

The subversive dreams of Alice in Wonderland

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Summary. This article examines the specific features of dreaming found in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, using current dream research as a guide. These features include falling, magical animals, metamorphoses, wordplay, bizarreness, memory distortions, moral ambiguities, metacognition, curiosity, empathy, existential questioning, and freedom. When Carroll's stories are viewed through the lens of current dream research, it becomes clear that he has provided a surprisingly accurate and comprehensive accounting of human dream experience. Drawing on historical and biographical evidence, this article goes on to argue that Carroll made dreams a central part of the stories because he wanted to give his young readers a conceptual tool for resisting the oppressive normality of adulthood in Victorian England, at the peak of the British empire. By subtly teaching his young listeners about the true nature of dreaming, Carroll was cultivating their critical capacity to look beyond the façade of supposedly "civilized" Imperial reality.

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1. Introduction

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1868) have delighted generations of readers with their enchanting portrait of a strange realm of magic, whimsy, and wonder—the realm of dreaming. However, no one has ever examined the specific features of dreams found in these two stories, using actual research on dreaming as a guide. Literary critics, philosophers, and psychoanalysts have examined a variety of themes in Carroll's works (Gardner 2000), but the pervasive dreaminess of his stories has never been explored as a topic in its own right. The present article will take a first step in that direction by highlighting the numerous features of dreaming included in the two tales. When Carroll's stories are viewed through the lens of the current dream research, it becomes clear that he has provided a surprisingly accurate and comprehensive accounting of human dream experience. The two stories are more than just "dreamy." Together, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* form a virtual encyclopedia of dream phenomenology.

The remarkable verisimilitude of dreaming in these stories may shed new light on Carroll's inspiration for writing the two books in the first place. Carroll himself denied having any special purpose in mind when he wrote them. Biographers have offered many possible explanations for the genesis of the stories, mostly revolving around Carroll's relationship with the Liddell family and their daughters Lorina, Alice, and Edith (Cohen 1996, Leach 2009, Woolf 2010). This article will suggest a different answer to the question by focusing on the paradoxical realism of Carroll's portrayal of dream

experience. Carroll wove into his whimsical children's stories a veritable treatise on the subject of dreaming. Why? Because he wanted to give his young listeners a conceptual tool for resisting the oppressive normality of the adult world. The social traditions of 19th century Imperial England were refined and civilized on the surface, but cruel and violent underneath. Carroll knew this, and he gave the children who were being educated into that world a covert means of defending themselves against its mind-warping tendencies. By subtly teaching his young listeners about the true nature of dreaming, Carroll was cultivating their critical capacity to look beyond the status quo of supposedly "normal" Imperial reality. He taught them to question at the most fundamental level what *is*, and to imagine with the greatest creative freedom what *might be*. Their future sanity and survival might depend on how much of this capacity they could maintain as they grew into adulthood.

2. An Encyclopedia of Dreaming

In what specific ways do *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* represent the realities of dreaming? This might seem like a trivial question, but it goes to the heart of what makes the two stories so universally appealing.

To begin with, both tales are explicitly framed as dreams. At the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland* (hereafter *AW*) Alice falls asleep under a tree, and in the first chapter of *Through the Looking Glass* (hereafter *TLG*) she falls asleep in a large easy chair. Both stories involve continuous references to dreaming, and both of them end with Alice waking up and realizing that everything that just happened was a dream. It seems fair to say that Carroll openly invited his readers to think about *everything* in the stories as an aspect of dreaming.

This question differs from asking about the psychoanalytic dimensions of Carroll's stories. Recent biographers and critics have challenged Freudian readings of *AW* and *TLG*, which is at least partly justified since early 20th century psychoanalytic readings of the texts were sometimes quite speculative and reductionist (Phillips 1977). But many of Freud's ideas about dreams remain valid and helpful today,

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and those ideas will be included in this article's focus on the dream-like features represented in the two stories, using the findings of many different modern dream researchers as sources of insight and empirical confirmation. Of course there continue to be numerous debates among modern researchers about the nature of dreaming, but the findings highlighted in this article are not radical or controversial; they represent well-established and widely-accepted results that many other researchers cite and use in their own work.

The references to dreams in *AW* and *TLG* have been sorted below into two groups. First are well-known features of dreaming that can be easily observed by anyone. Second are subtler features of dreaming that tend to appear only after closer investigation. For each of these twelve features (seven in the first group, five in the second), the basic findings of dream research correspond closely to specific instances described in *AW* and *TLG*.

2.1. Falling

From her initiatory tumble down the rabbit hole in *AW* to the surreal feast at the end of *TLG*, Alice finds herself in constant chaos and gravitational peril. Entropy has the upper hand in these stories. A relentless torrent of obstacles, difficulties, and misfortunes plague Alice at every turn. Everything is unbalanced, tottering, about to fall apart. The normal rules of civilized society that structure the waking world collapse in spectacular fashion during the Mad Hatter's tea party (*AW* 7), the Queen's croquet game (*AW* 8), and the trial for the theft of the tarts (*AW* 11). Many of the characters in Wonderland have a terrible time keeping themselves upright, as in the bumbling fight between Tweedledee and Tweedledum (*TLG* 4), the frantic soldiers tripping through the forest ("She thought that in all her life she had never seen soldiers so uncertain on their feet") (*TLG* 7), and the kind but gravitationally-challenged White Knight, who seems incapable of staying atop his horse:

"The great art of riding, as I was saying is—to keep your balance properly. Like this, you know—

"He let go the bridle, and stretched out both his arms to show Alice what he meant, and this time he fell flat on his back, right under the horse's feet." (TLG 8)

Disorder reigns in these stories. Disorder reigns in dreaming, too, where nothing from waking life is stable, where personal agency is radically decentered, and where gravity acts in peculiar ways. Researchers from Freud onwards have noted the high frequency of falling in dreams, and anthropologists and historians have found evidence of dreams of falling in many different cultures (Freud 1965, Shafton 1995, von Grunebaum and Callois 1966, Lohmann 2003). According to the research using the Typical Dreams Questionnaire (TDQ), dreams of falling are one of the most common types of dreams in societies all over the world (Griffith et al. 1958, Bulkeley 2016). Neuroscientists have identified the vestibular system in the brain as key to our sense of gravity in waking life, and it turns out that the vestibular system is also active during rapid eye movement (REM) phases of sleep, when much of our dreaming occurs (Ponpeiano 1974). For many people, the most memorable dreams of their whole lives are vivid falling dreams.

