The Tripartite role of the Psyche in *Alice in Wonderland*

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Introduction

While talking animals are not a new phenomenon in stories, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) with its anthropomorphic creatures is said to have inaugurated a new era in children’s books by breaking free from didacticism. (Elick 24) Literary scholar, Robert M. Polhemus praised Carroll highly when he said “out of the rabbit-hole and looking glass world come not only such major figures as Joyce, Waugh, Nabokov, Beckett, and Borges but also much of the character and mood of the twentieth century humor and life”. (Polhemus 245) The continued relevance of *Alice in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) in popular culture today, suggests that Polhemus’ adulatory praise for Carroll was well deserved. Both these novels have been adapted for various modes of entertainment, like ballet, opera, film and television. Consequently, Morton Cohen, one of Carroll’s biographers, calls this franchise “The Alice industry” and he asserts that it continues to generate countless Alice inspired paraphernalia-collectibles ranging from tee-shirts, figurines, post-cards and chess sets. (Sigler xiii)

It is now 150 years since Carroll published his book and popular culture today is still just as fond of *Alice in Wonderland*, as it was when he first released copies of his book. For instance, the famous director, Tim Burton has yet another remake of the *Alice in Wonderland* series in his new movie *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. (27’th May, 2016) The continued relevance of this phenomenal work can be attributed to several things and literary scholars have attributed this popularity to many factors. Nevertheless, it is the dream narrative of the book that continues to influence scholars and readers alike and as
Carolyn Sigler asserts, it is the dream structure and playful use of symbolic nonsense that generates multiple and contradictory readings. More importantly, like dreams themselves, the books signify any number of things to the reader (Sigler xiv) and this universal nature of the book appeals to the child in the adult and the adult in the child. Consequently, Will Brooker asserts that every generation collectively interprets this novel in a way that is reflective of their contemporary culture. Brooker states that the 1930s subjected the text to a psychoanalytic reading, the 1960s did a psychedelic reading and the 1990s saw increased attention to aspects of pedophilia in the text. (Silverman)

Like his books, Carroll himself remains an important figure in literary history. His real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and he was the eldest boy in a family of 11 children. He was born in the village of Daresbury, England, on January 27, 1832. He was a child prodigy as an inventor and he was adept at entertaining his young siblings. He went on to become an accomplished mathematician and a photographer, and he loved puzzles and logic games. The character of the White Knight in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice found there* is said to be a self-depiction as “he like the white knight, was an inventor – of gadgets, of puzzles, riddles, games, and conundrums, as well as many mnemonic devices” (Phillips) He was also interested in the dynamics of time and lectured on the subject “Where does the day begin” several times. Accordingly, his interest in time is reflected in the Mad Hatter’s tea party, where it is always tea-time.

That said, it is true that Carroll’s intense preoccupation with the dream state dominate the existing themes in *Alice in Wonderland* and the following diary entry from his journals suggests that he had similar questions about the dream state as his child protagonist:
Question: when we are dreaming and, as often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life? We often dream without the least suspicion of unreality: “sleep hast its own world,” and it is often as lifelike as the other. (Carroll)

The ambiguity between the dream state and reality cannot be ignored in his Alice books. For instance, in Alice in Wonderland, when Alice first meets the White Rabbit, we are told that Alice is already half asleep. However, as the dream state merges with reality here, there is no clear distinction. Similarly, when Alice wakes up from her dream, her sister is gently brushing away some “dead leaves” from her face and these are the very dead leaves that prompts Alice into thinking that the Queen’s guards were attacking her. (Schatz 106)

Given the centrality of the dream narrative in Alice in Wonderland, it was somewhat inevitable that it would greatly pique the attentions of psychoanalysts. Like Sigmund Freud, many of his followers saw the inherent relationship between psychoanalysis and dreams and this theoretical framework is reflected in the works of early critiques of Alice in Wonderland. Some of the pioneer members who psychoanalyzed Alice are A.M.E Goldschmidt, Paul Schilder, John Skinner, Martin Grotjahn, Phyllis Greenacre, Geza Roheim, Kenneth Burke and William Empson. (Phillips)

While the bulk of the aforementioned critics subject Alice in Wonderland to a severe Freudian reading, later critics abstain from doing so. For instance, A.M.E Goldschmidt, who belonged to the former category of Freudian believers, asserts that the text is rife with sexual symbolism,
in his essay “Alice in Wonderland Psychoanalysed”. He states that:

The symbolism begins almost at once. Alice runs down the rabbit-hole after the White Rabbit and suddenly finds herself falling down “what seemed to be a very deep well”. Here we have what is perhaps the best-known symbol of coitus. Next, the dreamer (who identifies himself with Alice throughout) is seen pursuing the White Rabbit down a series of passages, and it is worth noting that Stekel interprets the pursuit in dreams of something we are unable to catch as representing an attempt to make up for a disparity in age. Now the dreamer enters a “long low hall”, round which are a number of doors, all locked” (Phillips 330)

