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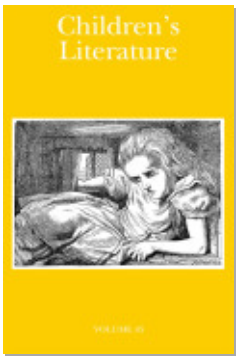

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Articles

Queen Alice and the Monstrous Child: Alice through the Looking-Glass

Veronica Schanoes

In chapter 10 of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, the unicorn, who had been battling the lion for the crown of the White King, catches sight of Alice and regards her "with an air of the deepest disgust." When informed, with great to-do, that she is a *child*, the unicorn is very excited, exclaiming, "I always thought they were fabulous monsters!" It is even more fascinated upon being informed that "It [Alice] can talk," and when addressed, Alice good-naturedly says that *she* had always thought that *unicorns* were fabulous monsters (175).[1] Despite this momentary mutual recognition of monstrosity, it is Alice who is referred to as "the Monster" and addressed as "Monster" by both the unicorn and the lion for the rest of the chapter. In this sequel to Carroll's wildly successful *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the dream-child has become a monster. Despite pages full of gryphons, mock turtles, and bloodthirsty queens, this is the only use of the word "monster" in either Alice book.

But why? On the face of it, the Alice of *Looking-Glass* is far *less* monstrous than the Alice of *Wonderland*, as Nina Auerbach noted nearly forty years ago. *Wonderland* Alice's size and shape change at an alarming rate and with an alarming elasticity; *Looking-Glass* Alice maintains her physical self admirably well. *Wonderland* Alice threatens the inhabitants of the fantastical realm through which she travels both accidentally, when she speaks repeatedly and longingly of her cat Dinah, who would love to gobble down the creatures Alice encounters, and purposefully, when she warns the White Rabbit not to set fire to his own house in order to rid it of her overlarge presence; *Looking-Glass* Alice is unfailingly helpful, and even deferential, to those she encounters, biting down on some of her thoughts to avoid "hurting the poor Queen's feelings" (although she does threaten to pick a few unruly flowers at the very beginning of the story and destroy her banquet at the end) (196).

I would suggest that Alice's monstrosity in *Looking-Glass* is key to understanding some of the sharp differences between this book and its predecessor, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Carroll had established the question of Alice's identity as central to *Wonderland*, as she wonders if she is curly-haired Ada or possibly the ignorant and deprived Mabel, the rabbit mistakes her for his housemaid and succeeds in interpolating her into that role, and she is told there is no difference between her and a serpent. I have, in a previous article, discussed what it means for there to be no difference between a little girl and a serpent; here I wish to understand what it means for a child to be a monster, to Carroll, to his contemporary readers, and to us. I will demonstrate that Alice's ascension to queendom, the central quest of *Looking-Glass*, is intimately tied to the monstrosity of childhood, and that rather than the book being an indictment of Alice's royal ambition to maturity, becoming a queen is Alice's path out of monstrosity.

What is that monstrosity, then? One path we might follow to discover the answer is an etymological exploration of the phrase "fabulous monster." "Fabulous" seems clear enough; certainly both the unicorn and the character of Alice are creatures of fable. But then again, for the unicorn, it is not Alice personally or even little girls generally who are fabulous monsters. It is the category of *children*. In what way, then, are children creatures of fable and monstrous? Turning to the entry for "monster" in the stalwart *Oxford English Dictionary*, we find definition A.1.a.: "Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening." It is interesting that Alice calls the unicorn a fabulous *monster*, rather than a mythical beast or animal, as unicorns are not generally considered monstrous in folklore and fantasy, and it suggests that Carroll specifically means to call on the negative connotations signified here. Indeed, even when the term "monster" does indicate "an astonishing or unnatural degree of excellence," according to the *OED,* it does so negatively, as in the 1682 example when the Duke of Buckingham adjures young writers to "reject that vulgar error which appears So fair, of making perfect characters. . . . you'l draw A faultless Monster. . . . " Not only negativity is associated with monstrosity, but specifically *unnatural, inhuman* negativity, as demonstrated in definitions A.2 and A.5, which in part read, respectively, "Something extraordinary or unnatural" and "A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such

extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman." So children, and unicorns, we find, are ugly and frightening, inhuman and unnatural.[2]

We need not stop with an etymological exploration of monstrosity. Recent years have seen theoretical explorations of what it means to be a monster in various contexts, led in part by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. While monster theory is as tied to its historical moment as any other theoretical discourse, still a reading of Cohen's theses combined with a historically situated account of the meaning of monstrosity in the nineteenth century offer great insight into Alice's—and other children's—monstrosity.

In surveying Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's theses on monster culture, it is tempting to go with the easy explanation: the monster both stands in for and polices unacceptable sexualities and figures the transgression of otherwise unbreachable borders. Charles Dodgson's (aka Lewis Carroll's) deep and disturbing affection for little girls is the stuff of not-particularly-accurate-or-imaginative pop culture "knowledge," and who could represent transgression better than the desired little girl who passes through a mirror? But not only does such an explanation strike me as facile and unsatisfying, more importantly, it seems to say far more about *our* preoccupations than about either Dodgson's or his contemporaries'.

