freud describes adults with eating disorders as having been imperatively potty-trained during the ‘anal’ stage of development, causing fear around food and consumption in adult life. Carroll meticulously planned the times and quantity of not only his own consumption but that of the children in his company. Kathleen Tidy, one of the child friends of Carroll once received a knife for her birthday and was instructed to use it to cut her dinner as ‘this way you will be safe from eating too much, and so making yourself ill.’ He continues, ‘if you find that when others have finished and you have only had one mouthful do not feel vexed about it’.[[56]](#footnote-56) Carroll’s need to control the eating of his female friends is supported by his control of Alice’s consumption in *Wonderland*. In addition the imperative nature of the ‘eat me’ and ‘drink me’ labels on the consumable items are further convincing to this view.

Carroll was heavily influenced by and interested in the pre-Raphaelite movement. He formed particular friendships with Arthur Hughes who was a key attribute to the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and frequently photographed the Liddell family.[[57]](#footnote-57) He also formed a friendship with pre-Raphaelite writer Christina Rossetti, the author of the infamous ‘Goblin Market’. Pre-Raphaelite art heavily associates the consumption of mysterious foods with a fall from grace or sexual awakening. The imperative nature ‘eat me’ ‘drink me’ labels in *Wonderland* is comparable to the Goblin’s ‘come buy, come buy’ as both female protagonists of the pieces undergo vast changes after consumption.[[58]](#footnote-58) Carroll differs from the goblins, by attempting to moderate Alice’s consumption, which is arguably a metaphor for sex. The Goblin’s however tempt and trick Laura into consuming and do not moderate her consumption, thus making her a fallen woman. In this sense, Carroll like Rossetti is not condemning female sexuality but celebrating its moderation whilst also illustrating his fears of greed and psychosexual development.

Freud’s Oedipus Complex claims that during the Phallic stage of development, young boys become possessive of and desire their mothers. Irrationally the boys become envious of their father and believe that if he were to know of their feelings, he would take away the boy’s manhood, his penis. During this stage of development, boys are said to fear *penis castration* and subsequently partake in masculine behavior with their fathers to protect themselves. Having been one of several brothers, it could be argued that Carroll may have naturally feared *penis castration* and jealously of not only his father but of his brothers also. Carina Garland points to Barbara Creed’s theory of *vagina dentata* or “vagina with teeth” to help portray Carroll’s Oedipus nature in *Wonderland*.[[59]](#footnote-59) *Vagina dentata* aligns well with Freud’s Oedipus Complex but puts emphasis on the male fear of aggressive female sexuality emasculating them. Carroll was alleged to have wished for girls not to visit him wearing red, a symbolic colour of rampant sexuality instead requesting pale coloured attire. This illustrates a fear of the early sexualisation of young girls by their mothers and also a fear of female sexuality.[[60]](#footnote-60)

This criticism of overly sexualised women is apparent through the women of *Wonderland*, in particular the Queen of Hearts and the Duchess. The highly male populated *Wonderland* is fearsome of a Queen whom threatens them notoriously with decapitation of their heads, although many are emasculated without such violent means, for example her husband the Red King. Alice as a developing girl does not fear the Queen however; she is beginning to acknowledge characteristics of the ‘Phallic Stage’ of psychosexual development. Controlled and monitored by the narrative she is becoming more aware of her sexual ability. Alice is continually represented as the phallus and shares characteristics of the ‘Phallic Stage’ by the ways in which she frequently desires to fit into spaces she cannot. This is apparent when she wishes to escape the White Rabbit’s house and when she desires to first enterWonderland through the small door. Carroll as the narrative controls Alice’s sexual awakening through consumption, in fear of Alice becoming greedy and sexually aggressive like the Queen of Hearts. The Queen embodies the fear of emasculation and *vagina dentata* from her constant cooing of “off with their heads!” with ‘head’ being notoriously associated with the phallus. In the trial of the tarts, the narrative is once again focused onto consumption. In this example however, consumption is punished and controlled by the female sexuality of the Queen. The Queen’s desire to castrate the thief of her tarts is arguably a metaphor for someone entrenching on her desire for sexual satisfaction from consumption. Furthermore the word ‘tart’ itself is arguably a colloquialism of a woman whom is sexually promiscuous, which is further semantic towards this theme of red, coitus and aggressive female sexuality. The aggressive nature of the Queen and the association of consumption with coitus portray the fears felt by Carroll of not only food in general but also of female sexuality. Carroll portrays how important the control of consumption is on the development of female sexuality. This is done through paradoxical characteristics of Alice and the Queen of Hearts.