Here, it would seem as though the sexual symbolism is rather forced and Goldschmidt himself admits that “no critic upon whom the Freudian theory has made even the slightest impression can refrain from recognizing sexual symbolism in any medium, when it is clearly manifested.” (Phillips 329) Lisa Ede addresses this issue in the book *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense* and asserts that this is a “basic difficulty” when psychoanalysis is applied rigidly to a text like *Alice in Wonderland*, when nonsense is the basis of the narration. (Tigges 55) She goes on to say that:

Psychological critics have achieved some interesting insights concerning nonsense, but too often they base assertions about a work on the interpretations of Lear’s and Carroll’s lives, only to turn around and then make judgements about Lear’s and Carroll’s lives by interpreting their work. The only constant frame of reference is clearly the critics’ own interpretations, not the works themselves. Such analysis, which is, as Rackin describes, “simple (in its practice and results) and attractive, and within its own self-defined system rather foolproof- like plane geometry, often fails to do justice to the complexity of either the work or the man. (Tigges 56)

We see a similar pattern in “Symbolization of Alice’s adventures in Wonderland”, by Martin Grotjahn. He seems to follow Goldschmidt’s line of thought in his psycho-sexual analysis and compares Alice to a phallic symbol:
At the opening of ch.2 is a picture of Alice which is almost too obvious for words, and which could be easily misinterpreted as obscene: Alice is elongated to the extreme, has a small head, a long neck, a trunk without shoulders or hips, which is continued without curves into the pillar-like legs. The arms are small and practically non-existent, the dress emphasizes the phallic appearance of the girl, asking almost teasingly: Who in the world am I? The illustrating artist, John Tenniel, betrays here his secret, intuitive understanding of Carroll’s symbolism and gives it perfectly visual expression. (Phillips 365)

However, this seems to be an overly simplified Freudian analysis of the text. By reducing Alice to a mere phallic symbol, Grotjahn takes away the subtler nuances of the illustration. Nonetheless, he concludes his essay by emphasizing that a book like Alice in Wonderland can “lead to an artistic and testing regression”, and in order to fully experience the merits of such works it is important to keep the “creative unconscious” alive, free and open. (Phillips 368)

Modern day critics, in contrast, have tended to move away from narrow Freudian readings of the text, and the “creative unconscious” as Grotjahn puts it is exercised more actively. For instance, in her essay, “Curious Appetites: Food, Desire, Gender and Subjectivity in Lewis Carroll's Alice Texts” Carina Garland argues that Carroll uses food and drinks to manipulate his young protagonist. As she says: “Food is eaten constantly and results in bodily changes but is consumed without any explicit hunger (or desire) being expressed. Alice is continually following (the male author’s) instruction”. (Garland 32)

Apart from analyzing the overwhelming presence of food in the text, Freudian scholars have focused on the gothic elements within the text as well. For instance, Chloé Germaine Buckley, in her essay “Psychoanalysis, “Gothic” Children’s Literature, and the
Canonization of Coraline” (2015), compares Alice to the eponymous heroine of the book Coraline (2002) by Neil Gaiman and comes to the conclusion that Coraline is a playful reworking of Alice in Wonderland in opposition to Freud’s theories. (Buckley 74) Her primary contention in making this argument is that “Critics want Alice to be gothic; Coraline obliges.” (Buckley 68) Having said this, she does not abstain from using Alice in Wonderland as a key to understanding the gothic elements in Coraline. Consequently, her essay demonstrates that Alice in Wonderland can be subjected to a Freudian study which would enable us to discover the uncanny in the text.

Like Buckley’s analysis, several studies have been devoted to the varied representations of Alice in Wonderland. As mentioned before, because of its popularity, Alice in Wonderland has been reproduced in several ways. Some of the prominent remakes of this text are Tim Burton’s movie Alice in Wonderland and American McGee’s Alice, the video game adaption of the novel. This game has macabre overtones and the storyline here is that Alice’s parents are killed because her pet cat Dinah, knocks over a lamp and the house catches fire. Alice escapes by jumping out of a window and this is the transformative stage in the game where she is now a teenager in a lunatic asylum. (Nicols 166) Another interesting retelling is seen in the graphic novel Lost Girls (2012) by Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie. Here, it is seen that Alice is “a worldly wise devotee of debauchery who utilizes her trauma as a looking glass, reflecting upon the nature of childhood and fantasy and thus, herself.” (Hollingsworth 176)

According to Helen Pilinovsky, most of the Alice retellings follow three primary paths- “those that continue Alice’s original adventures in their Victorian setting, those that update her still childish situation into more contemporary circumstances and those
that diverge from their surroundings to focus on her maturation.” (Hollingsworth 176) It will be observed that both the criticism and the readaptations of Alice in Wonderland focus their attentions on the female protagonist. However, the world of Wonderland and its many creatures are an inherent part of Alice’s personality. Little attention has been given to the psychological implications of the representations of the Wonderland creatures.