Along with the theme of falling, psychologists have found that misfortunes (accidents, losses, bad luck) are much more common than good fortunes in dreams. People are much

more likely to dream of things going wrong than things going right (Domhoff 1996). This bias towards misfortune, disorder, and gravitational danger is a pervasive feature of human dreaming. Lewis Carroll wove this same entropic bias into every scene of *AW* and *TLG*.

2.2. Magical animals

Alice falls at the beginning of *AW* because she is following a white rabbit wearing a waist-coat, holding a pocket-watch, and fretting about being late. From this point forward Alice encounters a variety of magical animals who can talk, think, argue, and behave with alarming independence. These remarkable creatures include the mouse in the pool of tears (*AW* 2), Bill the Lizard (*AW* 4), the Caterpillar (*AW* 5), the Cheshire Cat (*AW* 6), the March Hare (*AW* 7), an argumentative Gnat (*TLG* 3), a shop-keeping Sheep (*TLG* 5), and a Lion and Unicorn fighting for the crown (*TLG* 7). Alice also has a conversation with several verbose flowers and plants (*TLG* 2). Like the White Rabbit, these creatures have vividly anthropomorphic qualities. Alice assumes that, because most of them can speak, she can have a civil conversation with them. She finds, on the contrary, that they are rude, hostile, and threatening towards her.

Dreams, especially in childhood, are also highly populated with aggressive animals. According to Domhoff's review of dream content research, "the biggest difference between child and adult dreams on the character scale is the much larger number of animals in children's dream reports" (Domhoff 1996, 89). Domhoff says children's dreams also have more aggression than adults' dreams, and "much of this larger amount of aggression is with animals, and the child is usually the victim of an attack by the animal" (90). In the Threat Simulation Theory of Revonsuo (Revonsuo 2003), the universality of children's dreams of being attacked by wild animals is evidence of the key function of dreaming, i.e., to simulate possible threats during sleep in order to be better prepared to face those threats in waking life: "In light of the human ancestral environment, it makes great sense to simulate violent encounters with animals, strangers, and natural forces, and how to escape from such situations." (2003, 886) Jung and his followers have emphasized the importance of animals in dreams as cross-cultural symbols of the unconscious mind: "The animal motif is usually symbolic of man's primitive and instinctual nature... Large areas of the human mind are still shrouded in darkness... Our psyche is part of nature, and its enigma is as limitless." (Jung 1979, 264, 6) Along with the psychological and anthropological evidence, the findings from neuroscience are consistent with a prevalence of threatening animals in dreams. During REM sleep the limbic region of the brain is highly active, and this region is strongly associated with primal emotions, the startle response, and fight/flight instincts. This is just what we would expect during frequent dreams of encountering aggressive animals.

The large cast of menacing magical animals in *AW* and *TLG* make Alice's adventures seem like total fantasy. Yet as modern dream research shows, the stories draw upon a very real and deep vein of children's actual dreaming experience.

2.3. Metamorphoses

Once down the rabbit-hole, Alice undergoes a series of sudden bodily transformations (twelve in total; Gardner 2000,

17). How exactly she changes depends on the circumstances. Sometimes it's from drinking (AW 1-4), sometimes it's from eating (AW 5), sometimes it just happens whether she wants it or not (AW 11). She grows amazingly large, she shrinks to nearly nothing, her neck becomes as long as a serpent (AW 5), and suddenly a crown appears on top of her head (TLG 8). She finds herself abruptly transported from one scene to an entirely different place (TLG 3, 8), with no time spent traveling between the two places. The other characters are just as liable to suddenly change into something or someone else, or disappear entirely: the baby turning into a pig (AW 6), the Cheshire Cat's gradual appearances and disappearances (AW 6, 8), the white queen turning into a sheep (TLG 5), and the two queens sleeping on her shoulders suddenly disappearing (TLG 9). At one point Alice exclaims, "How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another!" (AW 5)

Dream interpreters from ancient times have observed strange metamorphoses like these in people's dreams. Artemidorus, a Roman scholar who wrote a manual of dream interpretation in the second century CE, provided a long list of the transformations that can happen in dreams, with people changing into animals, gods, and mythological figures (Bulkeley 2008). In many indigenous cultures around the world, special rituals are practiced in order to elicit powerful dreams in which the dreamer forms a personal bond with the spirit of an animal, ancestor, or natural element (Irwin 1994, Tedlock 2005, Lohmann 2003). One of the first dreams that Freud analyzes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* involves the merging of the faces of his friend R. and his Uncle Josef (Freud 1965, 171 ff.). Freud said such transformations were the unconscious mind's way of condensing multiple meanings into a single image.

For skeptics, the metamorphoses in dreams illustrate the cognitive instability caused by the random brain activities of REM sleep. As Hobson and McCarley have said, our dreams "may be making the best of a bad job" when they form a barely-coherent narrative out of the nonsensical signals from the REM-stimulated brain (Hobson and McCarley 1977). But instability is only a problem from a perspective that emphasizes stability over all else. The Daoist tradition of ancient China recognized the dizzying changes that occur in dreams, particularly in Zhuang Zi's story of the butterfly dream, but it came to a different conclusion about its significance:

"Who knows if it was Zhuang Zi dreaming a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming Zhuang Zi? Zhuang Zi and butterfly: clearly there's a difference. This is called the transformation of things." (Bulkeley 2008, 64)

The teachings of Daoism would have been a better guide to Wonderland than anything else Alice learned in the waking-life British classroom. The physical metamorphoses she both experiences herself and witnesses in others are among the most fantastical and unrealistic elements in AW and TLG. They are also among the most attention-grabbing features of human dream experience.