In his book ‘The Symbolic Equation: Girl = Phallus.’ Otto Fenchiel introduced a very important contribution to symbolism, which can ultimately be applied to *Wonderland*.[[61]](#footnote-61) Paul Schilder asserts Fenichel’s opinion that little girls may symbolically express the phallus. The features of the equation Girl=Phallus are as follows: she unites a large body of men, she is loved by the men of the unit narcissistically but not genitally, she sports oversize boots, she bends like a phallus and after the protection of her group she acts like a tired child or like a penis post coitum.[[62]](#footnote-62) All of these characteristics of the girl as phallus can be applied to Alice. The weakness of the men in *Wonderland* allows her to unite them against the Queen of Hearts, she fascinates them and they admire her as the phallic but not genitally as they still recognise her as a little girl. Alice in several adaptions sports large oversized knee socks; this is further a feature of her costume illustrated by the Lolita fashion of Japan in the 1990s, where oversized boots also replaced her socks. Further to this, when she grows in the White Rabbit’s house she is forced to bend and adapt and after her growth she returns to her regular size. Alice as the phallus suggests further the fears of Lewis Carroll and aggressive female sexuality whilst also promoting girlhood as a protector of and attribute to the phallus. This is apparent when Alice is aware of her phallic sexuality and in fear of her own emasculation at the trial; she is for the first time able to grow without consuming food or the narratives influence.

Carroll was aware that Alice Liddell was fast becoming a woman and would no longer wish to spend time with him. This explains the somber tone of *Through the Looking Glass.* Carroll wished that she would not become like the menopausal, post-pubescent women of *Wonderland*. This negativity towards menopausal and post-pubescent women is further apparent in Carroll’s personal life and his poor relationship with Alice Liddell’s mother. Mrs. Liddell wished to marry her daughters off to wealthy aristocrats and feared Carroll’s influence on them. She had also become increasingly jealous of the stories the children told of their time with Carroll which may be an example of her resentment towards her own adult context.[[63]](#footnote-63) Carroll had further problems surrounding the mothers of the girls he photographed from when first criticized his motives. His resentment and criticism of motherhood resonates onto the character of The Duchess. Alice first encounters The Duchess in her kitchen, arguably a focal point of control for Victorian mothers and also a further association with food. The violence of the scene is extreme, as Alice looks on in amazement; a cook throws a variety of kitchen items at the Duchess and her baby. Un-phased by this The Duchess sings to her baby, giving him a ‘violent shake at the end of every line’.[[64]](#footnote-64) Eventually she flings the baby to Alice whom is ironically a baby boy and he turns into a pig. The pig child could represent a criticism of Victorian motherhood, in which without a controlled and proper upbringing, children do in fact turn into greedy pigs. Further to this, the Duchess also connotes Carroll’s fear that food affects people’s personalities; “maybe it’s the pepper that makes people hot-tempered”.[[65]](#footnote-65) This example also draws comparisons to the claim that Victorian mother’s were said to put too much pepper into bland food to add flavor, making children sneeze. This anti-maternal scene contrasts significantly with the female development of Alice. Alice’s body alterations prefigure her transformation into womanhood; the female body in reality is consistently changed from child, puberty, pregnancy and menstruation. During these changes, women produce fluids; menstrual blood, milk and amniotic fluid, the fluidity of such changes resembles Alice’s movements through *Wonderland* and possibly again the pool of tears. Further to this, Alice shows awareness of her impending fertility through her relationship with ‘eggs’. Although she constantly threatens to consume eggs they never pass her lips. The bird that fears Alice, accuses her of being a serpent also symbolic of the phallus to which Alice maintains she will not eat the pigeon’s eggs because she doesn’t “like them raw”.[[66]](#footnote-66) She is also reluctant to buy an egg from a shop, as “they mightn’t be at all nice, you know”.[[67]](#footnote-67) Alice’s desire to not consume eggs, despite having consumed frequently things she has not previously desired, reflects on her awareness of motherhood and the importance of it. Here we see Alice’s sexual development as controlled and contrasting to her female counterparts. A further example is seen during the dinner party in *Through the Looking Glass* in which Alice ‘rather anxiously’ carves mutton and “can’t stand this any longer” when surrounded by the nonsense and greed of the Queens.[[68]](#footnote-68) This suggests again the Carroll’s disapproval of Victorian society and its relationship with greed and consumption.