This dissertation subscribes to the predominant notion that Alice unconsciously devised Wonderland and its creatures to solve her identity crisis. Going by this, the thesis attempts to analyze the representations of important characters like the Cheshire Cat, the Caterpillar, the Queen and Alice in her dream self. It will be seen that Carroll cleverly characterized the creatures of Wonderland to symbolize the parts of the structural mode of the psyche (in his own terms as Freud was yet to design the structural mode of the psyche) and this representation is further enriched by Sir John Tenniel’s illustrations. By examining these characters from a psychoanalytical perspective and paying close attention to Tenniel’s illustrations, the thesis argues that the creatures in her dream can be classified as the Id, ego or the superego.

This thesis focuses on four main characters: Alice, The Queen of Hearts, the Cheshire Cat, and the Caterpillar specifically as they influence Alice’s psyche more strongly than the other creatures in Wonderland. In accordance to this, the thesis asserts that the Queen is the supreme ruler in Wonderland and hence, can be compared to the Id. The Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar constantly remind Alice of her true self as the Cheshire Cat provides her with a frame of reference to the real world, where she has a pet cat Dinah and thus, creates a distinction between her unconscious mind and the reality. As for the
caterpillar, his hookah gives him an oriental motif, thus suggesting that he did not belong to Wonderland. This is true of Alice as well. Symbolically, both the caterpillar and the Cheshire Cat constantly remind Alice that she is the orchestrator of the dream and not the dream itself. The Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar then, represent the superego. Finally, Alice in her dream self, acts as the ego by making sense of a nonsensical world.

The Creatures of Wonderland, Tenniel’s Illustrations and the Structural Mode of the Psyche

‘The interpretation of dreams is in fact the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious; it is the securest foundation of psychoanalysis...’ (Freud)

This chapter will examine some of Tenniel’s illustrations in Alice in Wonderland, paying close attention to the psychoanalytical implications of the sketches. In lieu of this, it will also discuss the theoretical framework of Sigmund Freud’s structural mode of the psyche.

The Interpretation of Dreams was published by Freud in 1899. Here, he argues that dreams are essentially a product of the battles between the conscious and the unconscious mind. (Rennison 44) He goes on to say that in dreams, the unconscious evades censorship and manifests its desires and wishes in the dream state. (Rennison 44) As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is clear that the many Freudian critics who analyzed Alice in Wonderland interpret Wonderland as a representation of her unconscious mind.

While the theoretical structure of Interpretation of Dreams will give us an understanding of her unconscious, it will be more prudent to use Freud’s structural model
of the psyche to understand the various functions of the creatures in *Wonderland*. Freud formulated the general theory of the structure of the mind in the early 1920s and laid out the foundations for the tripartite division into the Id, Ego and the Superego. (Rennison 29) It should be noted that he initially made a bipartite division of the mind- into the conscious and the unconscious. However, he began to understand the flaws behind so simple a division and consequently, extended this to a tripartite division. (Rennison 38)

Freud derives the Id from the Latin word “it and this according to Freud, is a representation of the oldest and most primitive part of the mind. He defines the Id as:

> The dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the Dreamwork and of course the construction of neurotic symptoms and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. [...] It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principles. (Freud 105-6)

This primal force can be observed in many of the creatures in the landscape of *Wonderland*. For instance, the Duchess, the Cook and the Queen are excellent examples of the representation of the Id. These three women can be described, going by Freud’s description as being like “a cauldron full of seething excitations” and consequently, they constantly seek instant wish fulfillment. To illustrate, all three women derive their immediate pleasure by ingesting copious amounts of food and this is seen as a metaphor for overtly concealed sexuality. This is explained by the popular theory that in most Victorian works, food “always acted as a veiled metaphor for sexuality, most improper in the respectable Victorian woman.” (Talairach-Vielmas 54) In *Alice in Wonderland*, only
the Queen, the Duchess and the Cook have the agency to choose what to eat and also, when to eat. *Alice* on the other hand, is forced to ingest food in order to manipulate her bodily shape to ascribe to her current situation. In connection to this, Helena Michie suggests that “delicate appetites match proper and chaste femininity, while gluttony signals monstrosity.” (Talairach-Vielmas 54) This sentiment is easily observed in *Alice in Wonderland* as the illustrations of *Alice* signify that she is a delicate little waif whereas the older women, the Queen, the Cook and the Duchess are seen as grotesque beings, both in the written and the pictorial form.

To explore this idea further, it will be seen that Sir John Tenniel’s illustrations of the Duchess convey her eccentricities as well. For instance, Lois Rauch Gibson delineates her “cavernous mouth” (Gibson 178) and most scholars agree that the Duchess is portrayed in a rather monstrous form. This representation once again points out that the Id represents the dark and uncanny force within the human psyche.