2.4. Wordplay

Alice's conversations with the animals and other characters in the two stories often devolve into elaborate bouts of whimsical wordplay. Language in Wonderland is no more

stable than one's physical balance or personal identity. Puns and metaphors come to life in this world. Names and objects have a dynamic, unpredictable relationship to each other. The concept of "meaning" is itself up for grabs. There is hardly a page in either story in which Alice is not confronted by some paradoxical slippage of language or conundrum of meaning. For example, a mouse dries a group of wet animals by reciting the history of William the Conqueror, "the driest thing I know" (AW 3). Alice learns from the Gryphon that shoes underwater are made with "soles and eels" (AW 10). A Tiger-lily tells her why the ground here is so hard: "In most gardens they make the beds too soft—so that the flowers are always asleep" (TLG 2). Humpty Dumpty informs Alice, "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" (TLG 6). After singing her a song, the White Knight explains the difference between what the *name* of the song is called, what the *song* is called, and what the song *is* (TLG 8). Several characters browbeat Alice into listening while they recite long, absurd poems. A cascade of playful language flows through the two stories, turning every word into a potentially explosive source of multiple contested meanings.

The linguistic complexity of dreaming has attracted the close attention of interpreters and analysts from historical times to the present. The earliest manuals of dream interpretation from ancient China, Egypt, and Greece recognized that a single image or word in a dream could have very different meanings depending on the personal circumstances of the dreamer. For example, two men came to the famous Muslim interpreter Ibn Sirin with identical dreams of being the *muathin*, the one who gives the call to prayer. Based on their different characters and specific verses in the *Qur'an*, Ibn Sirin told the first man the dream meant that he would go on a pilgrimage, while he told the second man that he would be accused of theft (Bulkeley 2008, 202).

Freud made this principle the centerpiece of his psychoanalytic theory of dream interpretation, which distinguishes between the manifest (surface) appearance of a dream and the various latent meanings that emerge from the depths of the unconscious (Freud 1965). The same manifest dream content can have many different kinds of latent meaning. Since Freud, psychologists have continued exploring the linguistic dimensions of dreaming (Foulkes 1978, Hunt 1989, Rupprecht 1995, Kilroe 2001, States 1993, Kuiken and Smith 1991), and they have found that word usage, meaning, and denotative significance are extraordinarily fluid in dreaming, but *not* in a random or nonsensical fashion. On the contrary, the multiplicities of linguistic meaning in dreams reveal new aspects of reality that cannot be perceived or accessed within the narrow framework of linear, univocal language. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff has shown that dreams include the same metaphor-generating powers found in waking thought and speech: "Dreams are not just the weird and meaningless products of random neural firings but rather a natural way by which emotionally charged fears, desires, and descriptions are expressed... Dreaming is a process with open-ended possibilities for metaphorical expression." (Lakoff 2001, 274) This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why dreams have been so influential as a source of creative inspiration for poets, musicians, and other artists.

In her journeys through AW and TGL Alice learns a new kind of language, or, perhaps more accurately, a deeper level of the language she already knows. It's the language

of poetry and art, of symbol and metaphor, and it's also the language of dreaming.

2.5. Bizarreness

Alice frequently encounters situations with startling incongruities and strange juxtapositions of elements that do not usually go together in regular life. The croquet game in *AW* is a classic instance of normal things being put to bizarrely abnormal use, with live hedgehogs as croquet balls, flamingos as mallets, and playing-card soldiers bent over to form the arches (*AW* 8). Other examples of ridiculous incongruities are the fish and frog dressed as royal servants (*AW* 6), the irascible Duchess using pepper and frying pans as airborne weapons (*AW* 6), a formal quadrille dance performed by a manic Gryphon and Mock Turtle (*AW* 10), and the White Knight's invention of a way to protect against hair falling out by training it to grow up a stick (*TLG* 8). A peculiar form of bizarreness involves reversing causality, from effect to cause rather than cause to effect. The White Queen cries in pain before she pricks her finger with a brooch (*TLG* 5), and a Unicorn explains to Alice that when she serves a cake here, she should "hand it round first, and cut it afterwards." (*TLG* 7). The same principle applies at the trial of the stolen tarts, when the Queen of Hearts demands "sentence first—verdict afterwards." (*AW* 12)

Bizarreness in this sense is one of the most often noted features of human dream experience. Rationalist critics point to the outlandish combinations and weird disjunctions in dreams as evidence of their essentially meaningless nature (e.g., Hobson and McCarley 1977). Modern psychologists have offered varying explanations for the bizarreness of dreaming. Freud claimed the sleeping mind creates the jumbled manifest content of the dream to hide its underlying unconscious meaning. Jung said dreams bring together incongruous elements not to deceive, but to expand the waking mind's awareness and open up new possibilities for knowledge of the collective unconscious. Content analysis research has found that many dreams, and perhaps a majority of them, are *not* terribly bizarre. In fact, most people's dreams revolve around familiar people, places, and activities (Domhoff 1996). It is thus incorrect to assume that all dreams are filled with wild incongruities. Dreams, when they want, can provide an entirely normal and realistic simulation of the waking world. This suggests that bizarreness in dreaming is not a failure of brain function, but rather a reflection of the greater range of mental associations that are possible in sleep (Hartmann 2000). These associations fuel the creative insights, and even spiritual revelations, that can emerge out of the most bizarre types of dreams (Hunt 1989, Knudson 2001).

To dream is to believe, at least temporarily, in an infinite variety of things that do not necessarily exist or normally go together in waking life. Alice laughs at the idea of believing in something she knows to be impossible, but the White Queen tells her, "I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." (*TLG* 5). It's worth noting that the longest REM phase usually occurs at the end of the sleep cycle, right before one wakes up in the morning, and that many cultures around the world believe the most meaningful and important dreams are the ones that come right before waking (Bulkeley 2008).

2.6. Memory distortions

As far down the rabbit hole and through the looking glass as Alice goes, she still retains some degree of awareness and memory of her ordinary waking life. For instance, she frequently thinks about her cat, she remembers several lessons from school, and when she falls into the pool of tears she remembers once having taken a train to visit the seaside (*AW* 2). Towards the end of *AW* Alice sees an unruly guinea pig being put in a bag and silenced during the Trial of Tarts, and she recalls reading in a newspaper about court officers at trials suppressing applause from the audience (*AW* 11). However, most of Alice's memories are fragmentary, jumbled, and strangely transformed, and she finds it maddening that she cannot accurately repeat poems she knows very well in waking life. She admits to the Caterpillar that her version of the school rhyme *You are old, Father William* is "not quite right, I'm afraid... Some of the words have got altered" (*AW* 5). The same thing happens when she tries and fails to recite the poem, *'Tis the voice of the sluggard*, which she learned in school: "The words came out very queer indeed" (*AW* 10).

