

EPIC ALICE: LEWIS CARROLL AND THE HOMERIC TRADITION

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

EPIC ALICE: LEWIS CARROLL AND THE HOMERIC TRADITION. (May 2012)

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The purpose of this project was to reveal Lewis Carroll's famous children's novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* to be an attempt by the author to write a Victorian mock-heroic epic, one that is based largely on Homer's *Odyssey*. Using a great deal of documented biographical information, it is evident that Carroll had more than just the expected education with Classical studies. By reading the two *Alice* novels as one story and setting them in comparison to Homer's *Odyssey*, it is possible to find a great deal of similarities between the experiences of the two heroes and various characters throughout each narrative. Further exploration reveals that Carroll's works include many structural techniques that support a poetic or oral telling of the story and all of the dominant themes that appear are also significant in the *Odyssey*. Conclusions reveal that literary genres as we know them are not nearly as rigid or uniform as they appear, as a work such as Carroll's can be long known as the epitome of one genre, and then turn out to have so much in common with a quite different and much older genre.

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Introduction

Fantasy Literature in Victorian England

“And what is the use of a book ... without pictures or conversations?” asks young Alice, as she sits on the bank of the river listening to her sister read. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll’s most famous work and one of the greatest children’s novels of all time (along with its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*), was first published in 1865 at the height of the Victorian era. While Alice’s statement was likely a common opinion among Victorian children (or children from any era, for that matter), the general sentiment of Victorian society about books and literature was quite different. The Victorian era witnessed a great change in the history of literature as the novel grew in popularity and became the most read form of literature in England. Many Victorian novels focused on the reality of life during the time period, often following the progress of a single character and his or her relationships and experiences throughout life, relating the individual to the greater society. In *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Maureen Moran reviews in depth the reading habits of the time period, explaining that there were three aspects of availability that made fictional novels so popular: cheaper books due to mechanized printing technology, borrowing rights thanks to subscription libraries, and installment purchasing of items published serially in separate bound issues or monthly magazines (78-9). While many works of fantasy would be as easily obtainable as those rooted in reality, there remained an immense gap between the popularity of these two genres. During the height of the *bildungsroman*, or development novel, works of fantasy were widely

overlooked by literary enthusiasts and scholars, discounted as literature that was only good enough for children.

Stephen Prickett's *Victorian Fantasy* provides a thorough and illuminating study of this literary counterculture within Victorian literature. In his Introduction, Prickett comments on the role of fantasy literature during the Victorian period, stating, "If it is also true that many of the fantasies of the Victorian period were children's books, that is not because they were simplistic, but because children, until they are educated out of it, are interested in everything" (3). While it does not completely discount fantasy literature, Prickett's statement reminds us that this genre was much less likely to be read and accepted as "serious" literature during the Victorian period. Prickett notes the etymology of the word *fantasy*, stating that, "From its earliest usages in English the word has been associated with two other related ones, *imagination* and *fancy*—which share the same Greek root as *fantasy*" (5).¹ It was this association with the imaginative, a realm that lacks the normal boundaries and rules of reality, that caused fantasy fiction to be assigned to the youngest readers of society. Prickett goes on to highlight the content of fantasy fiction, stating that it "might be horrible, it might be delightful, but it was definitely unreal, and therefore of little more than clinical interest to sane and practical citizens" (5). Prickett comments on how this dichotomy between what was real or possible and the unreal or bizarre created a definitive line between the two genres, describing Victorian fantasy as "the underside, or obverse, of the Victorian imagination" (11). While it is clear that there was indeed a place for fantasy or nonsense literature during the Victorian era, the audience was few and the recognition nominal.

¹ The Romantic period provides an interesting discussion on the differences between *fancy* and *imagination*. According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "You may conceive the difference in kind between Fancy and the Imagination in this way,—that if the check of the senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first would become delirium, and the last mania" (Coleridge 121). For more of Coleridge's explanation, see *Selections from the Prose Writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Henry A. Beers.

While the majority of adult novels and more scholarly literature of the Victorian period were grounded in reality, those that strayed from this formula were often called into question as a threat to the standards or principles of society. Prickett discusses how fantasy authors such as Carroll were not challenging the status quo with their fantasy fiction; rather, they looked for different techniques to explain reality: “Deliberately, they tried to extend and enrich ways of perceiving ‘reality’ by a variety of nonrealistic techniques that included nonsense, dreams, visions, and the creation of other worlds” (3). This approach was encouraged by advances in science, as studies in psychology attempted to discover new ideas about the human mind. According to Moran, “The scientific approach to mental phenomena inflected Victorian literature. Fantasy and occult writing gradually focused more on psychological disturbance than on supernatural occurrences” (59). It was not only adult readers who tended towards works grounded in reality, as we can clearly see by the number of novels *written* during the era that fall into this genre. While many authors of the time period did not consider it worthy to write fantasy, others tested the flexibility that this literature allows. Prickett notes the different manifestations of the genre as they appear from various authors:

One is the idea of the *Gothick*; another is a revival of religious mysticism and a renewed feeling for the numinous—the irrational and mysterious elements in religious experience; a third is the purely human revulsion against the squalid and degrading conditions of the early industrial revolution. In all three we can trace that curious ambivalence between imagination and fantasy that was to so haunt the Victorian consciousness, and turn it inwards towards the creation of dreamworlds. (12-3)

Despite the varied displays of the fantastic, many Victorians continued to avoid this literature. However, works of this genre were more likely to be approved by adult readers if they contained a moral or lesson for the young reader, such as the widely popular *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Moran provides further insight on the subject of acceptable representations of the fantastic during the Victorian era, describing how, "Writing for children frequently inculcated explicit religious principles In such juvenile literature, Christian precepts were entangled with respectable social customs and good manners for the instruction of youthful readers" (25). Although there were a number of works of fantasy that relied entirely on the supernatural (monster stories such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stoker's *Dracula* certainly come to mind) or religious doctrine, psychological fantasies such as Carroll's *Alice* novels illustrated how a person could potentially end up in their own version of Wonderland, unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, an idea that frightened many members of Victorian society.

Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (1975) is an important critical work on the genre of fantastic literature. Todorov engages Aristotle's *Poetics*, whereby genres are classified by a procedure that elicits a particular response (i.e. Tragedy does *this*, which makes the reader feel *this*), applying a similar formula to fantastic literature. According to Robert Scholes's *foreward*, Todorov examines "the codes shared by writer and reader that enable a certain kind of communication to take place" (Todorov viii). After discussing ideas of genre, Todorov begins his explanation of the literary phenomenon known as the fantastic: "In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world" (25). According to Todorov, it is this moment of uncertainty in such events that

defines the fantastic; once the event is explained it will fit into another, possibly related, genre. The cause of this fantastic moment might be explained away as a mistake or a trick, fitting it into our understanding of the world. If it cannot be explained within our world, it may be classified under the genre of marvelous (25). While many works might explain away the moments associated with the fantastic, others are less explicit and leave the reader questioning what really happened. Todorov's definition of the fantastic is certainly relevant to Carroll's *Alice* novels, as the young protagonist ends her adventures questioning the reality of her dream experiences.

Today, imagination and fantasy are held in higher regard, whether or not it is associated with a moral or religious message, but in earlier years many adult readers were unable to find any merit in works that were not realistic. Prickett comments on the merit of fantasy from a late twentieth century perspective, stating that, "Over the last two hundred years fantasy has helped us to evolve new languages for new kinds of human experience; it has pointed the way towards new kinds of thinking and feeling. In seeking to preserve and recreate a world we were in danger of losing, it has also created far other worlds and other seas" (3). While we can certainly see the worth of fantasy literature today, there remain many critics who continue to denounce its placement in scholarly conversations. As is clear from Carroll's two *Alice* novels, even works of pure fantasy can have a profound and lasting impression on literary history, making them much more than simply literature for children.

The Homeric Epic in Victorian England

While fantasy literature was popular among young readers and the realistic *bildungsroman* was prized by adult readers, there was yet another literary fad in Victorian

England that was celebrated among authors and scholars alike. This trend manifested in a fascination with the past, rather than new literary methods, as writers attempted to emulate and recreate the works of the Classical Greek poets. In earlier years, this type of writing was revered because the majority of readers had some degree of classical education. However, Moran describes how for the Victorians, “The diversity of readers also influenced style and technique. Classical and foreign allusions that assumed substantial formal education were downplayed in favour of contemporary references” (79). Nonetheless, classical literature was, and has continued to be, a key component of a Western education. Many writers throughout history have tried their hand at replicating the style and structure of Greek epics in their own works, particularly in the form of epic poetry. Earlier writers, such as the Restoration poet and literary critic John Dryden and the premier Augustan poet Alexander Pope, were well-known for their mock epics, which used lofty language and heroic couplets in their poetry. As the Victorian period emerged, nineteenth-century writers used similar techniques. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* is known as an epic poem in novel form and Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* is widely accepted as “the great Victorian epic.” In his book *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse, 1790-1910*, Herbert Tucker states, “For these authors, as for their Renaissance forerunners and their successors into our time, the exemplary career of that premier Augustan poet and direct Alexandrian heir Virgil established the composition of an epic as *the last rite of passage to full poetic majority, the summative test of art* [italics added for emphasis]” (2). This type of imitation has appeared numerous times throughout literary history and is an example of the Dionysian concept of *imitatio*.²

² Proposed in the 1st century BCE by the Greek author Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *imitatio* departed from Aristotle and Plato’s earlier concept of *mimesis*, which states that works of art are copies of the real. For more

Imitatio, Latin for imitation, describes the literary method and rhetorical device that relies on the emulation or adaptation of a text from an earlier author. In *Mimesis*, Matthew Potolsky explores this Dionysian concept, stating that, “The imitation of role models concerns the relationship between past and present, original and copy, and defines mimesis as a historical phenomenon” (49). For many poets and authors, the ability to imitate the great works of classical literature was the defining characteristic of a successful writer. According to John Kevin Newman in his introduction to *The Classical Epic Tradition*, “The classical epic tradition begins for us with Homer, and there are times when the reader of Homer, confronted by the inexhaustible riches which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain, is tempted to believe that the rest of European literature is merely a commentary on the first of its masters” (3). Todorov comments on the subject as well, calling into question such theories as reader response that view a work of literature as a stand-alone piece: “It is inconceivable, nowadays, to defend the thesis that everything in the work is individual, a brand-new product of personal inspiration, a creation with no relation to works of the past” (7). Numerous literary works have been identified as being inspired by or in imitation of Homer’s epic poems, and many others have the potential but have yet to be introduced into the conversation, as this thesis will explore.

Tucker’s critical exploration of the use of epic in Victorian England is quite important, and he describes his project as “a sketch whose internal variation ... will suggest how adaptable the genre turned out to be, and how responsive it remained to contemporary concerns as they arose and changed with the decades” (12). Tucker later discusses the purpose of the epic during the nineteenth-century, specifically with regards to the content, stating that, “Such a plot called forth normative virtues from the protagonists, as they rose to

on *mimesis*, see: Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.

the test of hardships that set at risk the welfare, and so highlighted the values, of the society they upheld” (23). Tucker goes on to highlight one of the most common aspects of the Victorian epic: “Since the plot of a nineteenth-century epic nearly always came from far away in place or time or both, its sheer telling abetted an effect we just saw verse obtaining by other means: it set the reader in an alienated and relativized position with regard to the action” (23). The Victorians understood the culture within the story as a moment on a continuum that helped lead to their present culture in nineteenth-century England, thereby creating continuity between the past and (Victorian) present. The use of setting is essential in many famous literary works, but it was key for readers of Victorian epics to experience a storyline that was both familiar and foreign.

While the Victorians certainly had a unique interest in the epic tradition, there is much more to be said of this tradition that dates back through various centuries and cultures. Homer’s great epics are nearly the earliest extant works of the genre, preceded only by the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and there are many components to the structure and content of the heroic epic that have been maintained and used in multiple literary works throughout history. Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* remains the definitive text on the subject of the epic hero. Using psychoanalytical concepts coined by Freud and relying on Jungian archetypes, Campbell uses mythology and religion to examine the notion of the hero throughout history and the commonalities that appear between all such tales. In the preface to his work, Campbell describes his intent: “There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind, but this is a book about the similarities; and once these are understood the differences will be found to be much less great than is popularly (and politically) supposed” (viii). As it turns out, there are a great many similarities

in literary works from different time periods that appear across various cultures. In describing the basic outline that is found in all hero stories, Campbell states, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (30). Using this very basic outline, it would be possible to argue that numerous texts, many of which are classified as fantasy literature, are in some ways heroic epics.

While Homer and the Greek tradition of the epic remained central to a Western education, the Victorian period also saw an increased interest in Homer as a person. Continuing a discussion revived by Friedrich August Wolf at the end of the eighteenth-century,³ many intellectuals began to question whether Homer was a real person, or rather a name given to an oral tradition that relied on numerous bards or story-tellers throughout Greek history. Despite this fascination with Homer during the Victorian period, what has perhaps been the most groundbreaking scholarship on the Greek poet came only decades later with the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord.⁴ Through their intensive studies of the Homeric texts and research in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, Parry and Lord set out to prove an oral origin for Homer’s two great epics: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The work of Parry and Lord illustrates how the repetition of stock phrases such as “gray-eyed Athena” would make it easier for story-tellers to be able to remember and recite such a lengthy story. Their studies of modern day oral story-tellers revealed that even in the twentieth-century, singers were able to memorize tales that rival the 12,000 lines of Homer’s *Odyssey* (Homer 280). In *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature: The Ancient World, Beginnings-100 C.E.*, the introduction

³ See: *Prolegomena ad Homerum*.

⁴ For a more in depth look at the work of Parry and Lord, see: *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* and Albert Lord’s *The Singer of Tales*.

and background on Homer describes several techniques that helped with the memorization of these tales, such as the fact that the verse was metered and poets would often use stringed instruments, such as a lyre, to establish a rhythm. This description goes on to note the poetic formulas, stock situations, and stock phrases that were used to create patterns in this oral poetry (280). There has been an ongoing debate about an oral origin for Homer's epic poems, and *The Bedford Anthology* helps to reconcile the conflicting opinions on the subject, stating that: "It is possible that for several hundred years Homer's epics were recited orally and a written text also existed, and that by the fifth century, the commercial reproductions of the texts finally canonized them and prevented further interpolation" (280). While the Classics such as Homer's *Odyssey* have provided a rich literary history and have long been the standard for a Western education, the Victorian fascination with the epic form and Homer as a person would lead to a new understanding of this ancient literary genre.

Lewis Carroll: "Who in the world am I?"

Lewis Carroll was born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson on January 27, 1832 in Cheshire, England. He was the first born son and the third eldest of his parent's eleven children, all of whom survived into adulthood. It is commonly known that Dodgson was a lover of wordplay, and this is represented in his pen name: *Lewis* was the Anglicized form of *Ludovicus*, which was Latin for *Lutwidge*, and *Carroll* was an Irish surname similar to the Latin name *Carolus*, which the name *Charles* comes from (Carroll 252). Although Lewis Carroll was only used for Dodgson's literary pen name, for the purposes of this discussion, I will only use the name Carroll.

