***Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland***

***Chapter 1***

***Analysis:***

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland begins with Alice dozing off as her sister reads to her, anticipating the strange and nonsensical events that occur throughout the book. As her sister reads, Alice nods off into a dream-like state in which she seems to catch sight of a fully dressed white rabbit capable of speaking English. Even before she enters Wonderland, she experiences phenomena that depart from the conventional rules of the real world. The plunge into the rabbit hole represents a plunge into deep sleep. Her dreams create a fully formed world that constantly shifts and transforms with its own unique logic. The slow fall imitates the shift from dozing off to deep sleep, beginning with Alice’s idle daydreaming and ending with her firmly placed in her dream world. Alice slowly acclimates to the dream world but does not let go of the established logic of the waking world. She marvels that after this fall, she would think nothing of falling off of the top of her house, much less down the stairs, even though the narrator reminds us that both falls would still likely kill her. Alice runs away from the Victorian world of her sister because she feels unfulfilled, but she quickly discovers that Wonderland will not fulfill any of her desires. Wonderland thwarts her expectations at every turn. The Rabbit represents this motif of frustrated desire. His antics inspire Alice to follow him down the hole and into Wonderland, but he constantly stays one step ahead of her. Led on by curiosity, Alice follows the elusive rabbit even though she does not know what she will do once she catches him. She pursues him out of pure curiosity but believes that catching him will give her some new knowledge or satisfaction. Even when the outcome is unknown, the act of chasing implies that a desired goal exists.

Alice cannot enter the garden even though she wants to, and her desire to enter the garden represents the feelings of nostalgia that accompany growing up. Carroll dramatizes the frustrations that occur with growing older as Alice finds herself either too small or too large to fit through the passageway into the garden. After drinking the potion, Alice shrinks and cannot reach the key on the table. The helplessness that comes with her exaggeratedly small size represents the feelings of insignificance of childhood. The growth spurt caused by the cake in Chapter 2 represents the awkward bodily transformations that come with puberty. Alice’s growth allows her the means to fulfill her destiny but literally reminds her that she is growing away from the pleasures of childhood. The idealized garden is now off limits to Alice, who can no more fit through the passageway than an infant could travel back to the safety and security of the womb.

Summary:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland begins as a pleasant fairy tale. Alice and her sister are reading a book that has neither pictures nor conversations. Alice finds the reading tedious; she is anxious for more vivid and direct forms of experience. Her boredom and anxiety cause her to withdraw from the "civilized pastime" of reading dull books and to fall to sleep, entering the world of dreams. At the edge of semi-sleep consciousness, she sees the form of a white rabbit scurrying toward a rabbit-hole. Immediately, Alice is curious and pursues him down the hole. The reason for Alice's pursuit is that she burns with curiosity; after all, the rabbit is wearing a waistcoat, talking to himself, walking upright, and he has a pocket watch; his image is thus unusual, suggesting romantic and fairy tale "people." The rabbit's hole functions like a large laundry chute, and, curiously, Alice "floats" down the hole in a slow descent. In her fall, she has fantasies relating to the absence of gravity, the quality of infinite space, the shape of her body, mass, and velocity. Her free, fanciful associations in the tunnel are in vivid contrast to her innocent, non-reflective curiosity that led her to leap down the hole in the first place.

In fact, her leap downward probably was unconscious. Not once did she hesitate for fear of what she might find or consider how she might get out. Her leap was a leap in a spirit of adventure, a reckless gamble done for fun.

On the other hand, Alice retains her belief in the world above-ground. There are shelves lining the walls of the tunnel, and on one shelf she finds a jar of orange marmalade. Things like the jar (which is empty) reaffirm her feelings that matters are not "too different" here, so she refuses to accept that her experience of floating down a rabbit-hole is unlike previous, curious adventures that she has had. This is just another adventure, and fancying that she might well be headed through the earth's center, she wonders how to determine her latitude and longitude. Note that it doesn't seem to matter to her that such terms do not apply under the earth's surface. Then, Alice considers the prospect of emerging head downward in New Zealand or Australia; her concern is almost a caricature of her childish belief in the impossible.