Today, cognitive psychologists would agree that dreams are constructed out of memories, impressions, and experiences from daily life, an idea that goes back at least as far as the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Freud's concept of "day residue" was a modern psychological recognition of this aspect of dream content (Freud 1965). Later psychologists like Calvin Hall, G. William Domhoff, and Michael Schredl have helped us see even more clearly how dream content revolves specifically around the most important concerns, interests, and activities of our daily lives (Hall 1966, Domhoff 2003, Schredl 2018).

Sleep laboratory research has found that sleep, and presumably dreaming, play an important role in learning and memory consolidation. According to Robert Stickgold, "evolution has assigned to sleep a critical role in selectively consolidating, translocating, integrating, and, in some cases, weakening memories encoded over prior periods of waking" (Stickgold's 2003, 18). Not just any memories enter into dreams, however. The dream-generating system favors memories that are emotionally meaningful and personally relevant to the dreamer. From Stickgold again: "the REM sleep brain is biased toward the processing of associative memories, both cognitive and affective, rather than toward the simple consolidation of recent memory traces." (18, 22). Associative memories are the wide-ranging networks of thoughts and feelings triggered by various events during the day. This is a good description of the memories that appear in Alice's dream world. They clearly relate to what is most meaningful in her in waking life—school, games, food, her cat—but they take her far beyond the literal realities of her ordinary world, into realms of seemingly infinite associative creativity.

Alice struggles with the unexpected distortions of her memories and the frustrating difficulty she has in recalling them accurately. This becomes another source of destabilization in Wonderland: Alice loses direct access to her autobiographical past. However, from the perspective of current dream research, this is not surprising. Dreams rarely provide a direct replay of waking-life events. Indeed, neuroscientific studies have indicated that the brain regions responsible for episodic memories are active in neither REM nor nonREM sleep (Stickgold 2003, 24). Rather than a graphic replay of an event, dreams portray what the event *felt* like, what it

related to, what it makes you think or wonder. From the perspective of memory, a dream is more like a diary entry than a newspaper report. Stickgold says, “the actual episodic memories may be inaccessible and hence irrelevant to the dream construction process... we dream *about* what happened, but not what actually occurred.” (24)

Carroll’s stories remain accurate to the phenomenology of dreaming when they portray Alice as remembering various aspects of her waking life (lessons, tarts, cats) in complex, elusive ways that do not obey her control but range across the spectrum of her interests and concerns.

2.7. Moral ambiguities

Each time Alice encounters a new character, she tries to engage with them using the good, civilized manners she has learned in waking life: Speak kindly, act modestly, be agreeable. Invariably this strategy fails her. Most characters are belligerent and dismissive towards Alice the moment they meet her. The Duchess quickly cuts off her attempt at polite conversation: “You don’t know much, and that’s a fact.” (AW 6) The March Hare and the Mad Hatter insist there’s no room for her at their table for tea-time, even though Alice can see plenty of empty seats (AW 7). Humpty Dumpty is deeply offended by her comment comparing him to an egg (TLG 6). Other characters criticize her for being rude and impolite, and they give her very specific instructions on how to behave better. The Red Queen pities Alice’s ignorance: “I daresay you’ve not had many lessons in manners yet?” (TLG 9)

What count as good manners in the waking world do not apply in Wonderland. The same is true of dreaming, where the moral rules governing our behavior in waking life are suspended when we sleep at night. Throughout history, this has been one of the most scandalous aspects of dreams: they will cross any boundary, break any taboo, violate any ethical principle. In his dialogue *The Republic* (4th c. BCE), the ancient Greek philosopher Plato lamented the wanton excesses of dreaming: “It does not shrink from attempting to lie with a mother in fancy or with anyone else, man, god, or brute. It is ready for any foul deed of blood...” (Bulkeley 2008, 151) The shameless immorality of what happens in dreaming has led many people to reject the whole subject as dangerous and unworthy of serious discussion.

Arguing against that view, modern psychologists in the lineage of Freud and Jung have claimed instead that dreams tap into a deeper, older part of the psyche that does not easily accept the limits and boundaries of conventional morality. This does not mean the moral codes of the waking world are bad or wrong, but people do struggle with them, and dreams offer a valuable space in which these struggles can be expressed, illuminated, explored, and perhaps better integrated. Contemporary anthropologists like Jeannette Mageo and Robin Sheriff have shown how dreams allow people to work through tensions and anxieties they feel about the cultural expectations of their waking realities (Mageo 2003, Sheriff 2017). Dreams traffic in morally ambiguous situations not to wallow in sinful fantasies, but to stimulate awareness of and adaptive responses to real conflicts in waking life.

The moral ambiguities that Alice confronts in Wonderland seem minor, but they are pervasive and inescapable, and they inevitably generate the sense that her lifelong assumptions about good behavior do not apply in this new reality. This realization is discomfiting—another source of destabilization—but it also gives her some intriguing glimpses of

new moral possibilities. Alice’s travels give her several opportunities to reflect on moral questions and ethical principles from a more sophisticated perspective. For instance, she has this exchange with the brothers Tweedle after hearing the poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” in which a number of gullible oysters are deceived, sorted by size, and summarily eaten:

“I like the Walrus best,” said Alice: ‘because he was a little sorry for the poor oysters.’

‘He ate more than the Carpenter, though,’ said Tweedledee. ‘You see, he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn’t count how many he took: contrariwise.’

‘That was mean!’ Alice said indignantly. ‘Then I like the Carpenter best—if he didn’t eat so many as the Walrus.’

‘But he ate as many as he could get,’ said Tweedledum. This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice began, ‘Well! They were both very unpleasant characters--’” (TLG 5)

Alice’s reflexive moral judgments yield contradictory answers. Instead of assuming she can simply look at a situation and immediately identify who is morally “best,” she must develop a more nuanced mode of ethical reasoning for complex, multi-faceted situations where it’s not obvious what exactly counts as right or wrong. Tweedledee and Tweedledum do not give her the answers, but they do make her confront the insufficiency of conventional morality and the need for her to learn how to think about moral questions in more sophisticated ways than she has been taught.