As a young child, Carroll was educated at home and showed promising intellect. He showed particular skills with the memorization of dates and facts and was an avid reader, reading *Pilgrim's Progress* at the age of seven. As a child he also excelled in mathematics, asking his father to explain complex concepts, and he showed a strong interest in drama, writing and staging his own plays in his own puppet theater. When he was twelve, Carroll was sent to a small private school in Richmond, not far from his family in north Yorkshire. According to Angelica Carpenter in her biography *Lewis Carroll: Through the Looking Glass*, in his short time at Richmond he studied: "Christianity, Latin, Greek, literature, French, and mathematics" (20). A year later he was transferred to Rugby school, where he continued to learn the "'modern' subjects of French and history in addition to religion and the classics (Greek and Latin language and literature)" (21). His success as a student won him the right to choose what books he wished to read, selecting biographies, histories, religious texts, and Greek dictionaries as his choices. He left Rugby four years later at the age of seventeen and began his adult education at Christ Church, Oxford in January 1851.

As a student Carroll was easily distracted and this affected his academic career, causing him to fail an important scholarship. Nevertheless, he showed great promise in mathematics and won the Christ Church Mathematical Lectureship, a position he would hold for twenty-six years. Despite his skills in and various publications about math, he was never cited for any significant mathematical breakthroughs. In 1856 Carroll took up the developing art of photography. His venture in this area relied heavily on the human body and many of his subjects were young girls, a fact that has given him the reputation of possibly having been

a pedophile.⁵ In addition to his other interests, Carroll also tried his hand as an inventor, creating such things as a stamp holder and a word game that is somewhat similar to today's game of Scrabble.

The year of 1856 would prove quite significant for Lewis Carroll. It was during this year that Henry Liddell arrived as the new dean at Christ Church, along with his wife and children, an event that would have profound effects on Carroll's life and success as an author. Carroll developed a close relationship with the Liddell family, particularly the three sisters Lorina, Edith, and especially young Alice. He would take the children on rowing expeditions and recite stories to them. On one such expedition on July 4, 1862, he developed the outline of the story that would later become one of the most popular children's stories of all time (Cohen 89-91). According to Derek Hudson, who writes about Carroll's ordination, his lectureship at Christ Church required him to take holy orders within four years of obtaining his master's degree, but he was able to delay this process for some time. He took deacon's orders on December 22, 1861, but a year later when expected to progress to priestly orders, he appealed to the dean not to do so, a defiance of the rules that should have resulted in his expulsion. Surprisingly, Dean Liddell granted him permission to remain at the college without becoming a priest (Hudson 259).

Even before his famous *Alice* novels, Carroll was a successful author, writing short stories and having them published in various magazines that included national publications such as *The Comic Times* and *The Train*. Another important event that occurred in 1856 was the birth of "Lewis Carroll," as the pen name appeared for the first time when his romantic poem "Solitude" was published in *The Train*. The work for which he is best known and

⁵ Morton N. Cohen's chapter "The Pursuit of Innocents" in his biography *Lewis Carroll* provides some insight into Carroll's relationship with young girls. Cohen discusses Carroll's photography in depth and displays a number of photographs produced by Carroll, including the four surviving photographs with nude subjects.

revered, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was first published in 1865 under his penname with illustrations by Sir John Tenniel. Before this publication, Carroll tested his manuscript, originally titled *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, by giving a handwritten copy to young Alice Liddell as a Christmas present (Jones 10). 1871 saw the publication of the sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. In addition to various mathematical publications, his other important literary works include *Phantasmagoria* (1869), the poem *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), *Rhyme and Reason* (1883), and his final novel *Sylvie and Bruno*, published in two parts (1889 & 1893). Although Carroll's other literary publications had much in common with his earlier works such as fantastical content and poetry,⁶ none saw the success or have had the lasting popularity of his two *Alice* novels.

Before going through the difficulties of publishing, Carroll wanted to be sure that his work would meet with approval. Martin Gardner's *Annotated Alice* provides a note explaining that Carroll gave an early manuscript of *Alice's Adventures* to his friend George MacDonald before deciding to publish it, asking Mrs. MacDonald to read it to their children. The reception was good and Greville, who was six at the time, said that there ought to be sixty thousand copies of it (140). This reception, along with much urging from the Liddell's, gave Carroll the assurance he needed and he went to work on a publishable edition. Carroll's attempts at authorship proved to be quite successful. According to Carpenter's biography of Carroll, the *Alice* novels were "two of the first best-sellers published especially for children and two of the earliest books written purely to amuse (rather than to instruct) young readers" (11). Carpenter goes on to describe how Carroll's use of the fantastical along with his

⁶ For a largely complete compilation of Carroll's works, see: *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, published by Modern Library. Although this publication does not include many of Carroll's mathematical works (published under the name of Dodgson), it proves to be an easily obtainable source of his works of fictional prose and verse.

cleverness of language helped these novels to become “acknowledged as two of the most important books in English and world literature” (11). Cohen’s biography states that by 1898, the year of Carroll’s death, Macmillan had printed over 150,000 copies of *Alice’s Adventures* and more than 100,000 copies of *Through the Looking-Glass* (134).

Down the Rabbit Hole

Carroll has gained the reputation as one of the greatest children’s fantasy authors of all time because of his novels *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Research into Carroll’s private life will prove that he had much more than the expected knowledge of the Greek Classics that would come from a formal education. Although the Victorians were greatly interested in epic style and Homer as a person and many of the great writers of the era were emulating the style of Greek epic poetry, Carroll’s *Alice* novels were never associated with the epic tradition. Instead, their fantastical nature caused them to be immediately classified as children’s literature and they slipped neatly into their role as two of the greatest children’s novels of all time. It is this gap in the understanding of the *Alice* novels that my project seeks to fill. Despite nearly a hundred and fifty years of being classified so simplistically, Carroll’s famous *Alice* novels suggest another reading that is quite different and much more complex. By reading Carroll’s two *Alice* novels together as part of one larger story-line, these works begin to take on a structure that is quite similar to Homer’s great epic poem: the *Odyssey*. Through this thesis, I will argue that Carroll’s *Alice* novels are much more than fantasy fiction for children. Carroll, like many Victorian authors of the time, was interested in creating a modern epic, one that was interestingly inspired by Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Martin Gardner, in his introduction to the Signet Classic publication of the two *Alice* novels, unintentionally provides support for such a reading of Carroll's novels, stating:

Although many adults dislike fantasy, preferring fiction about the real world, it is surprising how many great literary works are fantasies. One thinks of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Goethe's *Faust*, Shakespeare's *Tempest* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and scores of fantasy novels that have outlasted myriads of once admired works of realism. (qtd. in Carroll, v)

Todorov comments on the problem that arises when we use strict ideas about genre to classify a work: "When we examine works of literature from the perspective of genre, we engage in a very particular enterprise: we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of them" (3). It is these limitations of genre that have resulted in the stagnant understanding of Carroll's *Alice* novels. Todorov's discussion of genre touches on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, which Todorov describes as a theory of literature and a theory of criticism. Todorov summarizes Frye's ideas into specific categories about the classification of literature, and one of his ideas, albeit ancient and simplistic (as well as dualistic), proves helpful: "A third category emphasizes two principal tendencies of literature: the comic, which reconciles the hero with society; and the tragic, which isolates him from it" (11). Using this basic division whereby a work of literature is classified as either comedy or tragedy, we can begin to make connections between Victorian works such as the *Alice* novels and ancient works such as Homer's *Odyssey*. By exploring these novels through the context of other genres, we see just how flexible they prove to be. In describing a common aspect of the hero narrative, Campbell states that, "Freedom to pass

back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other—is the talent of the master” (229). As we see in both of the *Alice* novels and as I will explore further in the following chapters, Carroll created a character who could do just that. While definitions and classifications of genre can prove to be quite useful in literary scholarship, they can also greatly hinder new or different understandings of literary classics.

While the previous biographical information on Carroll revealed some knowledge of Greek and Classical studies, it turns out that he had a much greater knowledge and experience in the subject. Although Lewis Carroll was simply a pen name used by Charles Dodgson, the impression that has been left behind by both men is an impressive one. Numerous diary entries and correspondences of Carroll’s remain accessible today, allowing literary scholars to find evidence for different understandings of the *Alice* novels. It is through these surviving resources that Carroll’s experiences with Classical Greek can be found, and the Norton Critical Edition of *Alice in Wonderland* edited by Donald J. Gray includes many of these resources. Anne Clark’s excerpt describes Carroll’s early school years and the struggles that he had in Classical studies. Clark states that despite grammatical errors and difficulties with Latin metrical form, Carroll showed considerable promise in the subject. Clark goes on to describe how schoolboys of Carroll’s time had to achieve proficiency in prose composition, as well as “write Latin verse, modeling themselves on the great classical poets, and observing scrupulously the complicated rules of syllabic quantity” (243-4). Not only would Carroll have been expected to study classical literature as a young

student, it was required that he learn to write in imitation of it. Clark continues her discussion of Carroll's experiences with this subject:

Of his total of eleven prize books from Rugby, at least three were for Classics, including Latin composition, which effectively dispels any suggestion that he was weak in these subjects. It would be fairer to say that he was better at Mathematics than Classics, and that as his life progressed, his greater inclination to the former led him to devote himself to Mathematics at the expense of his work in Latin and Greek. (245-6)

Despite being continuously overlooked for evidence of Carroll's interest in classical studies, the *Alice* novels in fact reveal his fondness for Greek literature.

Carroll himself provides more evidence of his intimacy with classical literature, as his diary excerpt from Tuesday, March 13, 1855 states, "When these scholarships are over I shall be more at leisure for general reading. I hope to carry out some such scheme as this:— *Classics*. Review methodically all the books I have read, and perhaps add a new one— *Aeschylus? Divinity*. Keep up Gospels and Acts in Greek" (Carroll 250). While there is no doubt that Carroll's education was a rigorous one, this entry proves a personal interest in classical studies as Carroll planned for his free time. Another important resource, Charlie Lovett's *Lewis Carroll Among His Books*, provides the most extensive and informative compilation of not only Carroll's library of books that he owned, but also books that Carroll is known to have read. Using a number of primary sources that include a catalogue of Carroll's personal effects after his death as well as Carroll's diary and journal entries, Lovett compiles an index of 2,365 titles that can be traced back to Carroll.⁷ Lovett's compilation

⁷ Lovett notes that there are likely a number of books that Carroll read that he never referenced in his writings, as well as the fact that he probably owned many books that he never read.

proves that Carroll did have a copy of both Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in his library, as is cited in *Brooks Catalogue*, a catalogue of Carroll's personal effects and library that was sold at auction by E. J. Brooks beginning on Tuesday May 10th of 1898, only four short months after Carroll's death. Lovett's entry number 968 lists the *Pickering Diamond Classics* edition of Homer's two epic poems (156).

Morton N. Cohen has compiled an excellent collection of remembrances and conversations from members of Carroll's family and friends, along with material from Carroll's own diaries, which provides intimate insights into the life of one of the most interesting authors of all time. One excerpt from *Lewis Carroll: Interviews and Recollections* describes an evening discussion among the dons of Christ Church on the authorship of the works of Homer, some of whom supported the traditional view of Homer as a person and others who denied the existence of the Greek poet. Carroll sat quietly listening to the discussion, and when asked his opinion, replied that, "he had long made up his mind on this controversy; it appeared to him perfectly clear that the poems attributed to Homer were not written by him, but by another man of the same name!" (74). Alice Liddell's father, the Dean of Christ Church and intimate acquaintance of Carroll, was a well known Greek scholar and co-editor of *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Jones 112, 162). Carroll loved to include hidden meanings within his works that only select friends or acquaintances would pick up on, such as his play on the terms "grief and laughing" for Greek and Latin in the Mock Turtle's story. According to Jones and Gladstone in their encyclopedic *The Alice Companion*, this pun implies that Latin lessons are more enjoyable than Greek (112). As Dean Liddell would certainly have provided an education in Greek for his daughters, the Liddell's would have likely picked up on this joke and found it humorous, as was Carroll's intention.

By combining facts about Carroll's classical education and experiences with Greek, Victorian ideas about the epic tradition and Homer, and theoretical ideas about epic and genre, I will analyze Carroll's *Alice* novels as a modern, Victorian epic that draws on Homer's *Odyssey* for inspiration. While reading the two *Alice* novels in comparison with Homer's *Odyssey*, I will look at similarities between the texts that support this new classification of Carroll's works. I will look specifically at the structure and outline of the texts, such as chapter division, as well as content and characters that are similar or analogous. There are many examples of story-telling, poetry, wordplay, and riddles within both the *Alice* texts and Homer's *Odyssey*, and each use of these literary devices is important to the overall text. I will also explore issues of gender in the epic and characteristics of the hero, who is more often than not a male protagonist. Finally, I will raise questions about Alice's gender representations that support her role as the epic hero. Using all of these techniques, I hope to encourage a new understanding of Carroll's *Alice* novels.

Theoretical Perspective and Project Organization

As I begin my analysis of Carroll's works, I will be using a somewhat simplistic form of comparative literature, reading the two texts side by side and noting similarities and differences as I highlight the aspects in both the content and stylistics that represent the *Alice* books as a remake of the one of the greatest works of Classical Greek literature. I will not engage in the discussion of language and translation, as I feel that they are unnecessary for my purposes. This literary theory will allow me to approach Carroll's novels and Homer's epic poetry without the limitations of time, culture, genre, etc., instead finding the links that exist between these superficially different texts. I will use some aspects of structuralist

literary theory as I highlight the intertextuality of Carroll's works with those attributed to Homer, an idea that is supported by the description of Victorian epics previously discussed. Martin Gardner, one of the world's leading experts on Carroll and his works, provides what is likely the best critical edition of the *Alice* novels, a resource that will be invaluable as Gardner discusses the current understandings of the *Alice* novels. Although Gardner's *The Annotated Alice* is not critically focused, he has done extensive research on Carroll, Alice, and the Victorian mind, providing notes throughout the two *Alice* novels that highlight hidden meanings that are lost on many readers, both Victorian and modern. Gardner's book also provides an extensive bibliography and is an excellent resource for anyone wishing to delve deep within the text and learn more about the imaginative mind of Lewis Carroll.

Because many critics have argued that Greek texts such as Homer's *Odyssey* stemmed from an oral tradition, I will incorporate formalist theory into my discussion as I reveal how a similar argument can be made of the *Alice* novels, highlighting techniques used by Carroll to encourage the storytelling of his novels, such as the fact that Carroll himself told the story to Alice Liddell and her sisters before writing the first novel. Although their work was carried out after Carroll's time and many of their ideas would have been unknown to him, I will use the works of Parry and Lord to illustrate how the same ideas that suggest an oral beginning to Homer's *Odyssey* can be applied to the *Alice* novels. Although Carroll was not aware that the use of stock phrases as a technique of oral storytelling existed in the *Odyssey*, if he was in any way modeling Homer in his writing, then it would make sense that these same techniques would appear in his own works. Campbell's text is an important one to my argument because of his emphasis on the *similarities* in all hero stories. While it is obvious that Homer's *Odyssey* fits the category of hero narrative in a number of ways, many

would be hesitant to classify Carroll's works in the same way. Using the structure and examples provided by Campbell, I will illustrate how Alice serves as the customary hero in a number of senses. After my primary discussion of the two *Alice* texts compared with Homer's *Odyssey*, my theoretical perspective will incorporate aspects of gender studies as I look at the representations of Alice as the heroine of the novels in comparison to the typical hero representations.