Like the Duchess, all the characters in *Wonderland* are a parodied version of *Alice’s* unconscious. It could therefore be argued that her many character traits are individualized in each of the Wonderland creatures. As Nina Auerbach states: “The sea that almost drowns her is composed of her own tears, and the dream that nearly obliterates her is composed of fragments of her own personality.” (Auerbach 34) Lois Rauch Gibson takes this argument further and asserts that “each character is individualized by having one physical or personality trait exaggerated (for example, the Duchess’s mouth)”. (Gibson 178)
Similarly, it is worth looking into the illustrations of the Cheshire Cat as well as he is one of the few characters, like the White Rabbit who appears several times in the book. In these reappearances, it is seen that the Cheshire Cat is on a plane higher than all the Wonderland creatures and this trend is established in the book when he first meets Alice. She finds him outside the Duchess’ house, sitting atop a tree. (Tenniel 23) In another scene, when the King orders the Cheshire Cat’s execution, his head looms over all the creatures and this literally implies that he is above everybody, even the King and the Queen. (Tenniel 31) Both, the Cheshire Cat’s elevation pictorially and the ubiquitous presence in Wonderland can be related to the traits of the superego. Like the Superego, the Cheshire Cat reminds Alice of her earliest caregivers and here, the Cheshire Cat represents her pet cat, Dinah.

The Superego is also the moralizing aspect of the psyche. Here, the looming head of the Cheshire Cat can be seen as the presence that often takes over the Wonderland folk when they go wrong, since the Cheshire Cat has an almost godlike aspect in the picture, where his execution is supposed to take place. (Tenniel 31) While he does not really interfere with the other creatures of Wonderland, he plays a major role in defining Alice’s personality within the dreamscape.

Unlike the Id which seeks instant gratification, the Superego works in contradiction to the Id by controlling an individual’s sense of right and wrong. The Superego aspires for the ideal ethical and moral conduct. To this end, Freud theorizes that the Superego forms its impressions and sensibilities during an individual’s childhood and is shaped by influential figures like parents, teachers and nurses and these values define the superego. Freud defines the superego as follows:
now that we have embarked upon the analysis of the ego we can give answer to all those whose moral sense has been shocked and who have complained that there must surely be a higher nature in man. “Very true, we can say, “and here we have that higher nature, in this ego ideal or super-ego, the representative of our relation to our parents. When we were little children we knew these higher natures, we admired them and feared them, and later we took them into ourselves.” (Harold 45)

It is seen that the Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar become the “higher nature” when they take up advisory roles and thus, in Wonderland, it is the Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar who become her allies. The Cheshire Cat reminds Alice of her cat Dinah, at home, and the Caterpillar gives her the power to control her growth spurts.

Like the Cheshire Cat, the Caterpillar is positioned above Alice physically. When she first meets the Caterpillar, he is seated on top of a mushroom, smoking from a hookah pipe. His face isn’t seen clearly and we’re merely presented with something that passes for a silhouette of a face. In this illustration, Alice is barely as tall as the mushroom on which the Caterpillar is seated and here, we don’t see her complete face either. Instead, we see only her eyes and they almost have a cartoon like aspect as they are quite large. (Tenniel 15) Here, Alice is literally looking up at him, as though she is certain that she will help him.

Finally, the Ego is in tandem with the reality principle. As Freud states, the ego –

...is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world...Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which resigns unrestrictedly in the id...The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions. (Storey 28)
As Freud asserts, it is essentially the balancing force between the Id and the Superego as they are two contradictory forces. Freud asserts that the ego “serves three severe masters [...] the external world, the super-ego and the id.” (Freud 196) Going by this, it will be seen that in most of Tenniel’s illustrations Alice adopts a submissive stance. More often than not, Alice is always shorter than or on par with the creatures she is depicted with. For instance, in the scene with the Mock Turtle, in the chapter *The Lobster Quadrille*, both the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon are seen to be towering over her. (Tenniel 35)

There are several instances in the narration where Alice cannot distinguish between food and animals, as she did eat lobsters and eggs in real life. (Jaques 50) She struggles with a similar dilemma here and when the Lobster says- “perhaps you were never even introduced to a lobster” (Carrol 87) Alice begins to say that she once tasted a lobster. She eventually learns to keep these rather awkward remarks to herself. However, her expressions in these situations suggest that she is somewhat abashed and therefore, Alice in her dream self is constantly warring between the creatures of *Wonderland* in forms of the Superego and the Id. It is then evident that she plays the role of the ego in *Wonderland*. The following sections will analyze the roles of the Queen (id), the Cheshire cat and the Caterpillar (super-ego) and Alice (ego) in greater detail.

The Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar as the Super ego

As has been mentioned before the Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar help Alice form her identity and act as the Superego. This section will focus on the role of the Caterpillar
first before examining the Cheshire Cat. Alice meets the Caterpillar after her tryst with the White Rabbit and the lizard Bill. Incidentally, this chapter is called *Advice from a Caterpillar*, signifying that the Caterpillar did indeed serve as an advisory figure. In this whole chapter, the Caterpillar urges Alice to examine her identity, thus reminding her of who she really is. This is seen in the conversation they have from their very first meeting:

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

“Who are YOU?” said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.

Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I— I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then” (Carrol 37)

Here, it must be noted that Alice is rather timid and shy, and that the Caterpillar is as contemptuous and ill-mannered as the Queen. The Caterpillar and Alice have a very short conversation and yet, in this small interlude, the Caterpillar questions Alice about her identity on three occasions. Justifiably, she cannot answer him as her physical form has been subjected to several changes and thus, her personality was mutable. Alice is hopeful that the Caterpillar would understand her identity crisis as he is a creature of metamorphosis himself. However, the Caterpillar is further incensed by the implications that he would understand and empathize with the predicaments of Alice, a stranger in *Wonderland*:

Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; 'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis—you will someday, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?'
'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,' said Alice; 'all I know is, it would feel very queer to ME.'

'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are YOU?' (Carrol 37-38)

On the surface, it would seem as though the Caterpillar is being uncooperative on purpose. Nevertheless, by refusing to give Alice the sympathy that she so desperately wanted, he constantly directs her to examine the nature of her dream self. Secondly, by blatantly denying her the smallest iota of a connection between himself and Alice, he clearly demarcates her from the creatures of Wonderland. By doing this, he ensures that Alice does not lose her identity in her dreamland. However, as Alice does not understand the dynamics of his role within the landscape of her psyche, she interprets his demeanor to be contemptuous and begins to tire of it. Instead of answering the Caterpillar’s irate question, “Who are you”, she gravely subverts his authority and questions him on the nature of his identity. Yet again, the Caterpillar ignores her question and now instead of asking her to examine her conflicted self, directs her to inspect her changing physique. He asks her:

“What size do you want to be?” it asked.

“Oh, I’m not so particular as to size” Alice hastily replied; “only one doesn’t like changing so often, you know”

“I don’t know,” said the Caterpillar.

Alice said nothing: she had never been so much contradicted in all her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper.

“Are you content now?” Said the Caterpillar.

“Well, I should like to be a little larger, sir, if you wouldn’t mind,” said Alice: three inches is such a wretched height to be”
“It is a very good height indeed” said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high)

“But I’m not used to it!” pleaded poor Alice in a piteous tone. And she thought to herself, “I wish the creatures wouldn’t be so easily offended!” (Carrol 40)

In this conversation, in connection to the Superego, the Caterpillar insistently takes on a critical stance when he forces her to reorient her perspectives. Firstly, when he asks her about the size that would be ideal to her, she does not have an answer for him. Thus, he seems to be telling her that her size does not define her. Secondly, by getting incensed when she says that three inches is a wretched height to be, his caustic reaction suggests that she should not anger the creatures of Wonderland. By drawing himself up to his full height (which was exactly three inches), he draws attention to her lack of empathy and also points out that Wonderland creatures are capable of violence when they are offended. Yet, when the Caterpillar takes offence, she believes it was because the Caterpillar was sensitive and “easily offended”.

We are also given a glimpse of Alice’s dominant short tempered personality as we are told that she has never been “so much contradicted”, which suggests that Alice is usually used to getting her own way; like the Queen. When Alice fails to understand most of his indirect comments, he advises her: “Keep your temper”. And this is perhaps the most intelligible thing the Caterpillar tells her as she is prone to losing her temper and thus, affects the sensibilities of the Wonderland folk. In doing so, she alienates herself from her unconscious mind and the Caterpillar strongly advises her against it.

As an aside, it is interesting to examine the symbolism behind the Caterpillar’s characterization as Carroll chose him to guide Alice, amongst the many creatures in
Wonderland. Celia Brown addresses this issue in her research and seeks to examine the allegorical implications behind the characterization of the animals in Wonderland. She asserts that the magic in Wonderland is implicitly Egyptian as it deals with shape shifting, as it is the Caterpillar, in the guise of the Deity Thoth who give her the agency of control over the magic in Wonderland- the mushroom on which he is enthroned has that power. (Brown 281)

The Cheshire Cat

Unlike the Caterpillar, the Cheshire Cat assumes a friendly stance and as has been mentioned before, he is seen as a reminder of her pet cat, Dinah. Since the superego is also comprised of childhood memories from authority figures and caretakers, it can be conjectured that her pet cat, Dinah can be seen as an association of childhood authority. Pertinently, it is also her pet that she misses the most, from the real world, and since animals cannot talk in the real world, Alice then has long since had the habit of having one-sided conversations with herself, and with her pet cat Dinah as the grave listener. Alice herself imagines a situation where her pet cat plays a nourishing role wherein it is seen that her pet cat takes the role of a nurse: ""Miss Alice! Come here directly, and get ready for your walk!" "Coming in a minute, nurse! But I've got to see that the mouse doesn't get out.” (Carrol 29)

Like her memories of Dinah, the Cheshire Cat’s head continues to appear and vanish intermittently in Wonderland. When Alice first meets the Cheshire Cat, she is very aware of his “very long claws and great many teeth” and instantly regards him to be someone
who ought to be treated respectfully because he had the means to harm her. She approaches him carefully and politely, when she asks him for directions-

“Cheshire Puss,' she began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. “Come, it's pleased so far,' thought Alice, and she went on. 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat. 'I don't much care where—' said Alice. 'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat. '—so long as I get SOMEWHERE,' Alice added as an explanation. 'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.' Alice (Carrol 51-52)

By asking the Cheshire Cat for directions, she instantly assigns him the role of an authority figure or the Superego, as it the Superego that guides an individual when he or she is lost. It is pertinent to note that Alice does not ask the Cat for directions to a specific place, as she is happy to let the Cat/superego decide for her. By delineating that she wants to get “SOMEBWHERE”, we begin to understand that reaching the garden was no longer her primary goal. As reaching the garden was a way for her to regain her identity, it can be assumed that she has already begun to acquire a sense of herself.