**Down the Rabbit hole:**

**‘What is life but a dream?’ Dream Analysis and the Unconscious.**

*Wonderland* and its dream like qualities cannot be denied. Like in most dreams scientific theory is abolished and time becomes completely relative, this is apparent as Alice falls:

Either the well was very deep or she fell very slowly for she had plenty of as she went down to look about her and wonder what was going to happen next.[[69]](#footnote-69)

In this example, gravity is ineffective, as we know if anyone were to fall from what seems like such a height, they would not do so unharmed. Further to this, the time she takes to fall, whilst not particularly worried about the possible fatality is comparable to a dream like state. Many psychoanalytic concepts of dream can be applied to *Wonderland* and are convincing to the view that *Wonderland* is merely a nonsense dream. John Skinner makes the claim that there were several dream references in the first manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Underground* but Carroll discarded all references to them when he rewrote the book for publication.[[70]](#footnote-70) The opening verse of the book however is clear to compare the story to a ‘dream-like child moving through a land’.[[71]](#footnote-71) Further to this, Alice’s voyage down the rabbit follows boredom, after feeling ‘very sleepy’ and on a ‘hot day’.[[72]](#footnote-72) Virginia Woolfe points to the series of dreams that are encountered “down down down” into the ‘world of sleep’ and ‘the world of dreams’. These dreams include; the white rabbit, the fall and the walrus and the carpenter, where as Florence Becker Lennon, has questioned whose dream it actually is.[[73]](#footnote-73)

The very nature of Alice’s return to reality after *Wonderland* is dream-like in nature as she reflects on her the effect of her dream to her context in penultimate chapter. According to several sources Carroll suffered from insomnia and often shared his absurd ideas and dreams with his friends. Although he himself denied his insomnia, he invented a system of cryptograph writing, which enabled him to write his thoughts in the dark. His book *Pillow Problems* provided ways of occupying his mind when he was sleepless using this cryptograph skill.[[74]](#footnote-74) Freudian ‘Dream Analysis’ asserts that dreams are expressions of the unconscious mind’s wants and are key to the psychoanalysis of the conscious mind. As William Empson notes “Wonderland is a dream but the Looking Glass is self conscious”[[75]](#footnote-75). In *Wonderland,* Alice is unaware of her dream-like movements. However in *Through the Looking Glass* she questions whose dream it is; “Was it the Red King, kitty?” Further to this, the first person narrative is more prominent in the second book, posing to the reader “Which do *you* think it was?” which is then followed by an acrostic poem spelling out ‘Alice Pleasance Liddell’.[[76]](#footnote-76)

The original story *Alice’s Adventures Underground* first composed in the presence of Alice Liddell is said to come from direct unconscious sources. The revisions of the book added to it more conscious thought and archetypal characters such as The Duchess, shifting away from the unconscious mind of Carroll and Alice Liddell onto an attempt critique to Victorian society. The character of Alice herself is an archetypal form of the innocence of childhood, which is symbolic in Freudian dream analysis. The symbolic meaning of Alice further supports Jung’s claim that children are ‘mediators’ and ‘healers’.[[77]](#footnote-77) These criticisms of adulthood, to which sees it portrayed as hyper-sexual, erratic and in some aspects psychotic, arguably represent Carroll’s unconscious or subconscious criticism of adulthood.