I hope to demonstrate that for Carroll, *Looking-Glass* Alice's monstrosity lay in her status as an uneasy combination of the ever-more-distant child-friend on whom she had been based and his own authorial imagination, as he strove to compensate for not only an ever-more-distant child, but an ever-more-distant *childhood*. *Looking-Glass*'s Alice becomes monstrous in her unattainable innocence and idealized kindness; the very innocence that Carroll invokes distorts Alice into a monster, suggesting that while the figure of the child imagined by the adult may be a monster, it is the adult's imagination that is truly monstrous.

It is all too common for readers to conflate *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, thinking of them as one extended tale about Alice's various adventures. Indeed, they are often bound together in one volume (movies generally mix and match elements from both books). But, of course, the situations with respect to their writing were radically different. *Wonderland* was conceived of originally as an *ex tempore* story told to Alice and her two sisters on one of many afternoons Dodgson spent in their company, and it was written down at the urging of the then-ten-year-old Alice. It saw print three years later—and by that time, there had been some

kind of falling-out between the Liddell family and Dodgson (due to pages having been cut out of his rather extensive diaries, we still do not know the cause[3]) (M. Cohen 100). *Through the Looking-Glass* seems to have been composed between 1866 and 1871, when it was published. By then, Alice was nineteen years old, and it had been eight years since Dodgson and she had been on close terms. In other words, while Dodgson had, of course, scores of other child-friends, it had been quite some time since he had last spent time with Alice Liddell, and it had become quite impossible to spend time with the child Alice.

The personal situation was quite different, and so are the two books, with *Wonderland* being a rather anarchic, episodic nightmare while *Looking-Glass* is a more orderly chess game. *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* is built around a central quest, Alice's journey across the world of the chessboard to become a queen. Alice loses her name and her memory temporarily on this journey, and much of the novel reflects Dodgson's own horror of aging ("You're beginning to fade, you know," the Rose tells her in the garden of live flowers [123], and when Alice tells Humpty Dumpty that "one ca'n't help getting older," he responds that "One ca'n't, perhaps, . . . but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven" [162]). Carroll makes this clearer nowhere than in the prefatory poem to *Looking-Glass*, in which he figures Alice's adult life as a "hereafter" to her childhood, thus equating it with death. But Alice herself sees her ascension as a very desirable rite of passage. Thus the girl who barely escaped from Wonderland with her identity intact assumes the heavy crown of authority when she ventures beyond the looking glass.

Despite these differences between the novels' structures—an episodic picaresque as opposed to a plotted journey with a goal—they do share a a certain strong ambivalence regarding their authorship, or, as Marah Gubar argues in *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, Dodgson's desire for a true collaboration between adult and child, combined with the fear that no such equal partnership is possible. *Wonderland* opens with a prefatory poem portraying the story's origin not in Dodgson's imagination alone, but arising from among the questions, demands, and interruptions of all three Liddell girls—the "Cruel Three" whose "three tongues together" determine the course of the story despite the teller's fatigue. In the prefatory poem to *Wonderland*, Carroll's account of the origin of the story is one of fatigue and bossy little girls: "Yet what can one poor voice avail / Against three tongues together? / Imperious Prima flashes forth /

Her edict 'to begin it': / In gentler tones Secunda hopes / 'There will be nonsense in it!' / While Tertia interrupts the tale / Not *more* than once a minute" (3). We are then treated to an example of this dynamic when the dormouse—there are some indications that, like the dodo, he is a figure representing Dodgson[4]—attempts to tell a story at the Mad Tea Party. These are the circumstances under which the original Alice story was created, according to Carroll, and he emphasizes the point further by Alice's behavior during the dormouse's attempt to tell a story:

> "Once upon a time there were three little sisters," the Dormouse began in a great hurry; "and their names were Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie; and they lived at the bottom of a well—"
>
> "What did they live on?" said Alice, who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking.
>
> "They lived on treacle," said the Dormouse, after thinking a minute or two.
>
> "They couldn't have done that, you know," Alice gently remarked. "They'd have been ill."
>
> "So they were," said the Dormouse; "*very* ill" (58–59).

Alice goes on to interrupt the dormouse at least four or five more times, her interruptions determining the information the dormouse provides and thus the course of his story. In a very real way, Alice and the dormouse create the story *together*, and tellingly, it is a story about little girls. Again, what is at stake is the question of who gets to write the narrative of childhood, who gets to construct childhood and child-characters.