In Chapter One I will compare Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with the first part of Homer's *Odyssey* beginning with Book 5,⁸ which tells the story of the ten years in which Odysseus is trying to return home to Ithaca after fighting in the Trojan War. Starting with Book 5 of the *Odyssey*, the time in which Odysseus is out in the world, allows me to highlight the similarities with Alice's trip to Wonderland and her experiences as she also tries to return home. Chapter One will also compare Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* with the second part of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus has arrived in Ithaca and must win the competition designed by his wife Penelope and remove the suitors and regain ownership of his household. While Carroll's first novel and the first part of Homer's *Odyssey* take place out in the world, Alice's adventures through the looking-glass and Odysseus's ventures in the second part of the *Odyssey* take place in the interior, specifically within their own homes. I will make comparisons between characters that Alice meets with those whom Odysseus meets that are similar, as well as experiences that both protagonists share.

⁸ Books 1-4 focus on Telemachus and his instructions from Athena as he attempts to learn news of his father, thereby giving the reader knowledge of what has already happened and creating a frame for the adventures of Odysseus. These first four books are not relevant to the discussion at hand as they do not center on the adventures of the actual hero, so I will only use them for reference if necessary.

Chapter Two will be an exploration of the style and structure of Carroll's work in comparison with Homer's *Odyssey*, as opposed to the content that is explored in Chapter One. I will look at the structure of the stories, such as the division of chapters and breaks in the story that make the novels read more poetically. I will take note of specific poetic devices and the way that storytelling and songs are used within the text (creating further layers of meaning), noting examples of wordplay and riddles, and the ways in which these appear in the *Alice* texts as a practice comparable to that used in the Greek and Homeric tradition. I will also look for any instances that support an oral reading of the texts, such as repetition of lines or ideas. I will then focus on themes and motifs that appear in both texts, such as identity and the difficulties faced by the heroes to maintain their identity. Finally, Chapter Two will discuss representations of gender, specifically with regards to Alice as a heroine, as she clearly breaks various gender expectations, especially those of Victorian society. This section will include some discussion of the gender aspects of Homer's *Odyssey*, but as Odysseus already fits common ideas about the epic hero, most of this section will be devoted to creating a new understanding of Alice in this role.

By proposing this new reading of Carroll's works as a Victorian version of the Homeric epic, I hope to encourage an understanding of how works that are often considered the epitome of one genre can actually be read as part of an entirely different form of literature. Prickett, whose purpose in his text *Victorian Fantasy* is to "trace how the idea of fantasy as an art form developed during the nineteenth century," states that:

Thus, if Edward Lear often seems to be unconscious of what he is doing in his nonsense writings, the same cannot be said a few years later of Lewis Carroll, whose writings ... certainly rested upon very complex and consciously

worked out mathematical structures—often much more speculatively daring than his rather conventional and unadventurous academic work. (12)

This emphasis on Carroll's *intentions* as he wrote is vital to creating new readings of his works, readings that remove the lens of "children's literature" or "nonsense" that restrict the advancement and understanding of the beloved *Alice* novels. According to Newman, "In our day, when the creative tradition is threatened from every side, it is of more than academic importance that we should grasp what we inherit. Only so can we hope that at last poetry will unite its divided streams and find a community both to charm and instruct" (36). It is this type of understanding that I hope to encourage through this project, an understanding of both charm and instruction, uniting literary works across time and genre. And so, we shall see how deep the rabbit hole goes.

Chapter One

“Begin at the beginning”: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

When read separately, Carroll’s *Alice* novels and Homer’s *Odyssey* appear to be vastly different stories, each representative of their individual genres. On the other hand, to read these texts side-by-side opens up an entirely new understanding of the heroic epic, a genre that has long been dominated by strong, male protagonists and an array of dangerous obstacles. By keeping in mind that the Victorians were fascinated with Homer and the epic tradition and given Carroll’s extensive studies of Greek, it is possible to read the *Alice* novels as a Victorian version of the heroic epic. By reading both of Carroll’s *Alice* novels together as one complete story, the narrative takes on a structure that has much in common with Homer’s *Odyssey*. Despite being separated by over two thousand years and created in vastly different societies, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and the first part of the *Odyssey* have one key thing in common: both tell the story of an individual’s adventures in distant lands. For both of these narratives, this setting of travelling out in the world is impossible to ignore as it is what leads to the epic adventures that each protagonist will experience. Both Alice and Odysseus venture to unfamiliar realms, meeting new characters, both good and bad, while learning how to survive in a world that is strange and unknown.

Homer’s *Odyssey* has long been known as the definitive example of a heroic epic, but for the *Alice* novels this term needs some defining. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, epic pertains: to that species of poetical composition...which celebrates in the form of a continuous narrative the achievements of one or more heroic personages of history

or tradition. Both Homer's and Carroll's texts can also be read as a quest narrative, a notion that is often associated with the epic tradition. The term quest is often linked with the idea of a physical object as the goal to be obtained, but a broader definition includes quests for more abstract ideas, such as personal or spiritual growth. This broader definition is important to understanding the similarities between Carroll's fantasy children's novels and Homer's great epic. When Alice falls down the rabbit hole, she has been drawn into her adventures by her curiosity, a curiosity that is sparked by a white rabbit wearing a waistcoat with a pocket watch. Alice has a specific object in mind, the White Rabbit, making her initial intentions fit with the more traditional idea of the quest. After spending some time in Wonderland and having various interactions with the curious characters she encounters, Alice begins to wish to return home, making the latter part of her quest quite similar to that experienced by the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus was originally drawn away from Ithaca to go to war (which is recounted in Homer's *Iliad*), and he too wishes to return home after being away for nearly twenty years. During these homeward quests, both Alice and Odysseus meet many trials and tribulations; they both meet an array of characters that turn out to have a lot in common and they both share in a number of similar experiences.

When Carroll's novel begins, the reader is set up with a familiar Victorian image as the young Alice sits on the river bank listening to her older sister read to her. This scene sets up a frame for the narrative, which quickly changes directions after Alice spots the White Rabbit and her adventures out in the world begin. Homer's *Odyssey* is comprised of twenty-four books or chapters; Books 1 through 4 set up a framed narrative for the telling of Odysseus's adventures, as it is in these first four chapters that we learn of Odysseus's time away from home and his son's attempts to learn of his father's whereabouts with help from

the goddess Athena. When we finally meet Odysseus in Book 5, his adventures out in the world become the focal point of the story; he has been stranded on the island of Calypso for seven years and is finally granted the freedom to return home to Ithaca by order of the gods. When Alice first sees the White Rabbit and decides to go after him, she is trying to escape the boredom that she is experiencing in listening to her sister read. Although we do not learn much about Alice's older sister or the divine Calypso,⁹ it is clear that both are strong female characters who maintain a certain amount of control over those around them. It is this control that both Alice and Odysseus must escape, gaining independence and control over themselves as they venture out into the world.

In Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, the chapter "The Call to Adventure" describes the most common circumstances that lead to the hero's experiences. Campbell describes one way in which the hero is called to adventure, stating, "A blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (51). We know that Odysseus's original "call to adventure" was really a call to fight in the Trojan War, but this is not the adventure that is retold through Homer's *Odyssey*. After the war has ended and Odysseus sails to return home to Ithaca, his attempts are marked by blunders, some of which are accidental and some of which are caused by the manipulation of the gods. While it is easy for Odysseus's experiences to meet Campbell's description of the hero narrative, for Alice to be classified in this way she must meet many of the same requirements. Alice's adventures begin with her accidentally falling down the rabbit hole, leading her to a strange and distant world and thereby fitting with Campbell's statement about the call to adventure. It is also

⁹ I will use modern spelling for all Greek names, except when citing directly from Homer's *Odyssey* from *The Bedford Anthology*.

common that the hero begin his or her adventure by way of what Campbell calls the “World Navel,” and he describes how, “Typical of the circumstances of the call are the dark forest, the great tree, the babbling spring, and the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny” (52). Using this system, the deep, tunnel-like rabbit hole underneath the overgrown hedges can easily be interpreted as the “World Navel” and the White Rabbit can be seen as the “carrier of the power of destiny.” When Homer’s *Odyssey* turns the focus to the adventures of the protagonist in Book 5, Odysseus too begins from a symbolic world navel: the cave of Calypso. As Campbell’s text illustrates, the way in which the hero finds himself faced with new situations and the symbolic use of nature are quite important to the understanding of heroic narratives.

Experiences of the Hero

Despite the seemingly stark differences between these two texts, there are indeed many similarities in content, aside from the setting and framed narrative, between Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and Books 5 through 13 of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Many of these similarities have to do with the things that both Alice and Odysseus experience during their adventures, although these experiences do not necessarily happen in the same order for both of the heroes. One of the first and easiest spotted similarities between Homer’s *Odyssey* and Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures* lies in a further exploration of the physical settings of the two texts. It is very common for synopses of Odysseus’s narrative to describe him as venturing to the “ends of the earth,” and Alice, when falling down the rabbit hole, similarly wonders if she will fall right through the center of the earth. Odysseus’s adventures actually take him to the end of the earth, according to the ancient Greek understanding of the world,

when he ventures to the edge of the Underworld in order to beseech help from the prophet Tiresias. It is from Circe that Odysseus learns of this dangerous task, as few ever ventured to this distant realm. Before leaving the island of Circe, Odysseus is told, “but home you may not go / unless you take a strange way round and come / to the cold homes of Death and pale Perséphonê” (*Odyssey* book 10, lines 543-545). Circe continues her instructions, telling Odysseus how to successfully return to his homeland:

set up your mast and haul your canvas
to the fresh blowing North; sit down and steer,
and hold that wind, even to the bourne of Ocean,
Perséphonê’s deserted strand and grove,

.....
.....

land there, and find the crumbling homes of Death (*Odyssey* 10, 562-568)

The Bedford Anthology glosses “homes of Death,” stating that “Homer locates Hades on the western and northern frontier of the Greek world” (558), making it the end or boundary of the world as known to Odysseus and his culture. Carroll’s description of Alice falling down the rabbit hole states, “Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end? ‘I wonder how many miles I’ve fallen by this time?’ she said aloud. ‘I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth’” (20). As she continues falling, Alice exclaims, “I wonder if I shall fall right *through* the earth! How funny it’ll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downwards!” (21). This comparison is further supported with the fact that Carroll’s original manuscript was titled *Alice’s Adventures under Ground*, invoking an image much more similar to the Greek idea of the Underworld. Both Wonderland and the

Underworld are places that are *accessible* to people, although very few are able to go to either of them and return, yet both Alice and Odysseus are able to venture to these obscure realms and return to their own world mostly unharmed.

After reaching the bottom of the rabbit-hole, Alice soon finds herself submerged in a sea made up of the very tears that she had cried only moments earlier, when she had grown too large to fit through the small door. In the chapter “The Pool of Tears,” the narrative describes how Alice “soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high” (Carroll 30). Things do not get easier for Alice, as the narrative goes on, “‘I wish I hadn’t cried so much!’ said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out. ‘I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears!’” (30). Alice’s fear of drowning as she is tossed about on the ocean of tears is a fear that Odysseus experiences as well. After escaping from Calypso’s island, Odysseus’s raft is destroyed by the vengeful Poseidon, who creates a tempest in an effort to prevent Odysseus reaching land. The hero is able to stay afloat and survive by managing to hold onto a piece of debris from his destroyed raft. According to the narrative describing Odysseus’s peril:

Two nights, two days, in the solid deep-sea swell
he drifted, many times awaiting death,
until with shining ringlets in the East
the dawn confirmed a third day, breaking clear
over a high and windless sea; and mounting
a rolling wave he caught a glimpse of land. (*Odyssey* 5, 405-410)

As it turns out, both Alice and Odysseus are somewhat responsible for their near drowning experiences, as Alice was the one who created the sea by crying uncontrollably and Odysseus

was still being subjected to the wrath of Poseidon after blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus. Although both Alice and Odysseus are faced with their own deaths while being tossed about on the tumultuous sea, they both survive the dangerous experience and continue on in their adventures.

In the following chapter “A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale,” Alice has made it ashore along with a number of animals, and the group tries to come up with a way for everyone to get dry again. The Dodo suggests that they have a caucus-race, which is performed as follows: “First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle (‘the exact shape doesn’t matter,’ it said), and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no ‘One, two, three, and away!’, but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over” (Carroll 35). The caucus-race proves a successful way to dry the participants, as the narrative continues, “when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out ‘The race is over!’, and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking ‘But who has won?’” (35). Although the purpose of the race was to get dry, nobody forgets that it was in fact a *race*, and so it should have a winner, to which the Dodo replies, “*Everybody* has won, and *all* must have prizes” (35). Similarly, once Odysseus has reached land and been welcomed into the palace of Alcinous, the Phaeacians compete in a set of games, one of which is a foot race, in order to entertain their new guest. Odysseus, being weary from his adventures at sea, does not compete in the games, instead watching from the sidelines. The description of the race describes how:

The runners, first, must have their quarter mile.

All lined up tense; then Go! and down the track

they raised the dust in a flying bunch, strung out
longer and longer behind Prince Klytóneus.
By just as far as a mule team, breaking ground,
will distance oxen, he left all behind
and came up to the crowd, an easy winner. (*Odyssey* 8, 127-133)

Similar to the caucus-race, this race too must have a winner, the prize being the respect and reverence of the fellow competitors and the community. The *Encyclopedia of the Ancient Greek World* describes how the Greeks' love of sport was closely related to the glorification of male strength and beauty, describing how men commonly competed naked or nearly naked, and most of the prestigious athletic festivals were restricted, only allowing male competitors. Some areas, such as Sparta, maintained a vigorous program of girls' gymnastics, and the Olympic Games included a foot race for girls (Brody 329). In describing the caucus-race, Alice draws attention to the fact that there is no clear commencement to the race, thereby aligning her understanding of races with that which Odysseus witnesses, likely the very origins of the sport still used in the Olympic Games today. As the character of Alice is modeled after the real life Alice Liddell, whose father was a Greek scholar, this understanding about the race by the character Alice makes perfect sense.

While staying with the Phaeacians, Odysseus is prompted to explain who he is and how he came to be washed ashore upon their island. Odysseus begins to recount his adventures (or rather misadventures) ever since he sailed from Troy to return home from the war, describing in detail all of the misfortunes he has experienced. One of these misfortunes was his time with the Lotus Eaters, although Odysseus does not go into much detail about the incident, describing how:

They fell in, soon enough, with Lotos Eaters,
who showed no will to do us harm, only
offering the sweet Lotos to our friends—
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotos,
never cared to report, nor to return:
they longed to stay forever, browsing on
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. (*Odyssey* 9, 98-104)

Bernard Evslin's *Gods, Demigods and Demons* gives the following description of the island of Lotus Eaters: "The folk here ate of this flower and slept, and woke only to eat again, and fall again into a deep sleep laced with mild dreams" (118). For the Lotus Eaters, time does not progress because all they do is eat the lotus flower, which causes them to sleep, and then when they wake up they eat more of the lotus flower, etc. Similarly, in the chapter "A Mad Tea-party" Alice encounters the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, who also do not progress forward through time; the sequence of the tea party just keeps going round and round. Time is stopped for the Mad Hatter at 6:00, tea-time, and the Dormouse sleeps throughout the party, waking only long enough to start a story, but soon drifting back to sleep. The Hatter tells Alice the story of why it is that time has stopped for him, describing a conversation with the queen in which he was interrupted, the queen stating that he was "murdering the time." The Hatter goes on to say, "And ever since that ... he won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now" (Carroll 72). When Alice asks about the dirty dishes strewn about and why it is that they keep moving to the next seats at the table, the Hatter sighs and says, "Yes, that's it ... it's always tea-time, and we've no time to wash the things between whiles" (72). This circular nature of the tea-party, as the participants drink tea and tell stories and then move on

to a different seat and do the same thing over again, is quite similar to the cyclical nature associated with the eating of the lotus flower.

