Alice's Adventures inWonderland provides aninexhaustible mine ofliterary, philosophical, andscientific themes. Hereare some general themeswhich the reader may find interesting and of someuse in studying the work.

Alice's initial reaction after falling down the rabbit-hole is one ofextreme loneliness. Her curiosity has led her into a kind of Never-Never Land, over the edge of Reality and into a lonely, very alien world. She is further lost when she cannot establish her identity. Physically, she is lost; psychologically, she also feels lost. She cannot get her recitations right, and she becomes even more confused whenher arithmetic (a subject she believed to be unchanging and solid) fails her. Every attempt to establish a familiar basis of identity createsonly the sense of being lost — absolutely lost. Alice becomes, to thereader, a mistreated, misunderstood, wandering waif. Trapped insolitude, she finds herself lapsing into soliloquies that reflect adivided, confused, and desperate self.

Alice is the most responsible "character" in the story; in fact, she isthe only real person and the only "true" character. At most, the other creatures are antagonists, either a bit genial or cruel, depending onhow they treat Alice at any given point in the story. Alice's innocence makes her a perfect vehicle of social criticism a la Candide. In herencounters, we see the charmingly pathetic ingénue — a child whose only purpose is to escape the afflictions around her. By implication, there is the view that a child's perception of the world is the onlysane one. Conversely, to grow and mature leads to inevitable corruption, to sexuality, emotionalism, and adult hypocrisy. The childas an innocent, sympathetic object has obvious satirical utility, butonly to the point that the child must extend sympathy herself — andAlice fails to do this when she describes her cat Dinah to the Mouse, and later when she confesses to having eaten eggs to the frightened mother pigeon.

In an age such as our own, where philosophers earnestly debate therights of animals, or whether machines can "think," we cannot escapethe child's affinity for animals. And in Wonderland, except for theGryphon, none of the animals are of a hostile nature that might lead Alice to any harm. (And the Gryphon is a mythical animal so hedoesn't count as a "true" animal.) Most of the Wonderland animalsare the kind one finds in middle-class homes, pet shops, and inchildren's cartoons. Although they may not seem so in behavior, mostof them are, really, pets. Alice feels a natural identity with them, buther relationship ultimately turns on her viewing them as *adults.* So heridentity with the animals has a lot to do with her size in relationshipto adults. Alice emphasizes this point when she observes that someugly children might be improved if they were pigs. In her observation

lies the acceptance of a common condition of children and animals: Each is personified to a degree. Thus, it is not surprising that in theworld of the child, not only animals, but dolls, toys,

plants, insects, and even playing cards have the potential to be personified bychildren (or adults).

Growing up in Wonderland means the death of the child, and although Alice certainly remains a child through her physical changesin size — in other ways, death never seems to be far away inWonderland. For example, death is symbolized by the White Rabbit'sfan which causes Alice to *almost* vanish; death is implied in thediscussion of the Caterpillar's metamorphosis. And death permeatesthe morbid atmosphere of the "enchanted garden." The Queen ofHearts seems to be the Goddess of Death, always yelling her single, barbarous, indiscriminate, "Off with their heads!"

One of the key characteristics of Carroll's story is his use of language. Much of the "nonsense" in *Alice* has to do with transpositions, eitherof mathematical scale (as in the scene where Alice multiplies incorrectly) or in the scrambled verse parodies (for example, the Father William poem). Much of the nonsense effect is also achieved bydirecting conversation to parts of speech rather than to the meaningof the speakers — to definitions rather than to indications. When Alice asks the Cheshire-Cat which way to go, he replies that she should, first, know where she's going. The Frog-Footman tells her not toknock on the door outside the Duchess' house; he can only open thedoor when he is inside (though Alice, of course, manages to open thedoor from the outside). And some of the nonsense in Wonderland ismerely satirical, such as the Mock Turtle's education. But the nature ofnonsense is much like chance, and rules to decipher it into logical meaning or sense patterns work against the principal intent ofCarroll's purpose — that is, he wanted his nonsense to be random, senseless, unpredictable, and without rules.

The structure of a dream does not lend itself to resolution. A dream simply is a very different kind of "experience." In this sense, Alicedoes not really evolve into a higher understanding of her adventure. She has the *memory* of Wonderland but she brings nothing "real" from Wonderland — only her memory of it. This is a powerful testament to the influence of her domestication. In Alice's case, good social breeding is more important than her natural disposition. But ifAlice leaves Wonderland without acquiring any lasting, truly worthwhile knowledge, neither can she give any wisdom to thecreatures whom she has met there. Nature, in each case, sets limitson the ability to assimilate experiences.