But the scene described in the opening poem to *Wonderland* has changed dramatically by the end of *Looking-Glass*. In the ending poem to *Looking-Glass*, the origin tale is refigured so that the three girls are far more idealized—not to mention quieter: "Children three that nestle near, / Eager eye and willing ear, / Pleased a simple tale to hear" (209). In this idealized, sanitized version of the story's origin, Alice and her sisters have become a silent, innocent audience. When writing childhood is left to adults, we run the risk of making child-characters into monsters of sentimentality and nostalgia. The question with which the narrative of *Looking-Glass* closes asks whether the entire story had been Alice's dream or that of the Red King . . . such a binary division, of course, ignores the possibility of a joint dream, the collaborative partnership so strongly desired in the prefatory poem to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and suggested throughout that narrative by passages in

which Alice considers that she ought to be the subject of a fairy tale, and that "when I'm grown-up, I'll write one" (29). There is a similar gesture toward joint authorship in *Looking-Glass* when, just after Alice passes through the mirror, she finds the various chess pieces struggling on the floor where they have fallen. Invisible to the pieces, she moves the White King to the top of a table, and he decides to make a note of the experience:

> Alice looked on with great interest as the King took an enormous memorandum-book out of his pocket, and began writing. A sudden thought struck her, and she took hold of the end of the pencil, which came some way over his shoulder, and began writing for him.
>
> The poor King looked puzzled and unhappy, and struggled with the pencil for some time without saying anything; but Alice was too strong for him, and at last he panted out "My dear! I really *must* get a thinner pencil. I ca'n't manage this one a bit: it writes all manner of things that I don't intend—" (115)

The King's interrupted struggle with the attempt to write *his* feelings is hijacked by Alice's interest in describing the adventures of the White Knight ("The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly" [116]) While the struggle over the pencil may seem more adversarial than collaborative, it is not unlike the interactions Carroll describes between himself as the tale teller and Alice and Edith Liddell as the collaborative audience in the prefatory poem to *Wonderland*: "In gentler tones Secunda hopes / 'There will be nonsense in it!' / While Tertia interrupts the tale / Not *more* than once a minute."

Alice's seemingly adversarial authorial relationship with the White King creates the text in his memorandum book. Given that what Alice is writing is a description of the White Knight, her writing is particularly suggestive in light of the White Knight's identification with Carroll himself. Is Carroll writing Alice, or is Alice writing Carroll? Or is this scene, in which Alice overpowers a king, a foreshadowing of her ascension to a queenhood of her own by the end of the novel? If monsters, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests, are monstrous in part because of their refusal to remain confined in orderly categories, the author who is jointly adult and child, unable to be only or wholly one or the other because the author is actually both, becomes inherently monstrous. But there are notably fewer fantasies of authorial collaboration in *Looking-Glass* than there are in *Wonderland*, and I would suggest that

this change reflects the distancing of the figure of Alice the character. The collaborative chaos of *Wonderland* has become the orderly lesson of a chess game, and correspondingly, aggressive, angry Alice becomes a sanitized innocent.

The *desire* for an adult-child collaboration has not changed, as indicated by the incident with the White King's memorandum book cited above, but the character of Alice herself has, as Nina Auerbach pointed out in her landmark essay "Alice: A Curious Child." Compared with her *Wonderland* sister, *Looking-Glass* Alice is relatively meek and mild, resignedly putting up with the annoying antics of the creatures around her so as not to offend them (in *Wonderland*, of course, she had no such scruples). The very openings of the two books demonstrate a difference in Alice's character. *Wonderland* Alice is feeling bored, and within a few sentences we are in the thick of her adventures as she chases the White Rabbit. *Looking-Glass* Alice spends some pages in a sort of precious, saccharine monologue to the black kitten, saying things like "you little mischievous darling!" and "I wonder if the snow *loves* the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says 'Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again'" (108, 109). The word "darling" is not to be found in *Wonderland*, but here Alice uses it twice in a few pages. Another interesting difference between the two books is in their use of nonsense poetry. *Wonderland*'s Alice is the source of almost all the nonsense poetry in that text, with the exception of the "Lobster Quadrille" and "Beautiful Soup," underscoring her status as collaborator and author, and a good deal of her poetry is threatening, such as "How Doth the Little Crocodile." But *Looking-Glass* Alice is almost always the audience, and a polite audience she is, often stifling her impatience and boredom (the very emotion that led her into adventure in *Wonderland*), as in her response to the White Knight's offer of song ("'Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?' Alice said, trying to feel interested" [186]) or Humpty-Dumpty's poetry:

> "As to poetry, you know," said Humpty-Dumpty, stretching out one of his great hands, "*I* can repeat poetry as well as other folk, if it comes to that—"
>
> "Oh, it needn't come to that!" Alice hastily said, hoping to keep him from beginning.
>
> "The piece I'm going to repeat," he went on without noticing her remark, "was written entirely for your amusement."
>
> Alice felt that in that case she really *ought* to listen to it; so she sat down, and said "Thank you" rather sadly . . . (166)

Alice not only succumbs to a sense of obligation when it comes to listening to nonsense in *Looking-Glass*, in contrast to her abrupt departures from the Mad Tea Party and the caterpillar in *Wonderland* when they tried her patience, but she demonstrates respect and kindness to the queens, helping to dress the somewhat pathetic White Queen and obeying the Red Queen when first she meets her in the garden:

> "Where do you come from?" said the Red Queen. "And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time."
>
> Alice attended to all these directions. . . . (124)