Strangely enough, there is no indication that she is truly disoriented; everything seems true to sense in spite of the absence of acceleration and gravity. Even her "sense of propriety" is functioning. She returns the empty marmalade jar to a lower shelf for fear that to drop it might injure someone below. Then, in an imaginary conversation with a woman whom she might meet on the other side of the world, she manages to curtsy in mid-air. Yet, already she is beginning to suffer nostalgia for her life in the conscious, above-ground world. The frightening possibility of being trapped in a dream occurs to her. Above-ground, her cat Dinah had an appetite for bats, and Alice is suddenly confronted by the thought that, possibly, bats may also eat cats! The age-old questions of eating, or being eaten, poses itself here in the context of an alien world while Alice is falling, falling . . . to heaven knows where.

Wonderland is one of the most spontaneous "places" in this novel. And suddenly Alice is in Wonderland! She has landed safely at the bottom of her long, slow fall. But, immediately, she hears the White Rabbit's anxious lament: "Oh, my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!" Alice then loses sight of the rabbit in a hall that is paneled with doors. None of them, however, seems to be the right size for even a young girl of Alice's size; in fact, they are "strange doors." They seem to have a foreboding, funereal feeling about them. Thus, she does not attempt to open them.

On a glass table, though, she finds a tiny golden key, and this key opens a small, curtained door; but the entrance-way is small, rat-sized, in fact, and Alice cannot fit even her head through the doorway. And the door leads to a beautifully colorful, seemingly "enchanted garden." Alice wishes so very much that she could reduce her size and could explore the garden. Her wish that she could reverse her size is consistent with the logic of fantasy. Already, as the narrator observes, ". . . so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that few things indeed were really impossible."

On the glass table, Alice finds a little bottle. It seems to have just magically appeared. The label on the bottle reads "DRINK ME." It is against her previous, proper English training to eat or drink strange foods, but curiosity (she is a child, after all) proves a stronger compulsion than doing the "right thing." So she drinks the liquid and is reduced immediately; now she can pass through the doorway leading to the garden! But she forgot to take the key before she drank the liquid, and now she has shrunk down to a tiny little girl. Disheartened that she can no longer reach the key, Alice begins to cry.

Then there is a curious change in her attitude. She stops herself from crying, as though her "selfish self" has been detached from her "proper self" and the latter is scolding her for crying. We almost hear her mother's voice: A desire for something right now is childish; it is "narcissistic" — selfish. It is naughty, and little girls shouldn't be selfish and want things right now. Thus, Alice restrains herself from crying.

Suddenly, a little glass box appears with a cake inside it (this is underneath the three-legged table). On the cake, there is a sign: "EAT ME." Alice eats the cake, but there is no immediate consequence. To her dismay, life is dull once again; it seems as though she has not really left the above-ground world at all. She feels that she is the same frustrated little girl that she was before. Except now there's an additional problem. When she was a normal-sized girl, she could not get out of the passageway, and now that she is too small, she has no means to escape. So there she sits, an enclosed soul, trapped in the traumatic nightmare of a prison cell. Already logic has begun to break down in this confusing, claustrophobic condition. Life is beginning to become exaggerated. Alice feels that she can't trust her sanity; curiosity seems to have taken its place. Thus, here in this introduction, rational expectations have taken Alice to an illogical and fantastic destination.

Detailed Summary and Analysis:

Summary Part 1:

A little girl named Alice is sitting beside her sister, who is reading what Alice thinks is a very dull book, when suddenly a white rabbit appears and says “Oh dear! I shall be late!” For a moment, the rabbit doesn’t strike Alice as odd at all, until she realizes that she has never seen a rabbit in a waistcoat or with a pocket-watch before. Instinctively, she follows him across a field and, before she has a chance to think, down a rabbit hole.

Analysis Part 1:

Alice is bored and sleepy on the bank, and though it is never outright stated the implication is that she is drifting into the dream. Alice’s dream state—and her magical thinking as a young child—are on display as she is not surprised by the fact of a talking rabbit—it’s only when she realizes that it’s a well-dressed talking rabbit that it gets her attention. And she follows the Rabbit from her world to its world, the world of the dream.

Summary part2

The rabbit hole goes on and on like a vertical tunnel, and as Alice falls, it is as if time slows down – she is able to consider everything around her. The walls of the tunnel are filled with shelves and bookcases, from which she manages to select a jar labeled “Orange Marmalade”, but finding it empty, puts it back as she falls. She muses on what her family would say if they could see her. She thinks she must be near the center of the earth by now, and proceeds to recite facts she has learned in school about the size of world, getting stuck on the ideas of Latitude and Longitude.