While the Caterpillar addressed issues of identity and her physical form, the Cheshire cat deals with her mental state and calls her mad:

'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat: 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'

'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.

'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.' (Carrol 52)
Alice does not agree with the Cheshire Cat and assumes the aspect of humoring him when she asks him, “How do you know that you’re mad?” (Carrol 52) His brand of absurdity does not appeal to Alice and makes her rather uncomfortable. Elizabeth. L. Auchincloss, in her book, *The Psychoanalytical Model of the Mind* suggests that the Superego makes it impossible for a mind to feel good about oneself. Similarly, Freud suggests that the Superego and the Id are closely related to each other and the Superego is fueled by the aggressions of the Id. This is clearly seen in the roles of the Caterpillar and the Cheshire Cat, as they constantly make Alice uncomfortable and they force her to adopt a contemplative stance.

To this effect, David Rudd argues that the Cheshire Cat plays the role of the analyst, where Alice is the unwilling object of analysis. (Buckley 72) The Cheshire cat makes another appearance at the croquet ground, where Alice is extremely uneasy because of the Queen’s penchant for decapitation. As the Cheshire Cat slowly looms up in the air, Alice is visibly more assured as she tells herself “now I shall have somebody to talk to” (Carrol 69) and begins to complain about the Croquet game:

I don't think they play at all fairly,' Alice began, in rather a complaining tone, 'and they all quarrel so dreadfully one can't hear oneself speak—and they don't seem to have any rules in particular; at least, if there are, nobody attends to them—and you've no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive; for instance, there's the arch I've got to go through next walking about at the other end of the ground—and I should have croqueted the Queen's hedgehog just now, only it ran away when it saw mine coming! (Carrol 69)

Here Alice demonstrates a surprising lack of empathy for creatures that were alive and breathing. Instead of trying to avoid the hedgehogs, as a conscientious child, she tries to nab it anyway and thus, she imitates the Queen in her cruelty. Not surprisingly, the
Cheshire Cat ignores her complaint entirely and asks her- “How do you like the Queen?” By redirecting her attention to the Queen, he seems to point out that her mannerisms are similar to that of the cantankerous woman and it was time for her to change.

Finally, in the scene where the Cheshire Cat last appears, it will be observed that the King and Queen are trying to have it killed. Here, the executioner refuses to behead it as it has no body as he rightfully says “you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it off from”. (Carrol 72) Like the superego, the Cheshire Cat has no master and makes his own rules. As Stowell explains, the Cheshire Cat is:

a second manifestation of the Trickster, an expert in appearance and disappearance who contains significant opposites: he is "good-natured" but he has "very long claws and a great many teeth." Illusive and ambivalent, he is a guiding spirit whose most important information for Alice is that "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." This "mad" of course means both angry and irrational. Alice does not want to be among mad people, but the Trickster-Cat points out with a leer that everybody's quite irrational and capable of crazy emotions and thoughts. He is also a transformation of Dinah, symbolic perhaps of some trait personally hers, such as a cat-like illusiveness, introversion, cleverness or invulnerability. (Stowell 7)

Thus, while the Caterpillar counsels Alice on her size and temper, the Cheshire Cat helps Alice by merely listening to her and by appearing at moments that frustrate her the most, he reminds her of her real home and in doing so, ensures that her personality is not trapped within Wonderland.

The Queen as the Id

According to Freud, the Id functions because of the pleasure principle- “the psychic force that motivates the tendency to seek immediate gratification of any impulse.”
He goes on to say that the Id is comprised of the most primal instincts in our personality - emotions such as lust, anger and aggression and pleasure-seeking urges. Most of these urges are seldom realized. Instead they are pushed back (repressed), diverted into cultural activities (sublimation), acted out (temporary satisfaction) or are expressed in dreams. Henk de Berg continues in this vein and defines the Id as pure craving, a force that is always repressed and consequentially concludes that a part of our personality always remains suppressed. (Berg 50) Going by this hypothesis, the Queen’s persona represents the primal side of Alice’s character.

Interestingly, when Alice confronts the Queen in the garden, she is no longer the trembling girl who once hid from the White rabbit. Instead she is a confident young woman who refuses to acknowledge the Queen’s hierarchy by bowing down to her, like everybody in the procession awaiting her. In this scene, the Queen spots Alice and invites her to play a game of croquet. This game, like the caucus race is governed by absurdity and has no rules. The players merely tried to keep out of the Queen’s way, in order to avoid execution. Alice on the other hand, is a different person here. Instead of merely playing the game in order to please the creatures of Wonderland, she plays with the intent to win. Perhaps, when Alice in her role as the ego ideal is confronted with the Queen, she has no option but to match up to her aggressive stance and quickly adapt her personality in order to face a standoff with her.