Not only does Alice attend to all those directions, but she calls the queen "your Majesty" as requested, and when the queen contradicts her, Alice "didn't dare to argue the point." This is in contrast to Alice's attitude and behavior toward the Queen of Hearts in Wonderland, where she decides not to follow the gardeners' lead in literally kowtowing to the queen. While she is initially polite, she answers the queen's question about who the gardeners are by saying "How should *I* know? . . . It's no business of mine." When the queen takes in the situation and orders that the gardeners be beheaded, Alice actually interrupts her by saying "Nonsense!" "very loudly and decidedly" (64). Her relationship to the animals in Wonderland is bound up with issues of predator and prey ("Do cats eat bats?" she wonders as she falls down the rabbit hole. "Do bats eat cats?" [9]). She terrorizes the mouse and assorted birds she meets in the pool of tears with tales of her cat Dinah, but in *Looking-Glass*, her behavior toward animals is kind and courteous, as she wanders companionably through the forest where things lose their names with her arms around the fawn's neck (the fawn does run off when it recognizes Alice as a human child, but Alice herself makes no threatening move) and obeys the lion's and the unicorn's commands.

Auerbach ascribes this difference to Dodgson's distance from the real Alice. The prefatory poem to *Looking-Glass* would tend to support this reading, as Carroll refers to himself and Alice being "half a life asunder," and asserts that he is the farthest thing from her mind: "No thought of me shall find a place / In thy young life's hereafter" (103). That "hereafter" is not an isolated incident—the poem is rife with allusions to Alice's death and ghostliness: "Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread, / With bitter tidings laden, / shall summon to unwelcome bed / A melancholy maiden!" (103). While early death was not at all uncommon (indeed, Alice's sister Edith perished at the age of twenty-

two just a few years after the publication of *Looking-Glass*), Alice was alive and well. Yet the final poem of *Looking-Glass* refers to her "haunting" Carroll, "phantomwise" (209). Despite her continued life, for Dodgson, Alice had passed beyond the veil and become someone it was possible to idealize, as we so often construct hagiographies of the dead.

It is this very distance from what Auerbach terms "the real Alice" that positions *Looking-Glass* Alice as a monster. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes in his "Monster Culture: Seven Theses" that the monster's habitation is always "at the margins of the world (a purely conceptual locus rather than a geographic one)," that "the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct, but originate within" (6, 7). I would argue that the past, in relation to the present, certainly qualifies as being placed rhetorically as distant and distinct, but of course, it originates in, or as, the present. If we consider childhood as the past to an adult present, that relationship is even more striking, particularly in an age that was struggling to set childhood apart from adulthood both ideologically and legally in ways that it had not previously been, through, for example, child labor laws. It is the very distance that transforms Alice from a threatening, rude, and thoughtless little girl to a dream-child courteous to all, "gentle as a fawn, loving as a dog," as Carroll put it in his rather sappy "Alice on the Stage," which also makes her a monster. And as a monster, of course, she is ungraspable, "Never seen by waking eyes," as Dodgson puts it in the concluding poem (209). Thus Dodgson finds himself in the position of many a seeker after monsters, for, as Cohen's second thesis has it, "the monster always escapes. . . . Monstrous interpretation is as much process as epiphany, a work that must content itself with fragments [such as] . . . talismans, shadows, obscured glimpses, signifiers of monstrous passing that stand in for the monstrous body itself" (5–6). It was Otto Rank who observed that shadows and mirror reflections are merely alternate forms of each other, and surely the dream is the obscured glimpse, the signifier of monstrous passing sine qua non.

As Alice's and Dodgson's own childhood, the loss of which he was already writing about regretfully at the age of twenty-one,[5] both receded into the past, the fictional Alice, *Looking-Glass* Alice, is left to represent the Other that is the child in Victorian England. While Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that "the monster dwells at the gates of difference," he focuses his discussion on racial, sexual, gendered, and religious difference. But what about the difference inherent in the group of people

we categorize as children? Do adults not project onto them what we need or want to see as well?

Certainly, the idealization of children and childhood "innocence," which continues into the present day, is one version of that projection, as adults imagine[d] children to be imbued with an innocence and divinity, a connection to the godhead and to nature impossible for an adult in his/her fallen state to grasp. As J. M. Barrie puts it: "We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more" (8). We may be able to sense the innocence that is childhood, but we cannot attain it.

So too is the idea, which I would also term an idealization, of the child as the wild, ungraspable Other that Jacqueline Rose constructs in *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, an adult projection of difference. The notion that adults, each of whom has once been a child, are so wholly incapable of accurately remembering or understanding children that children's literature becomes an impossibility, is absolutely dependent on an assumption, or rather, a projection, of utter and absolute difference, as well as a fantasy of a being who is not always already written by and writing into the social/cultural/symbolic order. Just as adults who know their own corruption wished for children to carry the light of innocence and thus redeem humanity, Rose's fantasy of a human being interacting with other human beings, but a human being still untouched by (and who does not touch) the symbolic order and its sociocultural weight, is a fantasy that sacrifices children's humanity in order to have them stand for an adult fantasy of untouched difference. Marah Gubar's eloquent rebuttal to and critique of this notion in *Artful Dodgers* posits that Golden Age authors understood children as canny interlocutors, socialized beings who use the symbolic order and the cultural products directed at them as much as they are used by them. *Wonderland*'s Alice may be just such a child-character, but *Looking-Glass* Alice has succumbed to hagiography.