2.8. Metacognition

The previous seven features of dreaming found in *AW* and *TLG* can be characterized as involving *less agency* and *more anxiety*. They all give Alice the sense of being unbalanced and out of control, besieged by strange forces assaulting her from within and without. These are the qualities that give the two stories a distinctly nightmarish cast, and they are qualities common to many people’s dreams. The next five features of dreaming to be discussed are different in providing Alice with *more agency*, and *less anxiety*. They open Alice’s mind to new ways of finding balance, control, and mutually respectful relationships in this topsy turvy oneiric realm. These qualities of dreaming are less common in the general population, but when they occur they can elicit feelings of special insight, energy, and gnosis.

Alice experiences self-awareness at numerous points in both stories. In contemporary terms, we would say she is lucid dreaming through much of the narrative. When she falls down the rabbit hole at the beginning of *AW*, she realizes she is entering a realm of dreaming (AW 1). She thinks about waking up and telling other people the tale of her adventures (TLG 3), and she wonders what she will dream about the night after she wakes up from Wonderland (TLG 3). She imagines a book being written about her adventures (AW 4). She knows while the story is happening that the Queen of Hearts and her court are, in waking life, playing cards (AW 8), and that she is moving across what is, in waking life, a chessboard (TLG 2). At the end of both stories she decides she has had enough of the chaos, and she deliberately awakens herself (AW 12, TLG 9). Modern psychologists now recognize that self-awareness in dreaming is indeed possible, and it seems to occur with greater frequency

in youth, at the early end of the life cycle (Hurd and Bulkeley 2014). Alice is at a prime age for spontaneous lucid dreaming.

Self-awareness is just one aspect of *metacognition*, a broad term that refers to a variety of high-level cognitive abilities involving abstraction and taking oneself as an object of thought (Kahan 2001). Alice experiences not just lucidity in Wonderland, but many kinds of metacognition. She holds vigorous debates with herself, one part of her telling the other part how to behave better, “for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people” (AW 1). This kind of inner dialogue is a hallmark of metacognition. At many points during the story Alice pauses to reflect on the incongruities of her situation—how weird the creatures are, how oddly they speak, and how ridiculously they behave. In some cases, she has more knowledge about a situation than the other characters do, and she uses this knowledge to modulate her fears and avoid getting too caught up in the mayhem. For instance, when the Trial of the Tarts begins, Alice knows from the traditional English nursery rhyme that it was the Knave of Hearts who stole the tarts, so she is not frightened by the Queen of Hearts or her threats to cut off everyone’s head (AW 11).

Despite the many forces knocking her off balance, Alice maintains a great deal of high-level intelligence and mental acuity while traveling through Wonderland. Her experiences are strange enough to challenge her reflexive assumptions and implicit cultural beliefs, but not so strange as to terrify her, overwhelm her mind, and make it impossible to process the insights she is gaining along the way. In this sense, Carroll has created for Alice and her readers a metacognitively optimal environment. The two stories provide a safe literary space in which she, and they, can go beyond the conceptual limits of waking reality and use their greatest powers of creative imagination to explore alternative dimensions of reality.

2.9. Curiosity

Alice is not just a passive bystander. In certain moments her volition returns in full force: she takes charge of what is happening, thinks about what she wants, and decides how to act. These moments usually revolve around an intense feeling of curiosity. She displays an almost reckless yearning to know the unknown, a fervent desire to explore, probe, question, and discover. This is the personality trait above all others that most clearly defines Alice: she is supremely curious. Her initial tumble down the rabbit hole is prompted a flash of surprise at seeing such a well-attired hare; “In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.” (AW 1) She sees a lovely garden through a tiny door, and immediately wants nothing more than to get into it (AW 1). This becomes her overriding mission in Wonderland, and it gives her a new kind of orientation and sense of balance. She experiments with the magic food and drink for this reason, testing their effects on her body size and trying to figure out the best route into the garden. When a tree suddenly presents her with a door out of the mad tea-party, she exclaims, “That’s very curious! But everything’s curious today.” (AW 7) At the start of *TLG* she gazes intently at the mirror and wonders what it would be like on the other side: “Oh, Kitty, how nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-Glass house!” (*TLG* 1) Once there, she rushes outside to explore the rest of this realm. After encountering the Red Queen, Alice has

the sudden desire to become a Queen herself. All her efforts now focus on discovering how to get to the eighth square, where her royal transformation will occur.

The most salient research on this feature of dreaming comes from Roar Fosse and G. William Domhoff, who suggest that dreaming involves “non-executive orienting” (Fosse and Domhoff 2007). During REM sleep, while the “executive” functions of directed thought and self-control are diminished, the parts of the brain responsible for orienting ourselves in space remain highly active. Thus, Fosse and Domhoff claim,

“The similarities between dreaming and orienting behavior include an array of aspects ranging from heart rate changes to cortical function... The functional morphology of the REM state indicates that the brain may not only be in a mode of brief orienting at this time, but in a state of enduring orienting activity more similar to that of exploration and navigation in waking within which novel events occur. Because of the dysfunction of executive thought, we predict that this exploratory REM cognition will be demonstrated to lack crucial aspects of the sharpness and alert attentiveness of waking navigation.” (66-67)

This description accounts for much of what Alice experiences, especially if by “executive thought” we include the cultural beliefs and expectations of her waking world. Those forms of thought are diminished or non-existent in Wonderland, as noted above. From the moment she falls down the rabbit hole, Alice strives to figure out where she is and how to navigate through this fantastical world. She is, in Fosse and Domhoff’s words, “in a state of enduring orienting activity.” Getting lost can be scary, but Alice’s curiosity becomes a stimulating and encouraging force that guides her forward despite the manifest threats and dangers all around her.