In the Caucus-race, for instance, the race depicts the absurdity ofdemocracy. Yet, Alice's critical attitude — a product of her class education — is also satirized.

The object of the race is to haveeveryone dry off; so it doesn't matter *who* wins or loses, and clearlythe outcome of the race is irrelevant. To think otherwise, as Alicedoes, is absurd. The point of the running about is to dry off, which, incidentally, makes it equally absurd to call moving about for thatpurpose a "race."

Wonderland offers a peculiar view of Nature. For one thing, all theanimals have obviously been educated. There is literally not a "stupid" one in the bunch (unless it is the puppy or the pig/baby). Ingeneral, the basic condition common to all the creatures is notignorance — but madness, for which there seems to be noappropriate remedy. A Victorian reader must have wondered how theanimals were "trained"; after all, the assumptions that Alice makes allrest on her "training." On this point, however, the reader can onlyspeculate.

In Wonderland, much of the fun depends on the confusion of "training." Nature and natural feelings seem to more often than notmean danger or potential violence. (But except for the puppy and thepig/baby, there are no natural creatures, however much natural feelings are expressed.) The Duchess, for example, seems to be onlythe epitome of rage; she conveys a kind of sadistic delight in diggingher chin into Alice's shoulder; anger even seems to motivate herdidactic morals (that is, "Flamingoes and mustard both bite").

Finally, nature seems superior to nurture in Wonderland, as thepersonification of beasts seems to be no improvement on the actual beasts themselves. The pig, for example, is a more content creature*as a pig,* for the baby was not happier when it was a *baby.*

Although there are plenty of "rules," the laws of Wonderland seem aparody of real justice. The Queen of Hearts, for example, thinksnothing of violating the law which protects people from illegal prosecution; she seeks the head of the Knave of Hearts for havingbeen only *accused* of stealing the tarts. Thus, the Queen violates thespirit of the law against stealing to satisfy the logical necessity that*every* trial must have an execution. The spirit of the law is, so tospeak, sacrificed to satisfy the reversibility of the symbolic letter ofher logic. In the croquet game, anyone can be executed for reasons known *only* to the sovereign Queen, who acts as though she is adivinity with the power to take or give life. Under a monarchy, themonarchs are above the law. In Wonderland, however, the monarch's will is flaunted when the command is to execute someone. Ignoringthe Queen's command to behead someone is a matter of survival aswell as justice.

The trial of the Knave of Hearts satirizes both too much law and lawby personal edict. Someone may have stolen the tarts, and it may wellhave been the Knave. But the offense is trivial, and the sentence isonly a joke. One of the problems with the law in any context is itsapplication. When the law ceases to promote harmony, then itspurpose as a regulator of human

affairs is subverted. In Wonderlandthe idea of a law seems ridiculous because the *operative principle* ofWonderland is *chaos.* Injustice, then, is a logical consequence ofliving in Wonderland. The rule of the strongest person must be thelaw — that is, the law of anarchy. The trial of the Knave is proof ofthis woeful state of affairs. Fortunately, Alice is the strongest of the lot, and she overthrows the cruel Queen's sentence of execution andthe savage kangaroo court. There is no way to change the lawbecause no "law" exists. By her rebellion, Alice serves both the causeof sanity and justice.

Time, in the sense of duration, exists in Wonderland only in apsychological and artistic sense. When we ordinarily conceive oftime, we think of units of duration — that is, hours, minutes, andseconds; or days, weeks, months, and years. We may also think ofgetting older and having lived from a certain date. We assume thatthe time reflected on a clock and our age are essentially the samekind of process. But a clock may repeat its measure of duration, whereas *we* have only *one* lifetime. Our age is therefore a function ofan irreversible psychological sense of duration. We live in theconscious knowledge that we can never return to a given point in thepast, as we might adjust a clock for daylight savings time. Ourpersonal, psychological time is absolute and irreversible. And that isthe kind of time that creatures like the Mad Hatter employ inWonderland. (We never know whether the White Rabbit uses amechanistic time, only that he has a watch.)

When Alice looks at the Mad Hatter's watch, she sees a date, but shesees neither hours nor minutes. Because Time and the Mad Hatter donot get along, Time has "frozen" the tea-party at six o'clock. But itturns out that time is also reversed so that a year has the duration ofan hour and vice versa. Reckoned in hour-lengths, the tea-party mustgo on for at least a year (unless Time and the Mad Hatter make uptheir quarrel). But because of psychological time, the creatures areable to leave and return to the tea-party. And because ofpsychological time, Wonderland's experience comes to an end, andjust as our uniquely, individual lives will one day end, so will ournightmares and dreams.