Thus *Looking-Glass* Alice's monstrosity lies in her ambiguous reality status—she is a representation of Carroll's most beloved child-friend—or is she? Is she a figure onto whom an exoticized ideal of difference-as-innocence has been projected, despite Dodgson's own desires for a collaborator willful enough to refuse to be the White Knight's prisoner, to battle the Red King for ownership of a dream, and to seize the pencil from the White King, to write rather than be written? If so, *Looking-Glass* Alice becomes, then, an example of the monstrosity of the cult of the child, which sacrificed children's humanity for the sake of their innocence, a representative of the monstrous adult imagination.

But what about the larger Victorian context? What could *Looking-Glass* Alice's monstrosity possibly have meant when set within the larger currents of contemporary thought about monsters? Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson trace out a cultural shift in thought about the relationship between physical and moral monstrosity marked in the beginning by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and culminating at the fin de siècle with Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. They write that

> by the end of the century, monstrosity was no longer necessarily being viewed as an aberration of nature visited upon the very few, but as something residing within apparently normal, respectable, and respected individuals . . . all these fin-de-siècle monsters . . . collectively pose the question of the extent to which monstrosity is containable and concealable. The answer is deeply disturbing either way . . . : if we follow Stevenson's logic that . . . monstrosity is concealed and contained within the normal and indeed virtuous, that means we are surrounded by monsters who . . . do not warn us of this by their appearance. . . . On the other hand, if we opt for Wilde's hypothesis, the implication is that sooner or later the poisonous world turns us all into monsters and . . . we cannot prevent that seeping through our respectable outer selves and betraying our darkest secrets to all those we encounter through the ravages of age. (255)

Considering these two options, does Alice already contain monstrosity within her, concealed by her kind manners and Tenniel's appealing illustrations? Or is she doomed to become a moral monster, corrupted by the evils of life, with those corruptions appearing on her face and body as she ages and turning her into a physical monster as well?

Either is, of course, possible, but it is telling that one of the many theories advanced in Stevenson's book to account for the strange hold the abominable Mr. Hyde seems to have over the good Dr. Jekyll is that the former is the latter's illegitimate son—indeed, Jennifer Sattaur uses Hyde as the example of the "monstrous child" in her book on representations of childhood at the fin de siècle.[6] If Alice already both contains and conceals monstrosity, as did Jekyll, this is nothing new to her, or to Carroll, at least. It was, after all, in Wonderland that we found that a little girl could also be the serpent. Alice is the expectant mother to her own monstrosity, containing and concealing it, at once undoing Victorian tropes of childhood innocence and maternal saintliness. The

fable that makes Alice a monster is the narrative of the pure, innocent child, a narrative to which Carroll can succumb himself ("child of the pure unclouded brow"), a narrative that is fundamentally inhuman and unnatural—perhaps even larger than life.[7]

What makes *Looking-Glass* Alice a monster is both the uneasy knowledge that she is a creation, and that she is a misrepresentation of difference, a fictional child in an era that was asking its children to do the emotional labor of redeeming us with the power of their innocence; as Lisa Makman observes in her essay "Child's Work Is Child's Play: The Value of George MacDonald's Diamond," the cult of childhood demanded innocence. Alice is a human form distorted by projection and desire. It is her very innocence and mildness that make her a monster, whereas the monstrous appetites and threats of *Wonderland*'s Alice mark her only as human, as one of us.

Is there a way out for *Looking-Glass* Alice, or is she trapped in monstrous innocence and kindness? In *Artful Dodgers*, Gubar argues that

> Rather than single-mindedly insisting that a firm barrier separates—and ought to separate—young from old, Carroll frequently blurs this line, characterizing the child not as an untouched Other but as a collaborator enmeshed in a complicated relationship with the adults who surround her. . . . He hopes that children can function as empowered collaborators, but . . . he fears that the power imbalance inherent in the adult-child relationship ensures that all adults can offer children is a fraudulent illusion of reciprocity. (95–96)

Indeed, Gubar presses home the point that for Carroll, children's refusal and denial of adult wishes is essential to their very selves: Carroll "represents children as social, socialized beings whose autonomy is limited to saying no to other people's stories about them. In this way, Carroll conceives of identity itself as a collaborative affair, in that it is inevitably *reactive*, formed in reference to the commands and desires of the community one inhabits" (98). In other words, for Alice to successfully form her own autonomous identity, she *needs* to disagree with and defy the wishes of adults—perhaps particularly the adult narrator who wishes that "The magic words shall hold thee fast; / Thou shalt not heed the raving blast" of adulthood (103).[8]

Looking-Glass Alice has one ambition, one goal: to become a queen. If we accept Gubar's assessment of Carroll's texts as self-aware, intelligent, and thoughtful considerations of relationships between adults

and children, I would suggest that we read Alice's ambition as that of defiance and disagreement with the adult narrator. Queenhood, or becoming an adult woman, is the route out of monstrosity that Carroll offers Alice.