Alice tries several times to break away from the tea party but keeps finding herself interested in the conversation, attempting to solve riddles that have no answer and trying to make sense of the complicated (yet quite simple) puns. When she is finally disgusted with her inhospitable hosts, Alice leaves the party, but “the Dormouse fell asleep instantly, and neither of the others took the least notice of her going, though she looked back once or twice, half hoping that they would call after her” (Carroll 75). Although she is kept there for quite a while, Alice is finally able to break away from the tea party; similarly, Odysseus is able to fight the enticement of the Lotus Eaters, singlehandedly carrying his crew members back to the ship and rowing away from the dangerous island. Both Alice and Odysseus continue on their expedition, back under the control of time. Ferdie Addis’s *Opening Pandora’s Box* provides a dictionary of modern phrases that originated with classical works such as Homer’s, and it describes how the term “lotus eater” is used in modern day to describe: “A person given to indolent enjoyment; someone who has abandoned duty in the pursuit of pleasure” (Addis). The entry goes on to explain Homer’s *Odyssey* as the origins of this term, stating, “Since then, the Lotus Eaters have been a symbol for the temptations of pleasure over duty—perhaps literature’s first recorded drug addicts” (Addis). Perhaps it is the tea itself, or what is in the tea, that prevents the March Hare, the Mad Hatter, and the Dormouse from ever escaping their tea-time. Gardner provides an excerpt from Carroll’s diary on the related subject of sleeping and the alternate realities that are dream worlds. In his entry from February 9, 1856 Carroll asks, “May we not then 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 hath its own world,’ and it is often as lifelike as the other” (Qtd. in Gardner 67). Gardner’s note goes on to describe a scene in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, in which Socrates and Theaetetus discuss the inability to know the difference between the dreaming world and the waking world and similar questions of insanity (67). As it turns out, there is much in common with Plato’s discussion and that posed by Carroll, suggesting not only an interest in the subject but a knowledge of its historical relevance. This idea is clearly explored not just within the scene of the Mad Tea Party, but in the entirety of *Alice’s Adventures*.

While it is not impressive that Carroll’s and Homer’s works both contain farm animals, as a great many literary works do, there is something eerily coincidental about the accounts in which the farm animals appear in each story. In the *Alice* chapter entitled “Pig and Pepper,” Alice finds herself in the kitchen of the irritable Duchess, where she is at first startled by the Duchess’s carelessness with her young child. After leaving the house with the infant in her arms, Alice notices that this is no ordinary child and she begins to discern that it is slowly turning into a pig. After looking questioningly at the baby for a few minutes, Alice declares, “If you’re going to turn into a pig, my dear... I’ll have nothing more to do with you” (Carroll 63). Alice is still unsure about whether or not the bundle in her arms is in fact infant or swine, but she soon finds out as she contemplates what she will do with it once she leaves Wonderland to return home, when it “grunted again, so violently, that she looked down into its face in some alarm. This time there could be *no* mistake about it: it was neither more nor less than a pig, and she felt that it would be quite absurd for her to carry it any further” (64). When Odysseus and his crew reach the island ruled by Circe, half of his men go ashore and find the palace of the demigoddess. Circe’s beauty tempts the men’s hearts and

she has no problem tricking them into drinking her magical potions. The narrative describes this scene:

Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them
with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty—
bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all
swinish now, though minds were still unchanged.
So, squealing, in they went. And Kirkê tossed them
acorns, mast, and cornel berries—fodder
for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth. (*Odyssey* 10, 262-268)

While it is unclear what becomes of the pig that Alice encounters after she turns it loose into the woods, Odysseus is able to save his men by imploring Circe to turn them back into their human form.

According to Evslin, Circe, a daughter of the sun's charioteer, was a beautiful demigoddess who was skilled in magical spells and magical herbs. Evslin describes how Circe was so artful that she was capable of using her singing voice and her physical beauty to hold men enthralled, making magic and potions unnecessary some of the time. Circe was loved by many men and when she tired of them, she would change them into the animal that best fit their personalities or appearances and keep them as pets on her castle grounds (Evslin 37). Ingvild Sælid Gilhus's book *Animals, Gods and Humans* draws on the discipline of physiognomy to describe similarities and differences between humans and animals.¹⁰

According to Gilhus, "Animals are used as examples and symbols. In ancient times, animals were believed to inherit specific characteristics, and a species of animals could therefore

¹⁰ *Physiognomy* refers to the assessment of a person's character or personality (inner) from their physical appearance (outer). See: *Physiognomy* by Johann Caspar Lavater.

appear as a symbol of these characteristics. Thus animals could be seen as representing a human passion, a virtue or a vice” (74-5). Nearly any time a person is transformed into an animal in literature, the particular animal they are turned into is chosen by the author for a specific, symbolic reason. Eugénie Fernandes’s “Animals” in the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece* states that, “Greek myth transforms human beings into animals typically as a punishment” (51). Fernandes goes on to describe the use of animals for sacrifice to the gods, stating that pigs were used for sacrifice, although they were not usually the first or best choice of animal to sacrifice (51). Because the instances described in *Alice* and Homer’s *Odyssey* do not hint towards a punishment or sacrifice, it is more likely that the pig is used in both of these instances to comment on the people. Odysseus’s men are quick to accept food and drink from Circe without knowing anything about her, possibly representing a gluttonous nature among the crew. However, in ancient Greek culture, as is illustrated numerous times in the *Odyssey*, hosts were expected to welcome guests with hospitality, which always included plenty of food and drink. The infant turning into a pig while Alice holds it is possibly representative of the inhospitality of the Duchess, as neither she nor her cook welcome Alice into the house nor do they bother to ask Alice who she is or where she is from. Similarly, Circe proves to be quite the inhospitable host as she turns her guests into animals and prevents them from ever returning to their homes and previous lives. In both of these texts, the turning of humans into pigs can be interpreted as a representation of bad or inhospitable hosts.

Characters the Hero Encounters

While both Alice and Odysseus share in many similar adventures, they also meet many like characters along the way. In the chapter “Advice from a Caterpillar,” Alice meets

the hookah-smoking Blue Caterpillar. The Caterpillar can be interpreted at least two different ways, both of which align him with substances that alter one's physical or mental state. Homer's *Odyssey* provides two influential characters who use such substances to inhibit Odysseus and his men: the Lotus Eaters and Circe. Martin Gardner's *Annotated Alice* provides a note on the mushroom that the Caterpillar suggests to Alice, stating, "Many readers have referred me to old books, which Carroll could have read, that describe the hallucinogenic properties of certain mushrooms. *Amanita muscaria* (or fly agaric) is most often cited. Eating it produces hallucinations in which time and space are distorted" (53). The sleepy voice and lethargic nature of the Caterpillar is certainly reminiscent of the effects of the lotus flower, making one ponder exactly what he is smoking from the hookah.

In addition to similarities with the Lotus Eaters, the way that the Caterpillar encourages Alice to eat the mushroom that will alter her size is also reminiscent of Circe, whose magical potions change men into animals. *The Bedford Anthology* glosses Circe as "An enchantress who uses drugs and herbs to manipulate men" (548) and Odysseus recounts Circe's attempt to manipulate him, describing how, "The lady Kirkê / mixed me a golden cup of honeyed wine, / adding in mischief her unholy drug" (*Odyssey* 10, 355-357). Although the Caterpillar's motives do not suggest such ill will towards Alice, his encouraging her to eat a substance that changes her physical state is certainly questionable. Furthermore, the Caterpillar offers no further advice about the proper use of the mushroom, simply stating, "One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter" (Carroll 54). Alice is left to figure out the division of the two halves of the mushroom, then to figure out which side produces which effect, and finally experiments with a nibble from one side, a risk that very nearly results in her death as she shrinks so small that her chin is resting on her

own shoe. After several attempts, Alice finally reaches her normal height, and continues on in her journey through Wonderland. Similarly, Odysseus must learn how to resist the drugs offered to him, refusing the lotus flower and receiving a tip from Hermes that saves him from the affects of Circe's drugs. Despite the interference of both the Lotus Eaters and Circe, Odysseus is able to return with all of his men to his ship and he too is able to continue on with his attempt to return home to Ithaca. For both Alice and Odysseus, drug-like substances prove to be obstacles that must be overcome. These substances provide a temptation that will cause the heroes to forget their intentions to return home and take away their control over their personal life and destiny, and both Alice and Odysseus must learn to adapt as well as exercise self-control in order to survive such temptations.

In the chapter "Pig and Pepper," Alice is introduced to the fascinating Cheshire Cat, a character who turns out to be somewhat important to her. The Cheshire Cat proves to have many characteristics in common with the god Hermes, a character in Homer's *Odyssey* who is essential to Odysseus's survival and return home. Both Hermes and the Cheshire Cat act as a messenger and provide help to the wayfaring travelers, and both tend to have a knack for appearing and disappearing at will. Campbell's text describes the presence of supernatural aids in hero tales, stating that, "Not infrequently, the supernatural helper is masculine in form. ... The higher mythologies develop the role in the great figure of the guide, the teacher, the ferryman, the conductor of souls to the afterworld" (72). Alice first sees the Cat sitting over the hearth inside the house of the Duchess, but it is not until she has left the house with the infant/pig that she actually meets it, when it appears to her out of thin air. After conversing with Alice for a few minutes, the Cheshire Cat disappears, and then, as the narrative describes, "While she was still looking at the place where it had been, it suddenly

appeared again” (Carroll 66). After the Cheshire Cat reappears to ask about the infant, Alice is described as replying to it “as if the Cat had come back in a natural way” and the Cat being satisfied with Alice’s answer “vanished again” (66). Again the Cat reappears, prompting Alice to exclaim “I wish you wouldn’t keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy” (66). The Cheshire Cat agrees, and its disappearance is then described, “this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone” (66). This ability to vanish into thin air belongs only to the character of the Cheshire Cat, making its appearance quite important in the world of Wonderland.

In the article “Devils, Demons, Familiars, Friends: Toward a Semiotics of Literary Cats,” Maria Nikolajeva writes that, “The Cat explains the rules of the game, or rather the absence thereof; yet he also comforts Alice, who need not feel she is the only one gone crazy” (258). Alice again meets the Cheshire Cat in the chapter “The Queen’s Croquet-Ground” while she is trying to escape from the croquet game with the Queen of Hearts. As Nikolajeva’s previous statement highlights, Alice is comforted by the sight of the Cheshire Cat, as if seeing an old friend, “she noticed a curious appearance in the air: it puzzled her very much at first, but after watching it a minute or two she made it out to be a grin, and she said to herself ‘It’s the Cheshire-Cat: now I shall have somebody to talk to’” (Carroll 82). Nikolajeva comments on the Cheshire Cat’s possible alignment with Carroll himself, stating, “It is equally possible to see the Cheshire Cat as a self-portrait, a benevolent companion that acts as Alice’s protector in an unfamiliar and bizarre world. The Cheshire Cat does indeed have ... the function of the mythical guide, telling Alice at least a few necessary facts about the place she had involuntarily come to” (258). After commenting on the absence of the

Cheshire Cat when Alice's sister attempts to imagine Wonderland at the end of *Alice's Adventures*, Nikolajeva states, "He dissolves without a trace, as a true spiritual guide must do when initiation is over" (259). It is this reading of the Cheshire Cat as a spiritual guide that most effectively aligns its character with that of the god Hermes.

When Hermes first appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, he does not actually appear to Odysseus, but to Calypso to inform her of the gods' wish for Odysseus to be released. According to the narrative, "To this the Wayfinder made answer briefly: / 'Thus you shall send him, then. And show more grace / in your obedience, or be chastised by Zeus.' / The strong god glittering left her as he spoke," (*Odyssey* 5, 152-155). Evslin's handbook describes Hermes as the "protector of travelers ... the wittiest of the gods by far, and very good company" (91-2). Hermes appears again on Circe's island, this time directly to Odysseus, as he recounts to the Phaeacians, "But Hermês met me, with his golden wand, / barring the way—a boy whose lip was downy / in the first bloom of manhood, so he seemed. / He took my hand and spoke as though he knew me" (*Odyssey* 10, 305-308). Odysseus continues the narrative, describing how, "Then toward Olympos through the island trees / Hermês departed, and I sought out Kirkê" (*Odyssey* 10, 346-347). It is during this appearance that Hermes tells Odysseus how to prevent the effects of Circe's magical potions, a helpful hint that saves Odysseus's life. Much like the Cheshire Cat, Hermes appears as an old friend, a comforting sight to the wayfaring hero.

Hermes is commonly portrayed as a trickster character, and he is also known as the patron of "liars, gamblers, and thieves." According to Evslin, Hermes climbed out of his cradle before he was half a day old and stole a herd of cattle that belonged to Apollo. When confronted by Apollo, he appeased his wrath by teaching him to play the lyre—which he had

invented before he was two days old (91). According to Nikolajeva's article, literary cats are often times revealed as tricksters, as she asserts, "Because of their trickster nature, cats can be easily employed as carnival figures, turning order into chaos and interrogating higher authorities" (254). We certainly see this interrogation of higher authorities with the Cheshire Cat's response to the King and Queen of Hearts. Another similarity between Hermes and the Cheshire Cat has to do with the ability to cross borders (a specific trickster characteristic). Nikolajeva describes how, "In modern fairy tales and fantasy, cats are widely featured as magical helpers and bearers of magical powers, especially assisting the hero in transportation between the everyday and the magical realm" (260). She goes on to describe how according to Christian beliefs, cats are commonly associated with Satan (250). This idea would have certainly been known to Carroll during the Victorian era. Although the Cheshire Cat does not actually help Alice to cross the border between her world and Wonderland (perhaps Alice's real cat Dinah serves this purpose), he is able to move about freely within the magical realm and his ability to vanish at will means that he does not have to obey the rules of the land and the tyrannical Queen of Hearts. Evslin's description of Hermes states that, "He was appointed Herald God and charged with the duty of conducting the dead to Hades" (91), and we see Hermes in this occupation in Homer's *Odyssey* after the suitors have all been killed. Thus Hermes was not only able to cross back and forth to the Underworld, but for that reason he maintained an association with Hades.

Hermes proves to be quite an interesting god; while he is known for playing tricks, he rarely stakes a claim in the lives of humans, usually going along with whatever the other gods decide and serving as messenger. In the *Odyssey*, Hermes does help Odysseus on more than one occasion, but one cannot help but assume that he was only doing what was asked of

him by Zeus. Similarly, the Cheshire Cat in *Alice's Adventures* does not seem to have an agenda of its own. While it does help Alice by giving her directions and informing her of her croquet game with the queen, it appears at odd times and its habit of disappearing is nothing short of unsettling to young Alice. Regardless, the absence of Hermes and the Cheshire Cat would have certainly had a profound effect on the outcome of their respective heroes, despite their brief appearances. Cats were becoming more popular as household pets during the Victorian era and Carroll's choice of this creature to mimic Hermes provides a non-threatening helper that would appeal to children, while also fitting with the theme of nonsense that persists throughout the *Alice* novels.