Consequently, it will be observed that Alice resembles the Queen to a great extent after their first meeting in the garden. Alice, like the Queen seeks instant gratification. Both the Queen and Alice use food for reasons other than nourishment and sustenance. To demonstrate, Alice uses food as a means to get into the garden and the Queen uses
food as an excuse to entice people into disobeying her, by stealing her tarts, and then, she uses this simplistic disobedience to decapitate people. Another glaring resemblance is portrayed in the way they impose their understanding of the world unto people around them. For instance, *Alice* assumes that the Caterpillar would understand her plight. She almost demands understanding and empathy from him and thus imposes her sensibilities on him. Similarly, the Queen has her own brand of logic, which incidentally pivots on absurd feelings of rage. Finally, both *Alice* and the Queen want complete supremacy. This is the singular trait that makes the Queen a foil to *Alice’s* character. While the Queen is unreasonable in her way of issuing decapitations (“Sentence first — verdict afterwards”), *Alice* tries to impose her supremacy in a land in which she is a mere stranger. She tries to enter places that are clearly off limits, as she barges into the mad hatter’s tea party even when she is vehemently told that there is no room for her. She ignores the creatures of the tea-party and when they are rude to her, she takes a moralizing stand and tries to teach them manners, all the while forgetting that it is she herself who breaches the rules of etiquette.

Nevertheless, parallels between the Queen and *Alice* end here, since it is the Queen who is the ruler of Wonderland and therefore the representation of the Id. Carroll himself describes her as a “sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion - a blind and aimless Fury”. (Lovett 282) Scholars have repeatedly speculated on this representation of the Queen and one popular interpretation is that the Queen of Hearts is a parodied version of Queen Victoria. While this might be true, it is important to note that the phrase “blind and aimless fury” can be used to describe the functions of the Id in the subconscious mind as well.
Not only Carroll’s description of the Queen but her representation in the book seems to suggest that Carroll had a basic understanding of the mind’s psyche. By portraying her as a grotesque and absurd character, whose desire is firmly rooted in abject selfishness and instant wish fulfillment, Carroll makes sure that her character is but a parodied representation. Nonetheless, her presence in Wonderland cannot be ignored as it is eventually the Queen who is the supreme ruler here and quite fittingly, her favorite catchphrase is “Off with their heads”. More often than not, it would seem as though she takes delight in issuing this command. That said, the mild mannered King silently pardons the executions and takes away the agency of control from her and eventually, none of the unfortunate offenders get beheaded. Her representation is then intriguing to say the least. It would seem as though her only purpose in Wonderland was to confront the dream-child Alice and then restore her to the real world.

The Ego Ideal: Alice

Of the ego, Freud once said that it is “not the master in its own house”. (Royal 59) This is all too clear in Alice in Wonderland as Alice is constantly trying to please the many forces of her psyche, in her dream self. The Queen as the Id is the strongest force of her psyche and the Ego ideal in Alice’s persona undoubtedly has a hard time coping with a strong personality like the Queen. Despite this, it is because of the Ego and the Superego that she conducts herself in a manner that is socially acceptable.

Unlike the Id and the Superego which work antithetically, the Ego ideal balances these two strong forces. Alice, then in her dream self is forced to please the many creatures of Wonderland and they are all quite strong-willed. From the very instant she
meets the creatures of her unconscious mind, it is clear that all of them are either exceedingly rude or indifferent to her existence. She is seen as an intruder in her own mind. On top of this, the creatures ask her to explain her identity and when she is slightly rude, they lash out at her. She is then forced to adopt a submissive stand and serve the creatures of Wonderland. For instance, when she is trapped in the White Rabbit’s house, he assumes that she is his servant Mary Ann and orders her to look for his fan and gloves.

Similarly, in the Caucus race, she is forced to take part in an absurd game with no rules and more importantly, it is a game devoid of a framework that defines it. Nonetheless, she passively accepts her role and plays her part. In the above mentioned examples, Alice in her dream self appears to play the part of the ego ideal.

In order to cope with two very strong dominating forces, the ego ideal sometimes blocks and distorts the impulses of the Superego and the Id. Freud calls this a defence mechanism and they are of three types: moral conflict, neurotic conflict and the realistic conflict. According to him, one experiences a moral conflict when there is a strong impulse to do something wrong and the superego resists. Neurotic conflicts arise when the ego is afraid of being overwhelmed by the Id. Finally, realistic conflicts take place between the ego and reality where dangerous situations provoke emotions of fear and anxiety.