The distortion of time and space within *Wonderland* is parallel to the dream motive and the loss of the third dimension plays an important role in several aspects of Carroll’s work. In *Sylvie and Bruno* for example*,* a young boy is called a nail by the warden’s brother and has to be hammered flat.[[78]](#footnote-78) The stability of space and Alice’s surroundings are continually threatened in *Wonderland*. For example, a ‘wind blows’ which carries the Red Queen, ‘Bottles start to fly’ and Father William ‘balances on his head’. In a letter to a little girl about three cats which visited Carroll, he similarly distorts space, he tells of how he knocked the cats down as flat as a pancake and they were quite happy ‘between the sheets of blotting paper’.[[79]](#footnote-79)Although the image may not seem to be suitable for children, it shows the creative mind and consciousness of Carroll’s distortion of space in his surroundings.

Time in *Wonderland* is further distorted, it ‘either stands still or goes in the opposite direction’.[[80]](#footnote-80) Carroll too toyed with time in his personal writing of a letter to one of his friends in which he finishes with the last word of the letter and begins with the first.[[81]](#footnote-81) Within *Wonderland*, the Mad Hatter’s clock runs to a strange time scale and there is no concept of day and night. Critics have seen Carroll as the master of non-sense literature and the adults of *Wonderland* continually define nonsense. For example, the Red Queen states ‘but I have heard nonsense compared with which that would as sensible as a dictionary’ in regards to a nonsense remark and the White Knight carries a little box upside down so that ‘rain cannot come in’ but ‘the clothes and sandwiches have fallen out’.[[82]](#footnote-82) Similarly, many things vanish without explanation, the fawn and the beard of the passenger and in *The Hunting of the Snark,* the baker disappears.[[83]](#footnote-83) This world is full of destructive nonsense and the characters ‘do not know whether they exist’ or whether ‘they are part of a dream and will vanish’.[[84]](#footnote-84) Freud claims that nonsense in dreams and so-called unconscious thinking signifies disappointment and sneering in ones conscious life.[[85]](#footnote-85) This is agreeable on reflection of the several criticisms of Victorian society within the books. It could further be argued in these aspects, that the dream is Carroll’s and quite possible one in which he actually experienced during a sleepless night. Further to this the parallel worlds of the conscious, which is concise and lead by rules is comparable to that of Charles L Dodgson but *Wonderland*’s loss of time and space is a unconscious desire of Lewis Carroll’s wishes to escape his context.