While many of the characters in *Alice's Adventures* share similarities with those appearing in Homer's *Odyssey*, there is one character that comes straight out of Greek mythology and lore. In the chapter "The Mock Turtle's Story," Alice is introduced to the Gryphon,¹¹ a mythological being with the head and wings of an eagle and the lower body of a lion (Gardner 94). Despite their intimidating physical appearance, griffins were not considered monstrous or scary, more often than not being described as majestic creatures. According to Gardner's note on the Gryphon in the first *Alice* novel, "Griffins were supposed to guard fiercely the gold mines of ancient Scythia, and this led to their becoming heraldic emblems of extreme vigilance" (94). Carroll plays with this characteristic by having his Gryphon sleeping when Alice approaches it. Regardless, Alice is somewhat frightened by the look of the creature, "but on the whole she thought it would be quite as safe to stay with it as go after that savage Queen" (90). Again, Carroll is having fun with the traditional understanding of the griffin by implying that the Queen is more dangerous than this legendary creature. Although Homer's *Odyssey* does not make any mention of the

¹¹ Most commonly spelled *griffin*, sometimes *griffon*.

mythological griffin, Carroll's choice to insert this one definitively Greek character in an otherwise seemingly non-Greek story does more to support the *Alice* novels as a heroic epic based on Homer's *Odyssey* than it does to discount it.

Through the Looking-Glass

Once Odysseus has finally returned to Ithaca after being away for nearly twenty years, he finds that his adventures have still not come to an end. Similarly, Alice's adventures are not over after her time in Wonderland. Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* takes place exactly six months after Alice's trip to Wonderland. Similar to *Alice's Adventures* and the first part of Homer's *Odyssey*, *Through the Looking-Glass* and the second part of the great epic have one key element in common: the over-arching setting in which each hero's experiences take place. In Carroll's sequel to his immensely popular first *Alice* novel, we again follow Alice on her adventures, this time to an interior realm that she enters through the looking-glass from within her own home. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus is finally returned to Ithaca in Book 13, and he too is faced with adventures that take place within the interior: in the realm that he once ruled and in his own house. Although both Alice and Odysseus embark on journeys within their own homelands and some aspects of the world are recognizable to them, other aspects appear unfamiliar and they must both learn new rules in order to navigate through this new situation. As with the first part of these two epics, the second part also reveals many similarities in the heroes' experiences and the characters that are encountered.

Experiences of the Hero

Again there is much more in common than the setting in which Alice's and Odysseus's adventures take place, as many of the things that happen to them during the latter half of their narratives are quite similar. In the chapter "Looking Glass House," Alice enters the world through the looking-glass and finds that she is invisible to the inhabitants, particularly the Red King and Queen. Alice describes her first contact with the inhabitants of this new world, stating, "Here are the Red King and the Red Queen ... and there are the White King and the White Queen sitting on the edge of the shovel—and here are two Castles walking arm in arm—I don't think they can hear me ... and I'm nearly sure they can't see me. I feel somehow as if I was getting invisible—" (Carroll 133). After picking up the White Queen and alarming and confusing her, Alice is certain that the chess pieces in fact cannot see her. Alice then asks the White King if he would like her to help him up onto the table as she did with the Queen. The King "took no notice of the question: it was quite clear that he could neither hear her nor see her" (134). When Odysseus returns home to Ithaca, being invisible to the inhabitants as Alice was in the looking-glass world proves to be quite necessary. Odysseus is disguised by Athena to look like an old beggar, making him figuratively invisible as the people of Ithaca are unable to recognize his true identity. The text describes Athena's assistance with Odysseus's camouflage, explaining how:

Speaking no more, she touched him with her wand,
shriveled the clear skin of his arms and legs,
made all his hair fall out, cast over him
the wrinkled hide of an old man, and bleared
both his eyes, that were so bright. Then she

clapped an old tunic, a foul cloak, upon him,
tattered, filthy, stained by greasy smoke,
and over that a mangy big buck skin. (*Odyssey* 13, 538-545)

It is precisely this disguise that allows Odysseus to win back his house, as the suitors would have certainly killed him upon his return if he had not entered under the disguise that he did. Odysseus does reveal himself to his son Telemachus and is found out by an old servant who recognizes a scar on his thigh, but to the suitors and Penelope he maintains the false identity of an old beggar until he is ready to avenge his house and his throne. Through invisibility and disguise, both Alice and Odysseus are able to avoid detection as a probable threat in a world that is strange to the newcomers.

Throughout all of her adventures within the looking-glass, Alice knows that if she plays the game and makes all of her moves correctly, she will eventually become a queen. Finally, in the ninth chapter aptly titled “Queen Alice,” she does indeed make her last move across the chess board to be crowned a queen. Although Alice knew what was coming as she made her final move, the narrative describes the confusion of the moment:

‘And what *is* this on my head?’ she exclaimed in a tone of dismay, as she put her hands up to something very heavy, that fitted tight all round her head. ‘But how *can* it have got there without my knowing it?’ she said to herself, as she lifted it off, and set it on her lap to make out what it could possibly be. It was a golden crown. (Carroll 218-9)

Alice further illustrates her surprise, as the narrative continues with her exclaiming, “I never expected I should be a Queen so soon—and I’ll tell you what it is, your Majesty ... it’ll never do for you to be lolling about on the grass like that! Queens have to be dignified, you know!”

(220). Comparatively, Odysseus knows that he must first return to Ithaca, and that once he does he cannot simply rush into his home and attempt to retake his place as king. Odysseus must bid his time disguised as the beggar, making all of the right moves to ensure that he can regain his crown and be returned to the head of his household as king of Ithaca. After Odysseus has accomplished this by killing the suitors, Athena asks Zeus to restore his noble place: “There is one proper way, if I may say so: / Odysseus’ honor being satisfied, / let him be king by a sworn pact forever” (*Odyssey* 24, 533-535). For both Alice and Odysseus, the narratives do not end with their succession to royalty. Odysseus must go tell his father of his return and defend himself and his family against the residents of Ithaca who are angry over the killing of their sons.¹² After killing the lead man of the angry townspeople, Athena appears and states that all revenge has been had and that peace shall henceforth reign in Ithaca. Once she is named a queen, Alice must endure further interactions with the Red and White Queens and their convoluted ramblings before she is able to return through the looking-glass. Similar to Odysseus telling his father of his return and his many experiences returning home, after Alice returns from Looking-Glass World she goes to find her sister to tell of her adventures.

One of the final events that both Alice and Odysseus experience before things return to normal is the feast. For Alice, the feast comes after she has been made queen and for Odysseus it happens immediately before he regains his place as king. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the feast is in honor of Alice becoming a queen, yet she is unaware of the event until it begins despite her role as host. Alice is quite surprised, as the narrative describes, “Alice glanced nervously along the table, as she walked up the large hall, and

¹² The residents are actually angry with Odysseus because he has been responsible for wiping out nearly two generations of Ithaca’s men: the first generation having sailed with Odysseus and all died at war or on the return trip, and the second generation being the suitors.

noticed that there were about fifty guests, of all kinds: some were animals, some birds, and there were even a few flowers among them” (Carroll 229). In Homer’s *Odyssey*, after Amphinomus suggests a feast the narrative describes how the suitors:

made a ritual slaughter, knifing sheep,
fat goats and pigs, knifing the grass-fed steer.
Then tripes were broiled and eaten. Mixing bowls
were filled with wine. The swineherd passed out cups,
Philoítios, chief cowherd, dealt the loaves
into the panniers, Melánthios poured wine,
and all their hands went out upon the feast. (*Odyssey* 20, 274-280)

In both of these instances, the feast does not consist of only eating (and for Alice there is actually little eating done), as they both include singing or story-telling and end rather abruptly. Alice’s feast in *Looking-Glass World* begins with a song being sung by “hundreds of voices” and during the feast the White Queen recites a lengthy poetic riddle about fishes. During the feast in Odysseus’s home, the minstrel sings and tells stories, as was common in Greek culture. Alice becomes irritated when she is unable to serve the food because it has been introduced to her, and after losing control of both the guests and the dinnerware the narrative describes, “‘I can’t stand this any longer!’ she cried, as she jumped up and seized the table-cloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor” (Carroll 233). Similarly, Odysseus puts an end to the feast at his house when he, still disguised as the beggar, requests to compete in and then wins the bow competition that Penelope suggested for the suitors. For both Alice and

Odysseus, the end of the feast will coincide with their final actions in the narrative of their interior adventures.

Yet another experience that is shared by both Alice and Odysseus occurs at the end of their respective epics, and it is this action that provides the transition for the heroes to return to their normal life. There are numerous references to death throughout both *Alice* novels, although most of the references are phrased in a way that it can be easy to miss their true meaning (as the novels were intended for young readers). Alice showed concern over her life many times, especially while changing size after eating things that made her shrink, and the Queen of Hearts is obsessed with executions. While both Alice and Odysseus live to see the end of their adventures (something that many heroes in epics do not do), other characters are not so lucky. In the chapter “Shaking,” Alice figuratively kills the Red Queen by shaking her back into one of the kittens that she was playing with in the beginning of *Through the Looking-Glass*. The story describes how Alice “took her off the table as she spoke, and shook her backwards and forwards with all her might” (Carroll 235). The narrative continues, “The Red Queen made no resistance whatever: only her face grew very small, and her eyes got large and green: and still, as Alice went on shaking her, she kept on growing shorter—and fatter—and softer—and rounder—and—” (235). Even after winning the bow competition, Odysseus still has to get rid of the suitors before he can regain his domain. In order to do so, Odysseus kills all of the suitors and the handful of his servants who had been sleeping with the suitors, to revenge their exploiting of his home and stores as well as the mistreatment and disrespect shown to Penelope and Telemachus for so many years. Odysseus feels that this was the only option and he exclaims, “I bring good news—though still we cannot rest. / I killed the suitors to the last man! / Outrage and injury have been avenged!” (*Odyssey* 24,

358-360). With their opponents dead and their crowns (re)established, Odysseus and Alice are finally finished with their adventures and free to return to their former lives.

Characters the Hero Encounters

Again like the first parts of Carroll’s *Alice* novels and Homer’s *Odyssey*, the second parts of the heroes’ tales have more in common, as is illustrated in further similarities of characters. While the first *Alice* novel included the Gryphon, a mythological creature that was quite out of place in Victorian fiction, *Through the Looking-Glass* also includes a creature that would be much more at home in a Greek epic such as the *Odyssey*. Shortly after entering the looking-glass, Alice encounters the poem “Jabberwocky,” two lines of which state: “Beware the Jabberwock, my son! / The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!” (Carroll 137). Tenniel’s illustration (see Figure 1) of the Jabberwock reveals a monster that could have been inspired by two different Greek monsters, one of which is mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey*. When Circe instructs Odysseus on how to return to Ithaca, she reveals to him the obstacles that he must overcome. One of these is to safely sail around the monster Scylla,¹³ which Circe describes:

but that is the den of Skylla...
.....
though she is huge and monstrous.
..... Her legs—
and there are twelve—are like great tentacles,
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks

¹³ Scylla lived on one side of a narrow channel of water, across from its counterpart Charybdis, a deadly whirlpool-like sea monster. The channel was very narrow, so passing too close to either side would put sailors at risk of death. Odysseus loses six of his men to the monster in Homer’s *Odyssey*.



Figure 1: Tenniel's illustration of the slaying of the Jabberwock from Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (137).

are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
with triple serried rows of fangs and deep
gullets of black death. (*Odyssey* 12, 103-111)

The Jabberwock could also be compared with the Lernaean Hydra, a vicious monster with a “serpentine body” that grows two heads any time that one is cut off (Evslin 97). Although Homer’s *Odyssey* does not actually mention the slaying of the Hydra, Odysseus does talk to Heracles when he ventures to the edge of the Underworld, and he would certainly have been familiar with the twelve labors of Heracles, one of which was to kill the Hydra. Nearly all references to Tenniel’s illustration of the Jabberwock describe the slayer as a young knight, although the long hair could easily cause readers to mistake it as Alice wielding the vorpal sword. If the Jabberwock is inspired by similar Greek monsters, it is fitting to have someone else do the slaying, as Odysseus’s familiarity with the killing of the Hydra would be aligned with Alice’s familiarity with the slaying of the Jabberwock. Like the Gryphon, Carroll’s addition of the Jabberwock and the illustration drawn by Tenniel (which Carroll would have certainly had to approve of before it was printed) provides a Greek feel to Alice’s narrative and helps to align the story with the heroic epic tradition.

Although not a real character within either *Through the Looking-Glass* or Homer’s *Odyssey*, the figurative character of “Nobody” turns out to be quite important in both texts. In the chapter “The Mock Turtle’s Story” of *Alice’s Adventures*, the Gryphon says about the Queen of Hearts, “It’s all her fancy, that: they never executes nobody, you know” (Carroll 90). The character of “nobody” appears again in *Through the Looking-Glass* in the chapter “The Lion and the Unicorn,” as Gardner’s note in *The Annotated Alice* states, “If the Gryphon’s ‘nobody’ is never executed, then Alice may well have seen nobody on the road in

Chapter 7 of the second *Alice* book” (95). While conversing with the White King and asked if she can see anyone approaching along the road, Alice states, “I see nobody on the road,” to which the King replies, “I only wish *I* had such eyes ... To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too! Why, it’s as much as *I* can do to see real people, by this light!” (Carroll 196). This personification of “Nobody” as a character, and his/her appearance in both *Alice* novels is quite intriguing. According to Gardner’s note, “Mathematicians, logicians, and some metaphysicians like to treat zero, the null class, and Nothing as if they were Something, and Carroll was no exception ... Here we encounter the unexecuted Nobody walking along the road, and later we learn that Nobody walks slower or faster than the Messenger” (223). Gardner highlights other appearances of Nobody in the *Alice* novels, the first of which occurs at the mad tea party when Alice says to the Mad Hatter, “Nobody asked *your* opinion.” Nobody appears yet again in the last chapter of the first novel, when the White Rabbit produces a letter written by the Knave of Hearts to “somebody.” The King replies, “Unless it was written to nobody, which isn’t usual, you know” (223). These are not the only appearances of Nobody in these two novels, and one could actually go through both texts and record every instance of Nobody in order to see if the “character” portrays the same traits throughout.

Carroll’s play on the character of Nobody is not unique, as a similar scheme is employed in Homer’s *Odyssey*. After being trapped by the Cyclops Polyphemos and demanded to reveal his identity, Odysseus illustrates his cunning by saying, “Kyklops, / you ask my honorable name? Remember / the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you. / My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends, / everyone calls me Nohbdy” (*Odyssey* 9, 394-398). After Polyphemos falls asleep, Odysseus and his crew burn the end of a large tree trunk

and ram it into the single eye of the Cyclops. While the mouth of the cave is still covered by a large stone, Polyphemos cries out for help from his brethren, yelling, “Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!” (*Odyssey* 9, 444). Much as Odysseus intended, the other Cyclopes reply, “Ah well, if nobody has played you foul / there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain / given by great Zeus. Let it be your father, / Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray” (*Odyssey* 9, 446-449). Gardner’s note in his *Annotated Alice* cites Odysseus’s use of the pun to defeat the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, although Gardner’s note uses the Roman translation, citing Ulysses as the character and the pun being on the word “Noman.” Carroll’s experiences learning Greek history and literature would have certainly made him aware of this scene in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and his love of word play and riddles made it impossible to resist the addition of a similar character in his *Alice* novels.