The critical verdict on Alice's reign is that this sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* a book that celebrated Alice's anger and aggression, utterly condemns her queenly ambitions. Laura Mooneyham White argues in her 2007 essay "Domestic Queen, Queenly Domestic: Queenly Contradictions in Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*" that the events of *Through the Looking-Glass* indicate that Carroll indicts girls' ambitions to queenhood, which she reads as symbolic of political power and adulthood. She writes that Carroll's text reflects his rejection of the corruption such power would inevitably bring to the purity so many Victorians imagined they could locate in prepubescent girls. But in this essay, I am arguing that Carroll's innocent little girl-character is already a monster by virtue of that innocence and, given his unusual use of the term "monster," Carroll is self-aware enough to mark his creation's monstrosity. I would argue that Alice's experience of queening is more significant than the writer's or narrator's wistful nostalgia for the childhood of Alice Liddell, nineteen years old when *Looking-Glass* was published.

Prior critics have assumed that when Alice's perspective differs from the narrator's and the events he constructs around her, we are supposed to understand the narrator to be in the right. Adrienne Auslander Munich writes that "Carroll presents a conversation between three 'queens'—the Red Queen, the White Queen, and the newly crowned Queen Alice—in *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872). Their conversation reveals that not one of them is capable of emmanlinacy [Munich's word for positive masculinity appropriate to the public sphere but inappropriate for a woman; it is, she writes, a counterpart to "effeminacy"]. They are properly queens, incapable of rationality" (269). Noting that Carroll's queens are not rational is, of course, accurate; but who in these books is? Irrationality is the rule, not a marker of special incapacity on the part of queens. Joanna Tapp Pierce argues that "when [Alice] reaches that pinnacle of female achievement, she also discovers that it holds no power" (751). But as we shall see in this paper, Alice holds all the power in the Looking-Glass world—so much so that when she has had enough, she destroys it and renders the Red Queen a harmless if mischievous kitten. Jennifer Geer dismisses Alice's own perspective with the following: "The contrast between her success and the coronation

feast, which literally overturns her triumph, only intensifies the sense that maturity is no prize at all, but a profound disappointment. Alice herself, who calmly pretends to mother the black kitten once she returns to her own drawing room in the final chapter, never quite grasps this implication, but it certainly is available to the adult reader" (15). Not only is Geer mistaken about the coronation feast (Alice overturns the feast, not the other way round), but also I would be very skeptical of a reading that depends on a dismissal of Alice as dense, unobservant, or ignorant. Finally, White argues, "On almost every page, *Through the Looking-Glass* illustrates the disappointing consequences awaiting the girl who would be queen. . . . Carroll's moral holds that wanting to be queen, or rather 'queens together,' is the most absurd sort of quest for a little girl like Alice," and describes queenship as a "hopelessly frustrating role she should never have hoped to play, a role that brings out the worst in her character" (113). Note White's assumption that "arrogance, cruelty, and violence," the traits that she argues queenship brings out in Alice, are *undesirable*, despite the fact that they are what enable Alice to break out of worlds that have grown intolerable twice.

That's what the critics think. But what does Alice herself think? Alice is unmistakable in her desire to be queen. Indeed, even before she gets to the Looking-Glass world, we're told that "She had had quite a long argument with her sister only the day before—all because Alice had begun with 'Let's pretend we're kings and queens'; and her sister, who liked being very exact, had argued that they couldn't, because there were only two of them, and Alice had been reduced at last to say "Well, *you* can be one of them then, and *I'll* be all the rest" (110). Here we see not only Alice's ambition to be kings and queens (multiple), a desire fulfilled by her dreaming mind's manifestations of two kings and two queens each, but her desire for a sisterhood of royalty, not unlike the one she finally achieves with the Red and White Queens (of course, she finds the company of those queens more annoying than anything else, but such is often the way with sisters).[9] Alice quite explicitly verbalizes her desire, saying, "I wouldn't mind being a Pawn . . . though of course I should *like* to be a Queen, best," and the Red Queen promises her a future in which "we shall all be Queens together, and it's all feasting and fun!" (126, 128).

Is being a queen all feasting and fun in the Looking-Glass world, which is, of course, nothing more or less than Alice's own mind?[10] One thing we might note is that queens are rather more powerful than kings in this world, just as they are in chess. In rushing to the aid of her child,

the White Queen, so often depicted as hopelessly helpless (or helplessly hopeless) "rushe[s] past the King so violently that she knock[s] him over among the cinders" (113). The king is unhappy but ineffective about the matter. The Red King lies napping while the Red Queen tromps around bossing all and sundry, and Alice herself is kingless, an unattached queen with a decidedly arrogant swagger in Tenniel's illustration of her demanding entrance to her palace. In describing the Red Queen to Alice, the rose tells her that "She's one of the kind that has nine spikes, you know . . . all around her head, of course . . . I was wondering *you* hadn't got some too. I thought it was the regular rule" (123). The rose is certainly suggesting that Alice should have her own crown. In a text by Carroll, that artist of wordplay, I would suggest that there may be a pun on "rule" to suggest that a queen's rule, meaning "reign," is the regular kind of rule. We can find the pun coming up again when the White Queen bemoans her lot, saying "I wish *I* could manage to be glad! . . . Only I never can remember the rule" (152). It seems that a happy queen is one who does not forget to exercise her authority.