Alice is bewildered, passive and seems to witness more than she instigates, this is very much like the notion of a dream where we struggle control the actions of the people around us and react only to the situations we encounter. [[86]](#footnote-86) The only single time that Alice causes controversy herself is when she revolts against the King and Queen of Hearts and she shakes the Red Queen, which turns out to be a black kitten and this towards the end of her dream. One key concept of Freudian theory points our subconscious thoughts, not only dreaming but also in our waking lives. One example of this is a ‘slip’; something we may say in hast but is believed to be the voice of our subconscious. This could be saying the wrong name or saying something out of character.[[87]](#footnote-87) Alice frequently performs ‘slips’ within her journey into *Wonderland*; the most prominent is her constant mention of Dinah the cat to the Dormouse. Why Alice is so rude to Dormouse or why her subconscious forces her to is not certain. However the symbolism of the characters of *Wonderland* and the notion of dream analysis, in which each moment of a dream is representative of a person or feeling, we may connote that several of the characters draw comparisons to people in Alice Liddell’s life. The Dormouse could represent someone in her conscious life, notably her governess Mrs. Prickett. This is apparent in the Dormouse’s story of Elsie, Lacey and Tilly, which are several anagrams of the three Liddell sisters; Elsie is the pronunciation of the initials of Lavinia Charlotte, Lacie is an anagram of Alice and Tillie was a pet name used for Edith.[[88]](#footnote-88) Animal symbolism and dream analysis are central to this interpretation of Alice’s dream. The White Rabbit although male as J. E Cirlot notes has a “feminine character” and is symbolic of ‘yin’ as the second of the twelve emblems of the emperor of China.[[89]](#footnote-89) *Wonderland’*s rabbit is characterised by anxiety and frantic checking of his watch, symbolic of rationalism and control, in line with the characteristics of Charles L. Dodgson. The Caterpillar and the cat similarly are archaic symbols within the conscious mind. The caterpillar symbolizes death and rebirth and is arguably an archetype of transformation. The cat appears as Dinah and as the black and white kittens in *Through the Looking-Glass*. The cat also appears as the Cheshire Cat in *Wonderland*. The Cheshire Cat embodies traditional interpretations of psychic knowledge from its ‘enigmatic smile’ and philosophical knowledge ‘if you don’t know where you are going, any road can take you there’.[[90]](#footnote-90) Further to this, his shape shifting that has traditionally been ‘associated with cats, both large and small’[[91]](#footnote-91) and his infamous line “we’re all mad here” portrays an empirical knowledge of the unconscious mind. [[92]](#footnote-92) Alice interacts with these animals and her natural surroundings aside from her ego-consciousness expectations in a quality known as *participation mystique.* She interacts with them in a dream like state, which would not usually prevail in the conscious world. With the Red Queen stating ‘Even a joke should have meaning’ we are convinced that each individual character has some unconscious representation in Alice’s world or dream. Further to this the clear separation of the conscious and unconscious realms in Alice’s world further support the notion of ‘The Rabbit Hole’ as a dream.

Carroll as a nonsense writer continually invented portmanteau words that carried a double meaning, much like the characters in *Wonderland*. Carroll asserted that any meaning put onto his nonsense is ‘good meaning’ and ‘words mean more than we mean to express when we use them’.[[93]](#footnote-93) Just as many different incidents in a dream may be symbolized as one event, his explanation of invented words after their use helps to give them conscious meaning. His explanation of the words in Jabberwocky published about ten years before *Through the Looking Glass* attempt to add meaning to nonsense “I’m afraid I can’t explain vorpal blade for you” but “uffish thought – it seems to suggest a state of mind when the voice is gruffish”.[[94]](#footnote-94) The *Snark* published five years later and Jabberwocky share nonsense words and the words were defined in the 1855 newspaper Mischmasch.[[95]](#footnote-95) The use of words and meanings of this sort are called ‘condensations’ today and these are found when the forces of the system of the unconscious come into play. The meaning of these words are dependent on ‘which is to be the master’ according to Humpty Dumpty and the master is the unconscious mind of the reader.[[96]](#footnote-96) His normalisation of madness is a further example of schizophrenic language and is convincing of the view that much of *Wonderland* and his other works were a series of psychedelic hallucinations. The lithographs of Salvador Dali and artwork from Joseph McHugh illustrate the hallucinate nature of *Wonderland*. Thomas Fensch is clear to connote the connotations between the effects of drugs and the recitals of Carroll, using the lyrics of White Rabbit by Jefferson Airplane as evidence.[[97]](#footnote-97) The acceptance of hallucination or dream in *Wonderland* is widely acknowledged with syndromes such as psychological disorder, ‘Alice in Wonderland syndrome’ which is defined by the experiences of Alice in her adventure. Although they are subject to the criticism of their time context, psychedelic criticism is convincing to the aims of Lewis Carroll to create an unconscious and conscious realm that in cooperates the musings of his complex mind and the experiences of Alice Liddell.