Another analogous character pair between Carroll’s and Homer’s heroic epics is Penelope and the White Queen. Penelope is often described as pale or white faced, and before appearing to the suitors at the feast, the narrative describes how Athena makes her, “whiter than carved ivory” (*Odyssey* 18, 247). Shortly after, while listening to Odysseus disguised as the beggar, Penelope weeps over the news of her husband: “The skin / of her pale face grew moist the way pure snow / softens and glistens on mountains ... so her white cheeks were wetted by these tears” (*Odyssey* 19, 241-246). This makes Penelope very literally a “white queen.” Nearly every appearance of Penelope in the *Odyssey* describes her as weeping or lamenting over her lost husband, and similarly Tenniel’s illustration of the White Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass* shows her looking quite melancholy. The suitors describe how Penelope has attempted to trick them by declaring her intentions to finish a burial shroud for Odysseus’s father before consenting to remarry, and after working at her

loom every day she unwound her work each night, preventing the shroud from completion. Again Penelope is aligned with the task of spinning, as the narrative describes, “In silence / across the hall, beside a pillar, propped / in a long chair, Telémakhos’ mother /spun a fine wool yarn” (*Odyssey* 17, 120-123). Considering this description of Penelope, it is not surprising to find that the White Queen that Alice meets in the world through the looking-glass turns into a sheep who is knitting, as the narrative states, “She looked at the Queen, who seemed to have suddenly wrapped herself up in wool” (Carroll 177). The narrative goes on to describe Alice’s confusion, stating, “opposite to her was an old Sheep, sitting in an arm-chair, knitting, and every now and then leaving off to look at her through a great pair of spectacles” (178). Although Penelope does not actually turn in to a white sheep (perhaps she would were she to encounter Circe), her character has much in common with the White Queen whom Alice encounters in Looking-Glass World.

For nearly one hundred and fifty years, readers of Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* have experienced these beloved classics as the shining example of children’s fantasy literature. Although Carroll’s novels have been the subject of a great deal of conversation and scholarly criticism, few have approached these works outside of the framework that has been placed on them since their conception. In actuality, there are always multiple ways to understand any text, and it would be a shame to both the text and its author to stick to one interpretation and not engage in controversial discussions. The many similarities in experiences and characters that Alice and Odysseus both encounter are remarkable and provide a great deal of support that Carroll was intentionally modeling the great epic poem Homer’s *Odyssey*. While various

critics have proposed ways to read characters as satires of Victorian politicians or acquaintances of Carroll's, there is overwhelming evidence that suggests that Carroll created characters that could fit with a number of interpretations. By drawing inspiration from Homer, Carroll attempted to do as many other writers throughout history had done: create a modern epic that would appeal to a variety of readers.

Chapter Two

Creating Alice as an Epic Poem

While Carroll's *Alice* novels and Homer's *Odyssey* are in fact the epitomes of their respective genres, these two works surprisingly have much in common as far as content, which Chapter One explored. However, that is by no means the full extent of their similarities, as they share much in common by way of an over-arching structure and format, a poetic pattern that relies on songs and storytelling, an oral background, the use of the same themes and motifs, as well as the central character of the hero. Each of these literary devices is employed in both Homer's epic poem and Carroll's famous children's novels, providing further support for a reading of the two *Alice* novels as the Victorian answer to the heroic epic that would be accessible and acceptable to all readers.

For many great works of literature, the structure of the written text can be nearly as important as the text itself. Within works of the same genre, it is not uncommon to find specific formats and structures that divide up the text in a certain way that is relevant to its purpose, such as the division of chapters, the use of illustrations, etc. For the genre of heroic epic, there appears to be some importance to the number twelve, as this is typically the number of chapters or "books" that the text is divided into. Homer's *Odyssey* consists of a poem divided into twenty-four books. Odysseus finally returns home to Ithaca in Book 13, which supports a division of the epic poem into two, twelve-chapter parts: Books 1-12 describe Odysseus's attempts to return home and Books 13-24 are Odysseus's experiences in Ithaca. Surprisingly enough, each of the *Alice* novels has twelve chapters, so when the two

novels are read together, we are provided with the same total of twenty-four chapters or parts. This also creates the same structure as Homer's *Odyssey*, as the first twelve chapters, or *Alice's Adventures*, align with Odysseus's attempts to return home and the second twelve chapters, or *Through the Looking-Glass*, align with Odysseus's experiences in Ithaca. In *The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem*, Ulrich Broich describes how later authors preferred a division into three, five, or six chapters, with five, which corresponds with the five acts of drama, being the most popular after Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (55). Broich cites Homer's use of twenty-four and Virgil and Milton's use of twelve (55). While other writers of the time were creating mock heroic epics that modeled other areas of literature such as drama, Carroll wrote his *Alice* novels with the same structure that had been used in heroic epics for nearly two thousand years, a decision that was clearly symbolic.

The Importance of Songs and Story-telling

As was common for children's tales during the Victorian period, both *Alice* novels contain references to a number of poems and limericks that would have been well known during Carroll's time. This device is somewhat comparable to the occupation of the minstrel in Greek times, who appears several times in Homer's *Odyssey*. The minstrel, inspired by the gods, would recite songs that told of past events and battles, usually to remind the listeners of codes of conduct and other lessons of morality. Many of these songs would describe things that happened to the gods, such as Aphrodite's cheating on her husband Hephaistos with the god of war Ares (Homer 520). For the listeners, these stories were quite familiar and the outcome was already known. Carroll uses a similar technique in both of his novels as Alice recites short limericks, although she can never seem to remember them correctly. In *Alice's*

Adventures, we get Alice reciting such things as “How doth the little crocodile.” Alice is not the only one to engage in this practice, as we also get the Mad Hatter’s rendition of “Twinkle, twinkle, little bat,” the Duchess sings a lullaby to her baby as she nurses it, and the Mock Turtle singing “Will you walk a little faster” (among other things). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus expresses the Greek reverence for story-telling when he instructs the blind minstrel’s guide to take his master a quarter of meat, stating that, “All men owe honor to the poets—honor / and awe, for they are dearest to the Muse / who puts upon their lips the ways of life” (*Odyssey* 8, 512-514). After hearing another story by Demodocus, Odysseus goes on to state:

how beautiful this is, to hear a minstrel
gifted as yours: a god he might be, singing!
There is no boon in life more sweet, I say,
than when a summer joy holds all the realm,
and banqueters sit listening to a harper
in a great hall, by rows of tables heaped
with bread and roast meat. (*Odyssey* 9, 3-9)

The minstrel does not appear solely in the first part of the *Odyssey* with Demodocus singing at the feast offered by Alcinous; after Odysseus returns home to Ithaca his household minstrel is mentioned more than once, as he is employed by the suitors and Odysseus later agrees to spare his life for his loyalty. Similarly, the use of limericks and recitations appears again in *Through the Looking-Glass*, beginning with Alice reading the poem “Jabberwocky.” Later, Tweedledee recites the morally charged “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” Humpty Dumpty recites “In winter, when the fields are white,” and further on there are performances

from the White Knight, the Red Queen, and the White Queen. While the use of lyrical songs makes both of these works more poetic, they are used for a much more important reason: in order to engage the reader by reciting stories that would have been known and popular in society. According to Gardner's note, "Most of the poems in the two *Alice* books are parodies of poems or popular songs that were well known to Carroll's contemporary readers" and he goes on to state that "much of the wit of a burlesque is missed if one is not familiar with what is being caricatured" (23). Carroll plays with this as most of his songs have been altered; nonetheless, his readers would have been able to identify the origins of his verses just as the Greeks would quickly be able to identify the stories sung by the minstrels in Homer's *Odyssey*.

An Oral Reading of *Alice*

The work of Parry and Lord has provided some of the most groundbreaking scholarship on the Homeric tradition. Through their research of modern day story-tellers, they determined that the use of stock phrases helped the story-teller to remember such a long recitation, while also allowing for some degree of improvisation by the singer. Within Homer's *Odyssey*, a number of such phrases have been highlighted, noting the frequency with which they appear. Phrases such as "gray-eyed Athena" and "wine dark sea" appear numerous times, nearly every time that particular subject is mentioned. In his chapter "Formulas, metre and type-scenes" in the *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Matthew Clark states that, "Repetitions of this kind – a noun with modifiers – are common and important" (118). Clark goes on to describe how, "the names of many characters or the words for common objects are repeatedly linked with particular adjectives or modifying expressions"

(118). Alice engages this technique, describing nearly every character that she meets in Wonderland with a modifier, thus we get the *Blue* Caterpillar, the *Mad* Hatter, the King and Queen of *Hearts*, etc. Interestingly enough, Alice does not use these types of signifiers in Looking-Glass World, perhaps because she feels more acquainted with the characters there, just as Odysseus is more acquainted with the people he meets once he returns to Ithaca. Although this scholarship came after Lewis Carroll's time and would have been unknown to him, it is quite curious to find similar techniques appearing in the *Alice* novels. This is easily explained by the idea that Carroll was intentionally mimicking Homer's *Odyssey*, even if not for the purposes of oral story-telling.

It is not only descriptive phrases that appear multiple times in Homer's *Odyssey*, as entire sentences and sometimes almost complete stanzas are repeated, such as lines 424-430 in Book 1 and lines 148-154 in Book 3 (Homer). It is interesting to find that in Carroll's *Alice* novels, certain phrases and ideas are repeated much like in epic poetry. One such example occurs in *Alice's Adventures* when Alice drinks from the bottle and "she very soon finished it off" and again when she eats the cake "and very soon finished off the cake" (Carroll 24-5). Another example appears when Alice wishes to get through the small door into the garden, exclaiming, "Oh, how I wish I could shut up like a telescope!" later followed by her wishing for "a book of rules for shutting people up like telescopes" (23). Once Alice finds the small bottle and drinks from it, she asserts, "I must be shutting up like a telescope" and then after eating the cake she exclaims, "Now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was!" (24, 26). While all of these examples originate in the first *Alice* novel, there are other examples that appear in *Through the Looking-Glass* as well. In the chapter "Down the Rabbit-Hole" in *Alice's Adventures*, Alice drinks from the bottle and begins to shrink. As

she is shrinking, she fears that she will not stop, resulting in her “going out altogether, like a candle” (24). This similarly appears again in the chapter “Tweedledum and Tweedledee” in *Through the Looking-Glass*, when Tweedledum states, “you’d go out—bang!—just like a candle!” (167). Again in the second *Alice* novel, the White King tells Alice, “You see, a minute goes by so fearfully quick. You might as well try to stop a Bandersnatch!” (199). Only a couple of pages later, the White King states, “She runs so fearfully quick. You might as well try to catch a Bandersnatch!” (201). Clark states how, “One of the most important aspects of the Homeric epics is the use of type-scenes; that is, recurring situations which are narrated according to a more or less fixed pattern” (134), and we certainly see similar techniques employed in the *Alice* novels. The repetition of certain phrases and ideas would have certainly helped Carroll remember the story as he recited it to Alice Liddell and her sisters on their July 4th rowing expedition. Even though Carroll would not have known of the work of Parry and Lord, his attempt to create a Victorian heroic epic would have led him to employ the same techniques that appeared in the Classical epics of Homer.

While Carroll’s *Alice* novels are clearly not written in verse form like Homer’s epic poems, Carroll employs many subtle techniques that create a poetic structure for the novels. In the chapter “A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale” of *Alice’s Adventures*, the mouse states that he has a long and sad “tale.” Alice misinterprets his meaning, thinking that he is talking about his actual tail. As the mouse tells his story, Alice visualizes it in the shape of an actual tail. When publishing the first *Alice* novel, Carroll had this poem printed in a way that it would appear to the reader as Alice imagines it, starting wider at the top and becoming narrower as it spirals down the page. In his book *The Annotated Alice*, Gardner includes a note about this poetic device. The mouse’s tale is a well known example of emblematic or

figured verse, or a poem that is printed in such a way that it resembles something of the subject matter of the poem. In 1989 another discovery was made on the mouse’s tale by two teenage students in New York. According to this discovery, Carroll’s mouse poem has the structure of a “tail rhyme,” or a rhyming couplet followed by a short unrhymed line. This lengthened the last line of each stanza, and when printed in the format of a traditional poem each stanza takes on the resemblance of a mouse.¹⁴ So for the mouse’s *tale*, it takes the shape of an actual mouse’s *tail* as Alice listens to the poem. As we learn in Homer’s *Odyssey*, the telling of tales is very important to Greek culture. While listening to the minstrel of Alcinous in the banquet hall with the Phaeacians, Odysseus is unable to listen to the tale of the Trojan War without weeping silently. Odysseus is unable to separate the poetic retelling of the event with the actual event that he participated in. Carroll engages this device of emblematic verse to make his work more poetic and to blur the lines between what is real as the hero attempts to separate reality from the telling of tales.

The mouse’s tale is not the only device that helps to support a poetic reading of the *Alice* novels. In *Alice’s Adventures*, Carroll sometimes utilizes a page break with a design of eleven asterisks, which appears as follows:

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*           *           *           *
          *           *           *
*           *           *           *

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This technique is used three times in *Alice’s Adventures*, each time immediately following Alice’s consumption of a food or drink that causes her to change size. There seems to be some inconsistencies with the use of this break, as the Signet Classic version has the top and

¹⁴ For more details on this discovery, see: “Tail in Tail(s): A Study Worthy of Alice’s Friends” in the *New York Times* (1991).

bottom line consisting of five asterisks and the middle line of four, and it also includes only two full sets, the third set being only the top line containing five asterisks. This differs from Gardner's *The Annotated Alice*, where this third example appears in a complete set. This inconsistency is likely due to the fault of the editors and publishers of various editions that did not necessarily understand the insertion of this break, causing it to be omitted, perhaps if it came at the end of a chapter or immediately followed by one of Tenniel's illustrations. The original manuscript of *Alice's Adventures under Ground* further confuses the matter, as Carroll used this device after the first two instances but not the third, and then again at a later point in the novel. Carroll likely intended to include this device every time that Alice changed size, but forgot as he was writing and was unable to maintain a standard use.

While this device is not used consistently as it is set up for in the first *Alice* novel, it is executed again in *Through the Looking-Glass*, this time used to mark the moves Alice makes on the chessboard as she makes her way to the square that will make her a queen. The first of these illustrations is actually six horizontal lines that are referred to as "six little brooks," which represent the six horizontal lines on the chess board that Alice must cross to get to the eighth square. After this first illustration, the following five appear as the above description (the collection of asterisks) in every instance of Alice's move towards becoming a queen, suggesting that Carroll was more diligent in his use of this device in the *Alice* sequel. While Homer's *Odyssey* does not actually contain anything similar to this, it is written in verse form, which inherently uses breaks and pauses between stanzas. Using the technique of page breaks along with the insertion of illustrations, both *Alice* novels can be read in a way that is quite similar to an epic poem as each section prior to a set of asterisks or an illustration can be seen as a separate stanza. As Carroll originally told the story of *Alice's Adventures* aloud

to the Liddell sisters, perhaps he inserted these breaks where he felt that they would be required for pauses when recited orally. This is also supported by the fact that the novels were intended for young readers, who were often read aloud to by their parents or siblings (such as Alice on the river bank), making it easier for the reader to know when to pause. This device, combined with the example of emblematic verse and the insertion of numerous songs and limericks, creates a structure that results in Carroll's *Alice* novels having much more in common with Homer's *Odyssey*.