2.10. Empathy

Some of Alice’s most disorienting, yet most enlightening, experiences occur when she talks in depth with the various creatures she meets. She discovers the residents of Wonderland do not like being disrespected. They repeatedly insist that Alice take them seriously, accept them as real, and listen to their concerns. This isn’t easy for her, unfortunately, and it leads her into numerous tiffs, spats, and misunderstandings. When she and the mouse fall into the pool of tears, Alice proudly talks about her cat Dinah and what a fierce hunter she is. Too late does Alice realize she has deeply insulted the little mouse, who has very different feelings about cats and their hunting skills (AW 2). After she has grown so tall that her neck reaches into the clouds, Alice encounters a Pigeon who shrieks in fear and accuses her of being a serpent. Alice insists she’s a girl, not a serpent, but the Pigeon replies that if Alice has a long neck and likes to eat eggs, then as far as the Pigeon is concerned, she’s a kind of serpent. “This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two” (AW 5). Later, Alice wishes a Tiger-Lily flower had the ability to talk with her, and she is startled by its reply: “‘We *can* talk,’ said the Tiger-Lily, ‘when there’s anybody worth talking to.’” (*TLG* 2) At the feast celebrating her ascension to Queen, Alice is formally introduced to each of the dishes of food, and when she tries to cut into one she is immediately scolded: “What impertinence!” said the Pudding. ‘I wonder how you’d like it, if I were to cut a slice out of you, you creature!’” (*TLG* 9) After

the big fight between the Lion and the Unicorn, Alice finds herself being treated as an exotic beast:

“The Unicorn was going on, when his eye happened to fall upon Alice; he turned round instantly, and stood for some time looking at her with an air of the deepest disgust.

‘What—is—this?’ he said at last.

‘This is a child!’ Haigha [a messenger] replied eagerly... ‘We only found it today. It’s as large as life, and twice as natural!’

‘I always thought they were fabulous monsters!’ said the Unicorn. ‘Is it alive?’

‘It can talk,’ said Haigha solemnly.

The Unicorn looked dreamily at Alice, and said, ‘Talk, child.’” (TLG 7)

The capacity to recognize other people as *people*, as subjective beings with their own interests, is a major achievement in the development of individual consciousness. It takes time to emerge during childhood, and in some cases (e.g., people with autism, sociopaths), it never emerges at all. Known as “theory of mind,” this capacity enables us to form conceptual models of other people’s minds so we can interact with them more effectively. Researchers have found the theory of mind capacity is supported by the medial prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain that is also highly active in REM sleep, and presumably in dreaming (Fox et al. 2013). The vibrant sociality of dreaming (lots of characters, public settings, social interactions) seems to depend on a highly functional ability to perceive and understand the subjectivity of other characters. Although dreaming occurs in the isolation of one’s mind, it involves a fully activated capacity for empathy and awareness of others. In recognition of this, the Social Simulation theory of Revonsuo, Tuominen, and Valli suggests that dreaming helps people adapt to the challenges of social life by simulating the kinds of feelings, characters, and interactions we are likely to experience in the waking world (Revonsuo, Tuominen, and Valli 2015). According to this theory, dreaming provides vivid and highly realistic simulations of our social relationships in order to improve our chances for successful relationships in the waking world.

A big part of Alice’s journey through Wonderland involves expanding her capacity for empathy and theory of mind beyond the normal boundaries of her culture to embrace a much wider range of sentient beings. Although painfully difficult for her (“you’ve no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive,” (AW 8)), these experiences of radical empathy force Alice to think about the world in a fundamentally more complex and sophisticated way. Rather than considering her own perspective alone, she must recognize the perspectives of others and take them into account whenever she interacts with them. She must come to terms with the humbling idea that others might legitimately regard her as a Monster.

2.11. Existential questioning

Amid all the amusing adventures and childhood whimsies of Wonderland, Alice is confronted at several points with startling questions about the very nature of her existence. When she takes a drink from the magic bottle and starts shrink-

ing like a telescope, she starts feeling nervous, “for it might end, you know, in my going out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?” (AW 1) She tries to figure out why everything has suddenly become “curiouser and curiouser”:

“I wonder if I’ve changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is, ‘Who in the world am I?’ Ah, that’s the great puzzle!” (AW 2)

Her maddening conversation with the hookah-puffing Caterpillar revolves around his simple question to her: “Who are you?” (AW 5) Nothing, though, is more deeply perplexing to Alice than her encounter with the sleeping Red King. From an existential perspective, this is the pivotal moment in her journey, the ultimate metaphysical puzzle of Wonderland. Tweedledee and Tweedledum have just finished reciting the poem of “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” when Alice notices the king curled up on the ground and snoring loudly.

“He’s dreaming now,’ said Tweedledee: ‘and what do you think he’s dreaming about?’

Alice said ‘Nobody can guess that.’

‘Why, about you!’ Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. ‘And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you’d be?’

‘Where I am now, of course,’ said Alice.

‘Not you!’ Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. ‘You’d be nowhere. Why, you’re only a sort of thing in his dream!’

‘If that there King was to wake,’ added Tweedledum, ‘you’d go out—bang!—just like a candle!’

‘I shouldn’t!’ Alice exclaimed indignantly...[Alice tells them to be quiet, or else they will awaken the king]

‘Well, it’s no use your talking about waking him,’ said Tweedledum, ‘when you’re only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you’re not real.’

‘I am real!’ said Alice, and began to cry.

‘You won’t make yourself a bit realer by crying,’ Tweedledee remarked.” (TLG 4)

These unsettling questions that vex poor Alice at every turn have a long history in the world’s religious and philosophical traditions, from Socrates, Descartes, and Nietzsche to the Upanishads, the Dao, and Tibetan Buddhism (Bulkeley 2008). Is dreaming real? Am I real? Is this reality a dream? What happens to my identity during the transition from waking to sleeping and back to waking? Who am I, exactly? The phenomenon of dreaming itself becomes a source of existential self-reflection for Alice, just as E.B. Tylor and other anthropologists have said happens when people around the world generate religious beliefs about the soul, heaven, and the afterlife based on their highly-realistic dream experiences. The accuracy of this insight is supported by current neuroscientific research indicating that during REM sleep the brain is highly activated, with internally generated neuro-electrical stimulation rising to levels comparable to the brain during an alert waking state (Kryger et al. 2005). With no perceptual input or physical output, the brain creates an imaginal world that *feels* entirely real because, except for

the shift in input and output, it is processing everything in the same basic way as it processes our experiences in waking life.