Alice's own experience of queenhood is a bit conflicted. She is, as so many critics have already noted, dismayed by her crown which is "very heavy" and "fitted tight all round her head," but under no circumstances does she reject or regret her new position. Indeed, when she first finds herself wearing the crown that has magically appeared on her head, she is careful lest "the crown . . . come off, but she comforted herself with the thought that there was nobody to see her 'and if I really am a Queen,' she said as she sat down again, 'I shall be able to manage it quite well in time'" (192). We see that despite her initial dismay, Alice has no intention of losing her crown, literally and no doubt metonymically as well, and her confidence in herself and her own abilities is paramount—she knows that she shall be able to manage the crown quite well in the foreseeable future. In fact, as we can see from Tenniel's illustration, Alice keeps the crown on her head even while losing her temper and destroying her unruly and frustrating coronation dinner. And despite her inability to pass the Red and White Queens' absurd exam, the Red Queen is forced to hail her as "Queen Alice" in her toast.

Whatever the critics may think, and whatever Carroll's wishes may be, Alice's own desire for and confidence in her queenship never wavers. She never repudiates her ambitions, rejects her crown, or doubts her own authority. It is Carroll's avatars—his narrator, his White Knight, his Gnat—who are sad and wistful for what has been lost in Alice's matura-

tion into queenhood, not Alice. Alice's refusal to accede to Carroll's desire that she stay a child is, Gubar suggests, *essential* in Carroll's own view to her autonomy. She disagrees with the narrator and the author, *and she is right to do so.*

Certainly the journey to queenhood is not without loss—Alice herself fears losing her name along the way, and she temporarily does so in the forest where things have no names. Interestingly enough, the name she is trying to recall begins, she thinks, with "L." "Alice," of course, begins with "A." But "Liddell," Alice's surname, begins with "L," and it is not at all unreasonable to assume that a girl growing into a woman in Victorian England will eventually lose her surname. Alice Liddell did in 1880, when she married and became Alice Hargreaves. Alice's own concern about such a loss is not that she will lose her sense of self (unlike in *Wonderland*, Alice is quite secure in her identity in the Looking-Glass world), but that "they'd have to give me another, and it would be almost certain to be an ugly one. But then the fun would be, trying to find the creature that had got my old name!" (135). Of course, the creature that has Alice Liddell's old name, inscribed in the acrostic with which Carroll ends *Looking-Glass*, is the character Alice.

In exchange for losing this name, Alice acquires authority. She seizes the pencil of the White King early in the novel, and despite his struggles writes what she wishes to communicate, criticizing the balancing skills of one of Carroll's self-insertions, the White Knight. She refuses to be the White Knight's prisoner. And her final act in the Looking-Glass world is to lay hands on her most aggravating antagonist, the Red Queen. While her authority—and authorship—is called into question by the suggestion that the Red King is dreaming her into being, it is clear that after she awakes, Alice does not take this notion seriously. While she bursts into tears during her dream when Tweedledee and Tweedledum first inform her that she is only a sort of thing in the Red King's dream, she is positively light-hearted about the possibility at the end of the novel, putting the question to the black kitten, who considers licking its paw a far more enthralling consideration. The novel itself leaves the control in the hands of the child-reader, as it ends by asking, "Which do *you* think it was?" (208). If the final answer does not lie with Alice, it can be found in another child—the child-reader whose opinion is sought in the narrative's final word.

It is Alice's desires that differentiate *Looking-Glass* from *Wonderland*. Where *Wonderland* is driven by Alice's mounting frustration and anger, *Looking-Glass* is a quest driven by Alice's desires and goals. In the criti-

cal dismissal of Alice's experiences and perspective, in the dismissal of those desires and the dismissal of Alice's refusal to accept or defer to the narrator's melancholy desire for her phantom childhood, I see not Carroll, but our own age's prejudices and willingness to dismiss children's desires, perspectives, and experiences. I see not Carroll, with his gentle respect for children's sensibilities and astute understanding of their joys, but us, regular adults, with our easy ability to override children's stated wishes, secure in the knowledge that we know what's best for our children. Often we are right—my godson does need to go to sleep at seven o'clock in the evening no matter what he may think. But more often than we may like to think, Carroll tells us, we are wrong, particularly when we idealize childhood and children.

But what, then, about *our* child-monsters? Why have we created so many monstrous child-characters, the murderous children that have populated horror movies for over fifty years? They are no meek and mild innocents. What do they want from us with their murderous rampages? What are they asking us? Perhaps after all, what they want is no different from what Carroll gave his Alice: a way out of the monstrosity that is our vision of childhood. It is not only in Looking-Glass land that innocence is coupled with monstrosity.

In "Baby Bitches from Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film," Barbara Creed finds a confluence in the innocence of the female child and her monstrosity in Surrealist thought as well: "The Surrealists idealized the female child as the femme-enfant, and endowed her with a special ability to enter the realm of the marvelous. Through her, they hoped to return to a state of lost innocence and capture again that special state of childhood wonderment at the mysteries and magic of life. . . . A central feature of many films about the young girl is the way in which innocence and evil are interconnected; it is as if the girl's innocence opens the way for the entrance of evil, one feeding off the other in a complex relationship of interdependence" (34, 35–36). Through this lens, monstrosity requires the innocence attributed to the female child in order to be fully realized, and that would be why Alice in Wonderland is *not* a monster—she is simply not innocent enough. We know, for instance, through her encounter with the pigeon, that she is interchangeable with a serpent. But in Looking-Glass land, Alice is comparatively kind and mild—in other words, innocent enough to become a monster.