Themes and Motifs

Despite the vastly different time periods in which they were composed, Carroll's *Alice* novels and Homer's *Odyssey* share many themes and motifs. It takes only a cursory reading of these texts to identify the strong theme of homecoming that appears throughout the first half of each epic. Secondary to this is the theme of hospitality; because Alice and Odysseus are not within their own homes, they are vagrants who often have to rely on other people to help them. They both have the experience of being a guest in another's home on more than one occasion, and the way in which they are treated as a guest is very important. As previously mentioned in Chapter One, being a hospitable host was more than just a matter of manners, as not doing so could incite the wrath of the gods. Odysseus meets with an array of hosts, some good and some bad. Calypso, Alcinous, and the Swineherd all treat Odysseus as a proper host should, welcoming him and providing him with food, clothes, and a place to sleep. On the other hand, Circe only provides these things after Odysseus has proved himself immune to her trickery. The suitors appear as the example of what a host should not be, and they pay dearly for it. Although it is not their own home, the suitors are unwilling to provide

for Odysseus while he is disguised as the beggar, and they only do so and allow him to stay because of the prompting of Telemachus. They continuously berate him, some even throwing things at him, and Odysseus provides them with several opportunities to do the proper thing. Because none of the suitors do, Odysseus shows them no mercy when he retakes his household. Alice is also received as a guest several times during her adventures, but none of her hosts act in a way that even resembles hospitality. In *Alice's Adventures* she is a guest at the mad tea party, at the Duchess's house, and in the Queen's court, yet she is never welcomed properly; in fact, none of her hosts seem to even realize that she is newly present, acting as if she has been there all along. In the chapter "Queen Alice" of *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice is expected to play host at a large banquet in her honor. Unfortunately for Alice, she does not know how to do this properly as she is introduced to the food and then told that it is improper to slice food that you have been introduced to. As we see in the narrative of both of these heroes, being a proper host is more than important as not doing so could result in death.

There is also a strong theme of identity and mistaken identity that runs through both of these texts. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the gods often appear under the guise of a particular person in order to interact with mortals, such as Athena appearing to Telemachus as Mentor. During such encounters, the mortals who prove to uphold the proper standards of Greek society usually realize that it is indeed a god in human form, although they do not know which god, which encourages them to respond in the proper way. Other mortals who do not uphold the expectations of society, such as the suitors, never seem to realize that the gods might appear to them in human form. The suitors do not understand the complexities of identity and the power of the gods, and their berating of the beggars they meet is a dangerous

risk. As Chapter One showed, Odysseus hides his identity on more than one occasion, one instance being from the Cyclops and then again disguised as a beggar. Similarly, identity is manipulated in both of the *Alice* novels.

In *Alice's Adventures*, after falling down the rabbit hole Alice asks “Who in the world am I?” calling it the “great puzzle” and thinking about the other children that she knows in order to determine if she has been changed into one of them (Carroll 28). Shortly after, the White Rabbit mistakes Alice for his housemaid Mary Ann and rather than correcting him,¹⁵ she runs off to his house to get the white gloves and fan that he is asking for (40). During Alice’s encounter with the Blue Caterpillar, he asks her several times “Who are *you*?” to which she replies, “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” (49). When the Caterpillar does not understand Alice’s meaning, she goes on to say, “I can’t explain *myself* ... because I’m not myself” (49). Again Alice is mistaken for somebody, or rather *something*, that she is not, accused of being a serpent by the Pigeon after growing so tall that her head is in the trees. Not surprisingly, Alice struggles with her identity in *Through the Looking-Glass* when she first enters the new world and finds herself invisible to the chess pieces. In these two heroic epics, maintaining one’s identity becomes an obstacle for both heroes, as they are constantly challenged to either hide or reveal their real identity. Gardner notes the many times in which questions of identity are posed in the two *Alice* novels, stating that “Perhaps this theme reflects Carroll’s own confusion over whether he is Charles Dodgson, the Oxford professor, or Lewis Carroll, writer of fantasy and nonsense” (177). It is all too fitting that present understandings of Homer have the same issue, with some believing

¹⁵ Gardner cites Roger Green, stating that Mary Ann was a Victorian euphemism for “servant girl,” among other understandings of the name.

Homer the single greatest poet from ancient Greece and others doubting that such a person ever really existed.

Related to this theme of identity, the characters, particularly the heroes, in both the *Odyssey* and the *Alice* novels often change in their physical size. In *Alice's Adventures*, Alice literally changes size when she eats or drinks substances from Wonderland, and again after putting on the Rabbit's little white glove. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, it does not explicitly state that Alice changes size, although she must because when she first enters the looking-glass, the chess pieces are still their normal size and she is able to pick them up. It is unclear exactly when Alice changes size in Looking-Glass World, but during her later encounters with the chess pieces she is relatively the same size as they are. Much like Alice after eating the mushroom, Odysseus's physical size is changed several times during his adventures. Athena uses her powers to make Odysseus smaller, shrinking his muscles and his stature in order to make him appear as a beggar when he returns to Ithaca. Again his size is changed by Athena immediately after killing the suitors and before being reconciled with his wife, as the narrative describes, "She made him / taller, and massive, too" (*Odyssey* 23, 177-178). The use of size changing can be seen as symbolic of the growth (mental or emotional) that each hero must undergo in order to survive. Identity becomes harder to maintain for both Odysseus and Alice when they are constantly changing in their physical nature.

Another theme that is very important to both Carroll's *Alice* novels and Homer's *Odyssey* is the use of names, not merely the meaning of names but also the way that they can be used for various purposes. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice asks Humpty-Dumpty, "Must a name mean something?" to which the egg replies "Of course it must" (Carroll 184), highlighting Carroll's belief in this matter and drawing attention to the importance of Alice's

name. The etymology of the name Alice is often cited as having Greek origins, with the meaning most often described as “truth” or “noble.” There has been some debate over the meaning of the name Odysseus, and depending on which translation you read, the description of his naming by his grandfather Autolycus will use different adjectives. One understanding of the name Odysseus gives the meaning “trouble” and cites the origins as unknown, and this meaning is clearly representative of both Odysseus’s giving as well as his receiving of trouble throughout his adventures. In *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey*, Jenny Strauss Clay describes the meaning of Odysseus’s name: “Troubles inflicted and troubles endured—these are the two-fold aspects of the hero. The name itself, Odysseus, embraces both and is profoundly ambiguous in its significance” (56). Clay cites the following lines, which appear in Homer’s *Odyssey* after Odysseus and Penelope have been reunited: “But Zeus-born Odysseus told her all—all the troubles he set / upon men, and all that he himself had suffered in misery” (Qtd. in Clay 56). Carroll loved wordplay and portmanteaus,¹⁶ as we see with several of the explanations for the nonsense words that appear in the “Jabberwocky” poem.¹⁷ Combine the two meanings of Alice’s name, truth and noble, and one can certainly find all of the letters in trouble. If Carroll were to have read a version of Homer’s *Odyssey* that used trouble as the meaning of Odysseus’s name, then he may have had more than one reason to name his protagonist Alice. Keeping in mind Carroll’s fascination with such wordplay, this relationship of name meanings is likely no coincidence.

While the portmanteau created from Alice’s name is fascinating, this meaning is interesting for other reasons as well. It is important that Alice’s name has ties to nobility, as it helps create an image of her as a queen throughout the novels, not just as she becomes a

¹⁶ *Portmanteau* was first used in this context by Carroll in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

¹⁷ Humpty Dumpty explains to Alice that *slithy* means lithe and slimy and *mimsy* means flimsy and miserable.

queen at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*. This aligns Alice more with Odysseus as he is a king in the beginning of the *Odyssey*, he has only been away from his throne for some time. This helps to suggest that both heroes are destined for their nobility, that it is not merely accident that they are each crowned. The fact that truth appears as a meaning for Alice is quite interesting as well, as Alice is often unsure of what is real and who she is. There seems to be little truth, or the truth that Alice is accustomed to, in either Wonderland or Looking-Glass World. Questions of truth tie in with the theme of identity that runs throughout the *Alice* novels and Homer's *Odyssey*, and at times it can be difficult for even the reader to know what is real within the narrative and to figure out what will happen next for the heroes.

Another theme that appears in the *Alice* novels as well the *Odyssey* and proves to be quite important to both is the idea that the characters are merely pawns who have little agency as they are controlled by greater forces. The first *Alice* novel plays on the imagery of a deck of cards, which require someone to "play" them, and the second novel uses the imagery of a chess game, which has literal pawns and requires someone to move the pieces. In her essay "Alice in Wonderland: A Curious Child," Nina Auerbach states, "The dominant metaphor of a chess game whose movements are determined by invisible players spreads her sense of helplessness and predestination over the book. The nursery rhymes of which most of the characters form a part also make their movements seem predestined" (342-3). In the *Odyssey*, the people are essentially controlled by the gods; they must make sacrifices and do as the gods please or else bad things happen (such as Odysseus being away from home for nearly ten years after the end of the Trojan War). Although at times it seems that the heroes have no control over their fate, Odysseus and Alice actually have more agency than the other

characters that they meet. It was a poor decision on Odysseus's part to reveal his true identity to the Cyclops Polyphemus, which led to Poseidon's wrath and in turn caused him several more years of wandering as he tried to return home. Alice has more agency because she is never able to understand the world that she is in and the characters that she meets. In his essay "'You're Nothing but a Pack of Cards!' Alice Doesn't Have a Social Contract," Dennis Knepp describes how, "The basic idea of rule of law does not apply to Alice. She is not part of their world. She does not have a social contract in Wonderland" (47). Like Odysseus in the lands he travels to, Alice is not a citizen of Wonderland, so she does not have to follow the "social contracts" of this society, social contracts that would require her to obey the laws of the land. According to Gardner, there is some amount of evidence that suggests that Alice was not reversed when she entered the world through the looking-glass, and this is supported by Tenniel's illustrations. One such example is the fact that the poem "Jabberwocky" appears in mirrored format, making it impossible for Alice to read until she holds it up to a mirror and reads the reflection. This example illustrates how Alice is immune to certain aspects of these new worlds, as she is merely a guest who is travelling through. Similarly, examples from Homer's *Odyssey*, such as Odysseus not competing in the set of games with the Phaeacians, emphasis how one can maneuver through another society without adhering to the contracts associated with it. This allows both heroes some degree of power over their destiny, despite the interference of "higher powers."

Mervyn Nicholson provides an essay that focuses entirely on another theme that appears in the *Alice* novels as well as Homer's *Odyssey*. In "Food and Power: Homer, Carroll, Atwood, and Others," Nicholson explores the way that food is symbolically used in literature, most often to represent power relations. The essay states that, "In life, eating is a

routine necessity, but in literature eating is always a symbolic act. In life people eat in order to be alive, but the characters of literature do not eat to live, since they aren't alive. They eat only for a symbolic purpose" (38). This is easy to understand in the context of the *Alice* novels, as something always happens when Alice eats or drinks. Nicholson notes the importance of food in Homer's great epic as well, stating, "Eating is so important in *The Odyssey* that it is almost as much an epic about food as about the guile of its tricky hero" (38). Nicholson comments on the use of food and drink in the *Odyssey* and how this has influenced other works such as Carroll's, describing the "DRINK ME" bottle that Alice sips from as a descendent of the drug used by Circe, both relying on the image of the cup of "deceptive drink." Nicholson describes *Alice's Adventures* as "a work almost as familiar as *The Odyssey* and one that uses food obsessively" (43). As any reader can see, food proves to be quite important in the adventures of both heroes.

Nicholson discusses the ways that food is used to represent the power relations of society. In describing the scene in the chapter "Pig and Pepper" in *Alice's Adventures*, Nicholson describes how, "[Alice] holds the baby as if nursing him—but he turns into a pig and trots contentedly off. Alice's task is to become an independent, not a subordinate food-provider; the pig is food, not Alice" (47). The article focuses on the way in which power creates social control and independence, and in works such as Carroll's *Alice* novels and Homer's *Odyssey*, this is represented using food. Nicholson breaks his argument down:

Thus power over food = power over other people. ... A person who can provide for himself is one who supplies his own food. Thus food = (1) power of life = (2) power over others = (3) control of one's own destiny. We can watch Alice's frustrating struggle to master these equations in her travails

over the EAT ME cake, the DRINK ME bottle and the other food items. The motif of power relations, which for reasons we have noted calls for food imagery, organizes the Alice books. (48)

In both the *Odyssey* and the *Alice* novels one can find the representations of the social hierarchy, in which society is divided into two major groups: the strong and the weak. Another way of looking at this hierarchy is those who command and those who obey, and in the case of these literary works, those who eat and those who are eaten or provide food (Nicholson 52). Something that seems as trivial as food and eating in literature proves to be much more important and symbolic, especially in the narratives of Alice and Odysseus. For both hero narratives, this theme also ties in with the questions of identity and destiny that were previously discussed.

Chapter One mentioned the many down-played references to death that appear in both of Carroll's novels. As it turns out, the constant threat of death proves to be a persevering theme that runs throughout Alice's and Odysseus's narratives as both seek to avoid this finite end, and death proves to be an important element in most hero tales. Campbell's book highlights this omnipresence of death, writing that, "The last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure. Here the whole sense of life is epitomized. Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave" (356). The death of the hero is always a risk once he has left the safety of his home and world, and for many of the traditional heroic epics the death of the protagonist provides the full cycle of the hero narrative.¹⁸ There are several instances where both Alice and Odysseus come close to meeting this same end. It is not only the threat of the hero's

¹⁸ Hero narratives such as the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* and the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* end with the hero's death.

death that runs throughout these narratives, as the protagonists are exposed to or responsible for the deaths of others. Alice shows little concern for the playing cards who the Queen demands to have beheaded in *Alice's Adventures*, and she asks Humpty-Dumpty if he is not afraid of falling off of the wall in *Through the Looking-Glass*, making death seem trivial or not absolute. Odysseus loses all of his men during their attempts to return to Ithaca, some to the Cyclops Polyphemus and some to the monster Scylla (among other things), and after arriving at his home he is responsible for the deaths of all of the suitors as well as about a dozen of his own servants who proved to be unfaithful to him. Death appears as the ultimate obstacle for both Odysseus and Alice, and much like the other things they are each faced with, both of these heroes are able to overcome this obstacle and complete their adventures.

Alice as an Epic Hero

Perhaps one reason that Carroll's *Alice* books were never even considered to be related to the genre of heroic epic is because of the importance of the representation of the hero; after all, who would expect seven-year-old Alice to prove very heroic at all? Throughout the history of the hero narrative the genre has been dominated by strong, adult males as the central character. The history of the hero begins with Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu; from Greek mythology we get Odysseus, Achilles, and Heracles (just to name a few); and then we are provided with Beowulf, King Arthur, The Three Musketeers, Robin Hood, up to the very recent and very heroic Harry Potter. Although Alice has absolutely nothing physically in common with Odysseus, she proves to be quite his match in matters of mentality and emotion, as well as in successfully traversing strange worlds. Alice proves her ability to survive as she maneuvers through Wonderland and Looking-Glass

World, while at the same time remaining true to herself and refusing to adopt the nonsensical ideas that she encounters there.