In *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities*, historian of religions Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty considers the paradoxical theme of the "dreamer dreamt" in various mythological traditions. In Hindu and Buddhist contexts, this idea that reality is a dream is considered an important spiritual insight that can help one along the path towards Enlightenment; "yet when we weigh the attention paid to this theme in Western literature, it appears to have been tackled only intermittently and rather nervously." (O'Flaherty 1984, 245) The Alice stories are a rare exception, O'Flaherty says. In particular, the dream of the Red King brings to the fore a metaphysical puzzle about dreaming, reality, and human creativity: "Our greatest surprise arises not from the discovery that the hierarchy of dreamers is not fixed, as we thought it was, or that we are not at the top of it, as we thought we were, but from the realization that new hierarchies are constantly being created, by our minds and by those who are thinking about us." (259)

2.12. Freedom

Nothing is really impossible in Wonderland. Alice's explorations and discoveries are limited only by her own imagination. When she asks the Cheshire Cat which way she ought to go, he replies "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." (AW 6) The Frog Footman at the house of the Duchess gives a similar response when Alice asks him what she should do: "'Anything you like,' said the Footman" (AW 6). Alice has more power, agency, and freedom than she seems to consciously recognize. At several points her wishes actually come true and make things happen, although she does not make an explicit connection between her wish and the subsequent event. Just before she finds the bottle that enables her to shrink in size, she looks longingly through the little door into the beautiful garden and says, "Oh how I wish I could shut up like a telescope!" (AW 1) As Tweedledee and Tweedledum engage in ridiculous combat, Alice sighs to herself, "I wish the monstrous crow would come!" This is a reference to the nursery rhyme in which a huge crow interrupts the Tweedle brothers' battle. A moment later, the sky darkens like a black cloud with wings—'It's the crow!' Tweedledum cried out in a shrill voice of alarm" (TLG 4) The Lion and the Unicorn refer to Alice as "the Monster," which she does not like, and as they criticize her, the sound of drumming suddenly fills the air, deafening everyone and driving all the creatures away. Alice seems to have some awareness that her wish has come true: "If *that* doesn't 'drum them out of town,' she thought to herself, "nothing ever will!" (TLG 7) Despite constant attempts by other characters to control or constrain her, Alice experiences an almost dizzying degree of freedom, power, and agency in Wonderland.

The same is true of dreaming, of course, which provides a blank canvas for the imagination, offering the dreamer a palette of infinite creativity to envision being anywhere, with anyone, doing anything. The idea of dreaming as a space of maximal imaginative freedom accords well with current neuroscientific research. In REM sleep, and presumably dreaming, there is high activation among the association networks of the brain, and low activation among the executive control functions. This suggests that, compared to waking consciousness, dreaming mentation has a wider range of connectivity among various kinds of thoughts, feelings,

and memories, and less constraint by externally-focused attention (Hartmann 2000, Kryger et al. 2005). We experience much more cognitive freedom in dreaming than in waking. This is the animating insight of Existential Psychoanalysis, in which dreaming is treated as an authentic experience of being-in-the-world, just as we would say of our waking lives. Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, and others in this lineage value dreams as therapeutic guides to areas of constraint and limitation. By fully embracing the existential reality and authenticity of our dreaming selves, we can revitalize and reconnect with our innate capacity for free choice and action (Binswanger 1967, Boss 1958). From this theoretical perspective, the bizarre, irrational, counter-factual phenomena that pervade our dreams are actually revelations of our true existential freedom.

In both stories, Alice ends the narrative by affirmatively deciding to wake herself out of the dream and leave Wonderland. It might appear that normal waking reality has reasserted authority and control over Alice's consciousness, but at the end of the second book she explicitly rejects that conclusion. The expanded perspective she developed in Wonderland has carried over into her waking awareness. She has a very different view of "normal" reality now than she did before. In the final paragraph of *TLG*, while sitting with her favorite feline in the great armchair and reflecting on her experiences, Alice ponders again the paradox of the Red King's dream:

'Now, Kitty, let's consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear... You see, Kitty, it must have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too! Was it the Red King, Kitty?'

Regrettably, her cat gives no reply. Carroll ends the book, and the whole overarching narrative of Alice's adventures, by posing the same question to his readers: "Which do you think it was?"

3. Social Subversion

The pervasive and highly realistic dreaminess of the two stories suggests a serious degree of authorial intent. There are more than just a few stray references to dreaming in these books; there are dozens of them, covering a remarkably wide range of dream phenomenology, from the common and familiar to the weird and transcendent. These references are more than just literary devices to help the plot along; they are woven into the very nature of Wonderland. They stimulate Alice's mind, enliven her awareness, and introduce her, and her readers, to vital questions of psychology, philosophy, and metaphysics.

The following section will propose an explanation for why Carroll created such a detailed and comprehensive portrait of dreaming in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. This explanation depends on three historical/biographical facts that, taken together, suggest a specific motive for the supreme dreaminess of Wonderland.

The first fact to consider is that Carroll lived during the peak of the British Empire. This was the largest empire the world has ever known in terms of territory conquered and people governed. His life span (1832-1898) fits perfectly within the era that historians call Britain's "Imperial Century" (1815-1914). The "*Pax Britannica*" was a time of unrivaled global power, military dominance, and commercial expan-

sion. Carroll lived and worked in the center of that mighty geopolitical hegemon. The schools where he was educated and then became a teacher were designed to prepare young men for their future duties in ruling the empire via service in the military, government, business, and the church. None of that appealed to Dodgson, however. His female friendships and interests in theater, poetry, and esoteric spirituality put him far outside the mainstream of British masculine behavior. His life is even more closely coterminous with the monarchy of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), whose long reign was devoted to a religiously inspired push for higher moral standards and social reforms, especially around gender and sexuality. Women and children were idealized during this time as the embodiments of purity and innocence, yet they were also the worst victims of urban poverty, dehumanizing labor, and sexual abuse. Carroll was aware of these realities, too, and through his life he made numerous financial donations to charities dedicated to the care and protection of destitute women and children (Woolf 2010).