Karen Coats argues that despite—or, given the foregoing, because of—the prevailing ideology of childhood innocence, the Victorian era

is also characterized by an "outright hatred of otherness," an otherness that includes children and childhood (4). She focuses her attention on the figure of Barrie's Peter Pan, locating in him a heartlessness and *jouissance* that enrages adults who have had to sacrifice such antisocial qualities in order to pursue and maintain peaceful domesticity. Interestingly, she describes Hook's hatred for Pan thus: "What irritates Hook so much is that Peter does not know anything about form, good or bad, which is part of the social substitution we make when we choose society over isolation, particularly in Victorian [culture] . . . Peter only knows how to exercise his joy" (20). It is Peter's innocence that draws Hook's hatred, that makes him into a monster from the point of view of Hook, the adult antagonist. This hatred, she has previously noted, relies on "mak[ing] the figure of the child into an object and enter[ing] into a relation of unequal power with regard to his or her subjectivity. That is, instead of engaging children at the level of subject to subject, we must enter into a relationship with them in terms of subject (us) and object (them). This requires a distancing, a sense of oneself as other than a child, that is, an adult" (7). Having been deemed innocent and transformed into an object, Alice is both less and more than fully human—a monster. And in our society's objectification of children and sanctification of innocence, we have created the space for the child-monsters that populate our movie screens.

The only escape from the monstrosity that is our vision of childhood innocence is to become a queen, to grow up. If Alice the child always already contains monstrosity within her, as I have argued in this paper, the entry into adulthood is what allows the child to defeat that monstrosity. Our nostalgic projection is wrong, and the children who wish to grow up are right, *Through the Looking-Glass* tells us; an inhuman degree of innocence makes monsters.

Notes

[1]*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* are reprinted in *Alice in Wonderland: A Norton Critical Edition*. All page numbers refer to this volume.

[2]I think in this context, we can dispense with "large," as children in general are not. If this word had been used to describe Alice in *Wonderland* rather than *Looking-Glass*, "large" might have been in play, but Alice's size is remarkably stable throughout *Looking-Glass*. It is the chess pieces that seem to have grown big.

[3]The "cut pages in diary document" found by Karoline Leach asserts that the cause of the breach was that Lorina Liddell, Alice's older sister, had expressed romantic feelings for Dodgson, and her parents wished to nip such a development in the bud, but as the document's origin and trustworthiness are uncertain, it is an inconclusive piece of evidence.

[4]Like the dodo, the dormouse's name begins with "Do," the first sound of Dodgson's name, and as an adult, Alice Hargreaves, nee Liddell, remembers Dodgson pretending to fall asleep in the middle of telling a story to his child-friends in order to tease them (qtd. in M. Cohen 91).

[5]In a poem called "Solitude," he wrote, "I'd give all wealth that years have piled, / The slow result of Life's decay, / To be once more a little child, / For one bright summer-day."

[6]That relationship is the one emphasized in the BBC's recent miniseries, *Jekyll*, in which Hyde, now updated to be very sexy indeed—as well as murderous, mad, and preternaturally powerful—refers to his alter ego as "Daddy."

[7]"It's large as life and twice as natural," the White King says of Alice when introducing her to the unicorn.

[8]A significant conversation with respect to this reading occurs toward the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in the courtroom scene, when the dormouse, whom we have already seen as a figure for Dodgson, tells Alice to stop growing: "'You've no right to grow *here*,' said the dormouse. 'Don't talk nonsense,' said Alice more boldly: 'you know you're growing too'" (88). Alice thus allies her penultimate size-change, her spontaneous growth, with *natural* growth, and stands up to the dormouse, who stomps off, frustrated. This exchange, then, supports Gubar's contention that, for Carroll, children must maintain their autonomy in the face of adult pressure by refusing that pressure, even when it comes from a loving and beloved source, and that such refusals are the bedrock of the child's identity, always already socialized and in dialogue with the adult world. Too, rather than disconcerting Alice, this final growth emboldens her: she speaks to the dormouse "more boldly," and in her final exchange with the King of Hearts, she "had grown so large in the last few minutes that she wasn't a bit afraid of interrupting him." The text makes the connection between Alice's size and her boldness even more explicit with her final, angry dismissal of Wonderland: "'Who cares for *you?*' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'" (88–89, 97).

[9]Given that she must mother the White Queen and take direction from the Red Queen, and is then squashed between them as notably illustrated by Tenniel, perhaps we should take this sisterhood as a representation of the three Liddell sisters, of whom Alice was the middle: Lorina, Alice, and Edith.

[10]The book raises the possibility that the Red King, rather than Alice, is the dreamer in this book, but while of course Alice the character is Carroll's dream-child, it is this very indeterminacy—is she dreamer or dreamed?—that helps to position Alice as a monster, neither one thing nor the other.

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