We see that Alice goes through similar conflicts in the narrative. The predominant moral conflict in the narrative structure occurs when she consumes the savories in Wonderland. Part of her is aware that this can have serious consequences but she has them anyway, in order to make her way to the garden. Later on, as has been said earlier,
the Caterpillar gives her the agency to control her growth spurts and in doing so, the superego solves this dilemma for her. Neurotic conflicts take place in the Croquet garden where Alice is extremely uneasy because of the Queen’s inordinate fury. To quote from the text:

Alice began to feel very uneasy: to be sure, she had not as yet had any dispute with the Queen, but she knew that it might happen any minute, 'and then,' thought she, 'what would become of me? They're dreadfully fond of beheading people here; the great wonder is, that there's any one left alive!' (Carrol 46)

There are several occasions in Wonderland where Alice faces complete obliteration. Despite this, she does not display this sense of self-preservation in earlier situations and is happy to venture into unfamiliar grounds with an abandon that is both commendable and reckless. On the contrary, in the croquet ground, she is constantly afraid of being killed by the Queen and continues to remain wary in the garden. Finally, a realistic conflict arises when the Queen orders her execution.

In order to resolve the above mentioned conflicts the ego employs strategies like repression, denial, isolation, projection and rejection, among others. Most of these defence mechanisms were discovered by Freud and a few others were developed by his daughter, Anna Freud. According to Sigmund Freud, repression occurs when the ego forces impulses and memories out of conscious awareness. He says “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away and keeping it at a distance from the conscious [mind]. (Idema 84) Alice is clearly trying to escape from something on the hot summer day when Wonderland was created and the very act of falling down the rabbit
hole is an act of repression. Here it can be conjectured that she escapes the boredom of a hot sunny afternoon and the didactism of a book without “pictures or conversations”.

On the other hand, Freud states that projection occurs when “an internal perception is suppressed, and instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception.” (Chabot 36) *Wonderland* seems to have the theme of “eat or be eaten” throughout its narrative where, its protagonist has to continually eat or drink something in order to survive; it is not very surprising that *Alice* assumes that most of the creatures possess the cannibalistic drives that she herself does. Projection then, is the act of reading the ego’s desires in other people/characters and this is seen in the scene where Alice is playing with a dog and is quite afraid that it will eat her up.

Denial takes place when *Alice* refuses to accept that she is mad in the scene with the ubiquitous Cheshire Cat. When she asks him for directions, the conversation takes a philosophical turn wherein the Cheshire Cat gravely asserts that everybody is mad in *Wonderland*. Here, *Alice* staunchly refuses to accept the Cheshire cat’s argument. Remaining loyal to her role of the ego ideal, *Alice* looks for ways to distract him from his original point and in doing so, enable herself to forget his original contention that she was mad. In order to do so, she asks him: “How do you know that you’re mad?” (Carrol 52) In the conversation that ensues, the Cheshire cat gives her his own subverted logic, which surprisingly makes sense:

“To begin with”, said the Cat, “a dog’s not mad. You grant that?”

“I suppose so,” said Alice
“Well then,” the Cat went on, “you see a dog growls when it’s angry, and wags its tail when it’s pleased. Now I growl when I’m pleased, and wag my tail when I’m angry. Therefore I’m mad.” (Carrol 52)

Rather than assure herself of her sanity, Alice focuses on the Cat’s mental state and thus, enables her unconscious to forget the possibility that she could be mad.

Conclusion

As mentioned previously, just as Alice confronts the Queen in her dream state, she is fully aware of who she is. So in a sense, her identity crisis is solved here. Nonetheless, she still ascribes to the rules of Wonderland and continues to attend the trial scene. Yet, it will be noticed that she finds the incongruities of Wonderland to be absurd after she meets the Queen and not before that.

That said, both the Ego Ideal and the Superego help her in finding her identity as well. When Alice emerges from Wonderland we see that she is more in control of the situation and her personality as well. Only by finding her identity could Alice reject the world of Wonderland and she does so by recognizing the supreme rulers there to be a mere pack of card.

This dire contrast in her personality is easily observed when we examine her former self. In the beginning her character is rather complicated as she is at once, polite and rude; gentle and cruel; intelligent and stupid. Her subconscious mind brings out a volley of characters who are individually equipped with a distinctive quality at various times. For instance, when Alice meets the Duchess in chapter 9, The Mock Turtle’s Story, she is
most affectionate and tells her, “You can’t think how glad I am to see you, you dear old thing!” (Carrol 73) and walks with Alice, hand in hand. Likewise, her dream-self constantly changes her personality as well. She is sometimes as timid and anxious as the White Rabbit or alternatively displays the temerity of the Caterpillar. Her character evolves with each creature she meets.

Thus the polite child, who is happy to keep her opinions to herself and finds the need to curtsy even as she is falling down, which can be attributed to the strict adherence to politeness, imposed by Victorian Society transforms into a balanced young Woman who can destabilize an entire land by merely rising forth and swatting away at the creatures there with her bare hands. Indeed, towards the end, Alice reduces them to mere playing cards. By rejecting Wonderland, Alice solves her identity crisis.

It is now evident that the roles of the Id, Ego and the Superego represented by the Queen, Alice and the Cheshire Cat & Caterpillar respectively help Alice transform her conflicted self into a collective whole. Furthermore, it is seen that both Lewis Carroll’s characterizations and Tenniel’s illustrations of the creatures in Wonderland bear a remarkable significance to the tripartite role of the psyche.

References


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