The second fact is that he *hated* his time as a boarding student at Rugby, a public school he attended for three years, from ages 14 to 17. Writing in his diary a few years later, he said, "I cannot say that I look back upon my life at a Public school with any sensation of pleasure, or that any earthly considerations would induce me to go through my three years again." (Woolf 23) One of the famous public schools for the young gentlemen of the British elite, Rugby had a long history of violence and brutality (Woolf 22). This was true of virtually all the top schools in England at the time, where beatings by teachers, bullying by older students, and sexual abuse in the dormitories at night were considered appropriate methods for developing strong character and personal fortitude. Carroll experienced it differently. After visiting another school, he observed in his diary that each boy had a private sleeping cubicle, "a snug little bed-room secured to himself, where he is free from interruption and annoyance... From my own experience of school life at Rugby I can say that if I could have been thus secure from annoyance at night, the hardships of the daily life would have been comparative trifles to bear." (Woolf 24)

Almost from the time he could write, Carroll kept a detailed personal journal, and he did so faithfully throughout his life. All biographers note the significant gap in his diaries between 1858 and 1862, the years immediately preceding his composition of *AW*. It seems that during this time he had a romantic attachment that did not turn out well, and after his death his family members apparently destroyed the diaries from these four years, along with other private papers. Less well-known is the *earlier* gap in his diaries—from his three years at Rugby (Leach 23). It's unclear if Carroll himself simply lost the diaries or if, like the ones from 1858-1862, they were destroyed by family members to protect aspects of his life that he found painful and/or embarrassing. Either way, the missing journals from his Rugby years add to the idea that Dodgson loathed his time at the school, especially during the unsupervised nights in the boys' dormitories.

The third fact to consider is that Charles Dodgson, a professor of mathematics at one of the most venerable Oxford colleges, adopted the pseudonym "Lewis Carroll" in order to write a radically new kind of children's literature. Dodgson wrote several other books under his real name, mostly textbooks on math and geometry. He was a natural teacher and entertainer, going back to his early childhood as the oldest boy in a large family of siblings. But none of that came out

in his college teaching, where his classroom efforts to enlighten the privileged young men failed miserably. According to one biographer,

"Although it was possible to be a serious and purposeful student at Oxford, the prevailing tone was frivolous, self-indulgent, decorative, even flamboyant. Most young men came because it was the right course for their social class... Men with intellectual interests and ambitions were in the minority. Noblemen's sons came to fritter away their time; country gentlemen's heirs, who had grown up riding, shooting, and hunting, came to Oxford unwilling to give up their habits or horses..." (Cohen 33-34)

As Charles Dodgson, he was bound to his conventional identity in this world and his conventional work of teaching these diffident students. But as Lewis Carroll, he could freely explore other literary possibilities and other opportunities for educational guidance. His lifelong delight in storytelling led him away from the arrogant young men in his Oxford classes and towards younger children, especially girls, whose minds had not already been thoroughly molded and trained to obey the rigid social hierarchies of the Victorian era.

It is hard today to appreciate how dramatically the Alice stories violated the traditional forms of children's literature at this time, which emphasized clear morals and strict warnings about the dangers of sinful behavior. Dodgson, in the literary guise of Lewis Carroll, overturned all of that. Instead of the solemn, pious certitudes of Victorian moralism, he offered slapstick chaos and hilarious mockery of adult authorities. Instead of preaching down to children, he told a story from the child's point of view, allowing Alice to be an active protagonist in fanciful adventures that led her far, far away from the normal world of adulthood. Instead of imposing a protective tone of forced cheerfulness, he respected the courage and intelligence of his young readers enough to share some dark, frightening, and unsettling truths with them.

To summarize: Charles Dodgson grew up in the center of the world's greatest empire at the height of its power, but felt profoundly alienated from many of its cultural norms, especially those involving proper masculine behavior (Woolf 295-296). After becoming an Oxford professor, he adopted a pseudonym and wrote surreal, radically child-centered stories. The suggestion here is that Dodgson did this—became Lewis Carroll and wrote the tales of Alice's adventures—because he wanted to help children develop the mental strength to survive their socialization into the adult world of Imperial Britain with sanity intact. Putting it in contemporary terms, he wrote a children's manifesto for decolonizing consciousness. Dodgson knew from personal experience what lay ahead for them in their schooling and in society. He had direct knowledge of what young British men were capable of doing in the night, how arrogant and frivolous they were in the day, and how little they actually understood about the world they were being bred to rule. He knew that many of Victorian society's rules of behavior were, at base, arbitrary and unjust, and yet the moral authorities would always insist these rules are entirely normal, logical, right, and necessary. If anyone ever questioned these rules, the authorities would respond with immediate anger and aggression, no matter how ignorant or misguided they were. This was the social reality into which the children of Dodgson's time were being educated, trained, and subjugated.

Seen in this context, the Alice stories provide children with a practical resource to help them navigate through this reality without being consumed by its madness and capricious brutality. That resource is a knowledge of dreaming. To learn about dreaming is to learn that the rules of present-day society are just one of many ways of organizing things; that nothing is really stable or fixed; that language is a kind of game that can be manipulated for selfish purposes; that what seems random and bizarre from one perspective is deeply meaningful when seen from another; that other people and creatures have their own personal points of view; that social authorities often have great power but no understanding of what they are doing or why; that life is tenuous and fragile; that each of us has more strength, wisdom, and courage within us than we consciously realize.

These insights go far beyond what children's literature had ever tried to convey before. Dodgson was teaching his young readers to question reality at the most fundamental level and to stretch their imaginations in radically new directions. Alice and her peers were growing towards an adulthood in which they would be expected to leave childish things behind and assume their highly structured roles as rational, civilized, well-behaved imperial subjects. Dodgson tried to help them before that happened, to teach them how to recognize and appreciate the powers of the imagination they have within themselves and to use those creative powers to defend themselves against the oppressive social norms of Victorian England. The more one knows about dreaming, the more easily one can see through the vain pretensions of society and develop one's own independent identity.

4. Conclusion

Dodgson made his authorial intention as clear as possible by the question he posed on the final page of *Through the Looking Glass*. Instead of concluding with a clearly stated moral lesson, as all children's books traditionally did, he ended with an open question that his young readers were invited to consider and answer for themselves. He respectfully asked each of them to ponder whose dream it was, Alice's or the Red King's. In so doing, he invited everyone reading his stories to consider the personal relevance of this profound and vital question. Are you actively creating the dream of your own life, or are you merely a character in someone else's dream?

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