**Conclusion**

Psychoanalytical interpretations of chapter one, ‘The Rabbit Hole’ lead psychoanalysis towards three Freudian theories: ‘Child Development’, ‘Psychosexual Development’ and ‘Dream Analysis’. When applied to the personal life of Lewis Carroll we are able to draw clear comparisons between Freudian theories and the choices made in the production of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Carroll’s relationship and fascination with the child’s mind is convincing to the view that *Wonderland* is a celebration the child’s mind or ‘*puer child*’, whilst critiquing Victorian upbringing. This is apparent through Carroll’s criticism of didacticism. From this we are able to determine several satirical criticisms of Victorian upbringing, including sexual development. Equally convincing are the significant comparisons to sexual awakening and *Wonderland’s* critique of female sexual aggression through the association of food. This is clear from both Alice and Carroll’s conflicted relationship with food and consumption throughout *Wonderland*. Further convincing is the notion of the ‘Rabbit Hole’ as a dream, from the admission of the presence of dreams in both *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* but also the several comparisons that can be made between the unconscious decisions made during the creation of the books, for example symbolism.

What is most convincing are the aims of Carroll to incorporate critique, a housing for his subconscious musings and a series of books to feed the minds of young children. His critique in clear from the adaptions added to the original manuscript *Alice’s Adventures Underground.* These include the addition of the satirical view of motherhood through The Duchess and the extension of the trial in the *Wonderland* as a critique of Carroll’s experience of the judicial system. The books however are written for children and the aims of Carroll to make Alice so accessible are clear from the several translations and adaption *The Nursery Alice* for pre-school children. The subconscious nature of *Wonderland* is clear from its first recital to Alice Liddell. Further to this, Carroll himself has also proclaimed:

I distinctly remember, [wrote Dodgson] how, in a desperate attempt to strike out some new line in fairy-lore, I had sent my heroine straight down a rabbit-hole, to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards.[[98]](#footnote-98)

It could therefore be argued that all three interpretations of the Rabbit Hole are compatible with one another; Alice could be both dreaming, realizing her sexual potential and growing from a child to an adult in all aspects of *Wonderland*. In addition to this, the subconscious musings of Carroll with *Wonderland* as a dream could incorporate both his fascination with the child’s mind and his critique of Victorian society. The compatibility of these three psychoanalytical theories of *Wonderland*, are far from the psychoanalytical criticism of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The suggestion that ‘The Rabbit Hole’ is a metaphor for Carroll’s apparent sexual repression has little or no weight. The suggestion that *Wonderland* houses many contextual issues surrounding sex is however convincing. Sex as food is a theme that resonates throughout *Wonderland* whilst questioning the relationship between greed, consumption and aggressive female sexuality. Sex within *Wonderland* does not however connote a poor relationship between Carroll and sexuality but it does raise the issue of psychosexual development and the effect of this on children in adult life. Traditional psychoanalytic theory is similarly a reflection of the popularity of Freud. *Wonderland* too demonstrates Carroll awareness of child development, he frequently witnessed several of his child friends develop from children to adolescence and the character of Alice reflects this as a result. Carroll although in his context unaware of Freud’s theories of the ‘Id’, ‘Ego’ and ‘Superego’, demonstrates a clear understanding of the process described in ‘The Psyche’.

In conclusion, the evidence provided to determine three possible psychoanalytical meanings for the Rabbit Hole and *Wonderland* as a whole is coherent. All three theories are compatible with one another on acceptance that The Rabbit Hole is a dreamy birth in which Alice develops from a child down the Rabbit Hole to an adolescent in *Through the Looking Glass*. These theories move away from an obsession to determine Carroll’s sexuality or infer he had a poor relationship with adults and child, with evidence.

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