Because there has been so much documented on Carroll's relationship with young Alice Liddell, many critics have rested on this and this alone as Carroll's reason for creating a young, female child as the hero of his great novels. But what was Carroll's attraction to young girls and why did he choose this as the hero of his *Alice* novels as opposed to an older girl or even a male child? Cohen's biography on Carroll describes how many writers were interested in the "phenomenon of childhood," such as Rousseau's ideas in the eighteenth-century that children were adults in miniature and Blake's idea that children were marked by a "mystic[al] beauty." Although, according to Cohen, Carroll's view of childhood was Blakean, he also read and admired the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge and much of his poetry was inspired by these Romantic poets who wrote extensively about the experience of childhood (106-8). There is a common understanding among Carroll critics and biographers that the man who authored the *Alice* novels was more than just nostalgic about childhood, describing him as having something of a psychological affliction that made him reject adulthood and yearn for the companionship and understanding of young children. Cohen's biography on Carroll again proves useful, as he describes how:

The physical model for Alice wandering through Wonderland is Alice Liddell; the spiritual and psychological Alice is [Carroll] himself. Alice's attitudes, her fears, her aggressions, her strengths, her weaknesses, her sharp retorts, her ineptitudes, her confusions, her insensitivities—and, in the end, her determination to survive—they all belong to [Carroll]. (195)

Despite this tendency towards young friends, Carroll was not accepting of just any child, and he was almost exclusively fond of little girls. Gardner's note on the chapter "Pig and Pepper" states that, "It was surely not without malice that Carroll turned a male baby into a pig, for he had a low opinion of little boys. ... Carroll now and then made an effort to be friendly with a little boy, but usually only when the lad had sisters that Carroll wanted to meet" (64). It remains somewhat unclear what created Carroll's ill opinion of young boys, but it is obvious that he preferred the company of girls on his rowing expeditions, as the subjects of his photography, and as the hero of his greatest literary pursuit.

Although it is possible to find reasons for Carroll's choice of protagonist, it is not so easy to understand his reasons for creating a character that was physically female, but that rejected many of the Victorian ideas of femininity. Gender expression was explored greatly through the examples of "conduct books" for children and women, and the era was marked for its literary representations of women, with many novels including the stock characters of "the angel in the house"¹⁹ or her polar opposite: the "fallen woman." While these representations were most often manifested in adult literary characters, some of the ideals that defined them could be illustrated through a progression that started with the character as a young child. It is obvious to see Alice as a rejection of the angel in the house, as her initial adventures take her out into the world and even in Wonderland she rarely finds herself indoors, the location of "in the house" being essential to Victorian idea. Although Looking-Glass World is entered from within her own home, Alice's adventures are again set in an outdoor environment, and each time she enters any building she is very quick to make her escape. Alice's older sister could perhaps be a representation of the Victorian angel, as she

¹⁹ Inspired by Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name (1854), the "angel in the house" was the ideal example of what a woman or wife should be.

does her duty to read to her younger siblings and she lacks the imagination needed to escape her world and enter new ones. In fact, both Wonderland and Looking-Glass World are marked by a rejection of Victorian feminine ideals. Characters such as the Duchess and the Queen of Hearts show no maternal instincts and the White and Red Queens in the chess game seem to be concerned only with themselves. Although it was created long before the idea of the angel in the house, Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey* actually fits the role quite nicely. Not only is she nearly always in the physical structure of the house, but she remains faithful to her husband without knowing if he is alive or dead for twenty years. While this may hold true for women in Ithaca, the female characters that Odysseus meets out in the world also reject feminine characteristics. Both Calypso and Circe are strong, manipulative, and dangerous: a threat to the men who cross them. Athena on the other hand is a combination of both masculine and feminine ideals; she is both beautiful and caring, while at the same time strong and powerful. While Odysseus is either threatened or in some way affected by each of the female characters he encounters, the fact that Alice is a girl means that the female characters she meets do not pose a threat to her, helping her to maneuver through their world and avoid their influences. As was typical in Victorian literature, the physical location of female characters proves to be quite significant in Carroll's works and, interestingly enough, in Homer's *Odyssey* as well.

It is not only the setting of Alice's experiences that represent a rejection of femininity, as we can find many examples of her decisions and actions to prove this point in the two *Alice* novels. According to Megan S. Lloyd in her essay "Unruly Alice: A Feminist View of Some Adventures in Wonderland":

Alice rejects and frees herself from stereotypical female traits; she is not trapped by the confines of roles or requirements. First, she rejects the world her sister occupies; then in her journey through Wonderland she questions the nurturing role of mother; and finally she stands up to seemingly powerful females and males alike, including the Queen of Hearts, the Caterpillar, the Mad Hatter, and the Cheshire Cat. (9)

Not only does Alice want a book that is more engaging with pictures and conversations, she does not like to be read *to*, so she escapes to Wonderland where she can create her own story. It could be mistaken that Alice has maternal instincts as she worries over the Duchess's treatment of the infant and she takes the child in order to protect it, however Alice questions herself in this role when she asks what she will do with the child when she returns to her own world, a selfish thought that supports her conscious rejection of femininity. Alice is quite relieved when the baby turns into a pig, a creature that can survive on its own and does not need the care or instruction of Alice.

The tea party is one of the most male dominated experiences that Alice partakes in, and we clearly see her desire to converse with the members despite their assertion that there is "no room." The Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse have their masculinity threatened by Alice's many questions and inability to believe their tales, and Alice's decision to leave the party is due to her feeling their company a threat to her own sanity and intellect. The threat felt by both Alice and the company of the tea party is likely due to their gender commonalities. According to Lloyd on the court scene at the end of *Alice's Adventures*, "Her physical growth mirrors her social, psychological, and emotional development. Alice has become a large, powerful presence, a fully realized young woman who is ready to challenge

anyone, especially those who obfuscate the truth. In fact, the truth sets her free and wakens her into reality once again” (16). Lloyd’s essay goes on to discuss the way in which Alice and her sister are different, describing how, “Alice’s sister attempts to escape through reading and daydreaming, but unlike Alice, who plunges down the rabbit-hole in pursuit, her sister falls into a female trap, accepting what’s in front of her and not fully understanding the agency and opportunity within herself” (17). This statement highlights another common association of gender representations in literature, whereby males act and females are acted upon. Alice is clearly aligned with the male hero, such as Odysseus, who makes choices and acts on them, regardless of the validity or safety of such decisions. Lloyd finds Alice as an inspiring heroine for modern day young women, as Alice makes her sanity and her right to think and imagine her first priority.

Other critics have noted Alice’s gender representations and the way that they change as she progresses through her adventures. According to Nicholson’s article, “Once past the pool-of-tears stage, Alice moves toward a stronger, more independent and aggressive identity than the docile Alice being read to (not reading herself) that we see at the outset” (51). This statement is somewhat inaccurate, as the instance of Alice as “docile” is quite short and only at the beginning of the novel. The rest of her adventures in Wonderland result from a direct attempt to escape this scene. In his essay “Blessed Rage: Lewis Carroll and the Modern Quest for Order,” Donald Rackin states:

Like many spiteful heroines and heroes of failed causes in stage tragedies, Alice is a not altogether attractive figure. But we still admire her because she unwittingly learns to act heroically when she fails to find the order she seeks in the surrounding natural chaos. She thus becomes for many modern readers

what she undoubtedly was for Dodgson: a naïve champion of the doomed human quest for ultimate meaning and Edenic order. (402)

Much like Odysseus and other heroes, Alice is seeking an understanding of the world that is more constant than the size changing, identity hiding realms of Wonderland and Looking-Glass World. As it turns out, Rackin not only interprets Alice as an epic hero but defines her in the same Greek categories discussed in the Introduction to this project, whereby works of literature can be classified as simply being tragedy or comedy. Rackin states that, “For all their tragic implications, they are basically comic. Accordingly, their heroine, besides persevering and fighting back, has the practical good sense of a comic, rather than a tragic, heroine” (402). Alice reveals herself to be much more than a typical Victorian child with a vivid imagination, as she proves herself to be witty, independent, and brave when faced with new and sometimes threatening situations. It is obviously no coincidence that Carroll used the imagery of the chess game in *Through the Looking-Glass*, a game that sets clear boundaries on the power of the king, who can only move one space in any direction, and the queen, who can move any number of spaces in any direction. Considering the many other instances of heroic irony used by Carroll, there is much to suggest that he thought a young, seven-year-old girl the match (if not the superior) to Homer’s epic hero Odysseus.

Taking into account the structural strategies, emphasis on story-telling, oral devices, and many similar themes that appear in the two *Alice* novels and Homer’s *Odyssey*, it is certainly possible to read Carroll’s great children novels as a Victorian heroic epic based on the great Classical epic poem. Carroll made sure to represent Alice in a way that was a rejection of many Victorian ideas about femininity, ideas that were widely popular during the

era, but at the same time she was not defined or wholly accepted by masculine characteristics either. Alice, much like Odysseus, proves to be a complex hero whose gender characteristics help her to maneuver through strange worlds and attain her goals. All of these elements, along with the discussion of Chapter One, reveal young Alice to be quite the epic heroine.

Conclusions

Discrepancies and Further Research

While there are clearly a number of similarities between Carroll's two *Alice* novels and Homer's great epic poem the *Odyssey*, there remain a few aspects that do not entirely match up. One is the way in which Alice receives little assistance from the characters she meets, while Odysseus is helped a great deal by the machinations of Athena. For this reason, one could suggest that Alice is really the more heroic of the two for her ability to survive and even prosper of her own accord. Somewhat tangent to the matter of assistance lies another disconnect between the two narratives: Homer's poem is heavily laden with religious overtones. Carroll's choice to exclude any references to religion in a Victorian novel intended for children is quite surprising,²⁰ and it was clearly with precise intentions that Carroll avoided this subject. While Odysseus and other characters within the *Odyssey* must routinely make sacrifices and avoid actions that could potentially anger the gods in order to survive, Alice is able to move about freely and obtain her goals without answering to a higher power. Alice proves to be the creator of her destiny whereas Odysseus must act within a certain standard in order to fulfill his desires. This disconnect between Carroll's heroic epic and Homer's can be explained by the fact that for many modern readers (and readers of Carroll's time), Greek religion is strongly viewed or referred to as mythology, suggesting a downplay of its legitimacy when compared with modern religions. The adventures that both

²⁰ Chapter Two discussed the theme that the characters are merely pawns being manipulated by some higher power. I am drawing a clear distinction here between the ideas of fate/destiny and religion.

Alice and Odysseus experience often do not match up chronologically, and there is not necessarily an analogous counterpart for all of the characters within the two hero tales. As we can clearly see, Carroll was not attempting to completely rewrite, as it were, Homer's *Odyssey*; rather he seemed to be interested in creating a Victorian epic that relied greatly on it, but that would still fit into Victorian society and entertain young readers of the time.

There is clearly more room for research on this understanding of Alice as an epic hero. Due to the many different translations that exist of Homer's *Odyssey*, a review of the version that Carroll had in his library would help to determine if he intentionally modeled the language in the *Alice* novels after the epic poem, specifically with regards to similar scenes. Several of the examples given in Chapter One use similar language and word choice, but this could be mere coincidence as Carroll obviously did not have access to *The Bedford Anthology*. While Lovett's source does provide us with the copy of Homer's *Odyssey* that Carroll had in his library, Carroll could have read different versions during his time as a student and in his later pursuits of Classical study. A more in depth search into Carroll's biographies and surviving artifacts could reveal even more of his knowledge and experience with Classical Greek, although this project has attempted to provide much of the backbone in this area. Because Carroll was always known for many things, firstly as a mathematician, it would be quite interesting to find out how much he really knew about Greek and Homer. In doing so we can not only redefine the *Alice* novels as a Victorian epic, we can also redefine Carroll as a Greek scholar.

Although no one has established a reading of Carroll's *Alice* novels as the Victorian answer to the heroic epic until this project, some, as Nicholson's article about food

demonstrates, have found similarities between the heroic narratives of Alice and Odysseus. Gardner calls Dante's *Divine Comedy* "that lesser-known tour of Wonderland by way of a hole in the ground" (94). Many critics have commented on Dante's work drawing from Homer's epics, so if there are similarities between the *Alice* novels and the *Divine Comedy*, and there are similarities between the *Divine Comedy* and the *Odyssey*, then it makes sense that there are similarities between the *Alice* novels and the *Odyssey*. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that it was more than coincidence that Carroll's *Alice* novels have so much in common with Homer's *Odyssey*. Carroll loved to include secret meanings in his work that only readers with a specialized knowledge would understand. The fact that Carroll also published an article titled "What the Tortoise said to Achilles" (1895) and his 1874 poem *The Hunting of the Snark*, referred to by many as a mock-epic nonsense poem, further suggests that Carroll had a knack for classical references in his literary pursuits.

Both the *Alice* novels and the *Odyssey* include many similarities in characters and the adventures that each hero experiences. Carroll clearly used a structure that would create a more poetic reading of his novels, and his close work with illustrator Sir John Tenniel highlights the importance of the ideas represented in the illustrations. Songs and story-telling prove to be quite symbolic in both narratives, and there is an array of common themes, such as setting and alternate realities, that fill both of these heroic epics. Alice's rejection of Victorian ideas about femininity helps to define her as the epic hero that she is revealed to be. By creating this new understanding of Alice as a heroic epic, common ideas about the strict understanding of genres prove to be much more flexible. Not only are Carroll's *Alice* novels the shining example of children's fantasy fiction, they are also yet another example of the Victorian mock-epic.

Although the Victorian era certainly saw an increased interest in Homer and the epic tradition, such readings have never been done of Carroll's *Alice* novels. As it turns out, Carroll had a great deal of knowledge of Greek history and literature as well as close acquaintances with Greek scholars, further supporting such a reading as this. Given the evidence provided, there can be no denying that Lewis Carroll's beloved children's classics were somehow inspired by the great classical epic poem of Homer's *Odyssey*. Perhaps Carroll wrote this mock-Victorian epic based on the work of Homer for young Alice Liddell, as an attempt to provide her with the traditional classical education that was more inclined towards a child's interests. Alice certainly has long been, and continues to be, a hero for many young readers.

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Biographical Information

Alyssa Caswell Mimbs was born in Orlando, Florida in 1988. She attended elementary school in Ennice, NC and graduated from Alleghany High School in NC in May 2007. The following autumn, she entered Appalachian State University to study English, and in December 2009 she was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree. She was accepted into the Graduate program in English at Appalachian State University and began study towards a Master of Arts degree in August 2010. Ms. Mimbs plans to pursue a Ph.D in English with the intentions of being a literature professor at the University level. Ms. Mimbs currently resides in Winston Salem NC. Her parents are Charles Mimbs of Cape Coral, FL and the late Susan McCarthy of Glade Valley, NC.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (ˈlʊɪs ˈkɑːrəl; 27 January 1832 – 14 January 1898), better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, was an English writer of world-famous children's fiction, notably *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass*. He was noted for his facility at word play, logic, and fantasy. The poems *Jabberwocky* and *The Hunting of the Snark* are classified in the genre of literary nonsense. He was also a mathematician, photographer, and Anglican deacon. Carroll's fictional Alice bears little resemblance to Liddell herself, but *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is set on Liddell's birthday and *Through the Looking-Glass* is set on her "half-birthday." The books are also dedicated to Alice Pleasance Liddell, and *Through the Looking-Glass* contains an acrostic of Liddell's full name. Prickett with the Liddell children and Lewis Carroll. The name "Prickett" is relatively distinctive and quite common in the neighboring town of Binsey, so people--including Dodgson-- likely assumed that Prickett hailed from Binsey. The village also happened to be the location of the "treacle well," of which Dormouse tells a tale at the Mad Hatter's tea party.