Analysis part 2:

Alice is now in completely foreign territory. The rabbit hole does not seem to belong to the world of her sister and the bank, but a new world, not just a rabbit world, but one where gravity and the shape and composition of the earth do not exist as they did before, and everyday objects, like marmalade placed in new and ridiculous circumstances. None of this strikes Alice as strange or worrying, as she instead daydreams about facts things she’s half-learned in school. A mixture of dream and reality is occurring, offering Alice the opportunity to see her own experiences in a new light.

Summary part 3

As she keeps falling, Alice wonders if she might come out the other side of the world, and if people in Australia are themselves upside down. Then she starts thinking about her cat, Dinah, and wonders if cats eat bats. She begins to get dazed and sleepy, dreaming she is hand in hand with Dinah the cat, when she finally reaches the ground with a thump. She gets up straight away, not at all hurt, and sees another long passage before her, along which the white rabbit is hurrying, muttering again about being terribly late.

Analysis part 3:

Alice often regurgitates information she has heard from adults. She has learned geography but doesn’t entirely understand how gravity works and so the picture she has of the world is a mixture of facts and imagination—as a child, her “real” world is reminiscent of Wonderland. Her thoughts about cats eating bats, or bats eating cats, start the novella’s exploration of language, its meaning, and its meaninglessness.

Summary part 4:

Alice follows, but when she turns a corner, she loses sight of the rabbit and finds herself in a huge hall, with doors all around her. All the doors are locked, so she comes back to the center of the room. Now she finds a little table with a key on top. Thinking it must open one of the doors, she goes around the room trying it but it doesn’t fit any of them. Then a new door appears, a tiny door behind a curtain. The key fits perfectly. Alice opens the door and kneels down and peers through it to a beautiful garden. But the doorway seems to be for a small animal, not a girl. It's too small for Alice to fit through.

Analysis part 4:

The long hall with the locked doors presents Alice with a puzzle. She understands perfectly well what she has to do: use the key to unlock one of the doors, but in the end she discovers that the key unlocks a door that is the wrong size for her. This is quite a metaphor for childhood, where children want to do things—and know just what it is that they want to do—but are told that they are too young or too small. Wonderland inverts this by making Alice too big. The garden, here, represents the dream of the thing she wants to do, or achieve.

Important Quotations

1. Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and, burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.  
     
   In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

Explanation:

Alice's first instinct when she sees something unusual is to chase it. She doesn't think about her own safety, she doesn't concoct a plan, and she doesn't feel scared. She just feels surprised, then curious, and we're off – knowing she's going to be a fun character to follow through the adventures she's certain to have with this attitude.

1. Soon her eye fell on a little glass box that was lying under the table: she opened it, and found in it a very small cake, on which the words "EAT ME" were beautifully marked in currants. "Well, I'll eat it," said Alice, "and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door: so either way I'll get into the garden, and I don't care which happens!"

Explanation:

Not only does Alice explore the fantasy realm of Wonderland, she also explores different states of being for herself. After all, that's what all children have to do – explore a new size and a new body pretty much every day.

1. Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway. . . .

Explanation:

The object of Alice's "quest" in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is freedom – getting out of the "small passage" that confines her and escaping into "the loveliest garden you ever saw." What the passage and the garden represent is up for debate, but it's no accident that Alice's freedom is represented by the natural world and the outdoors. Like most children, she hates being cooped up inside and longs to get out and explore.

1. . . . she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that, if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked "poison," it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later.

Explanation:

The tone of the book becomes extremely dry when the narrator starts mocking the morality tales that Victorian children had to read. You may have read this kind of story yourself – a tale that warns you about the consequences of foolish behavior with a gruesome death or outcome. The narrator is scornful of this kind of story, and we can tell that he would never torture Alice just to make a didactic point.

1. "I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?" she said aloud. "I must be getting somewhere near the center of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think –" (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the school-room, and though this was not a very good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over) "– yes, that's about the right distance – but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?" (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.)

Explanation:

Alice is a diligent student and makes every attempt to practice her learning. Yet everything she knows about geography is either muddled or useless in Wonderland; none of her book learning has given her practical skills for finding her way.

1. . . . she was quite surprised to find that she remained the same size. To be sure, this is what generally happens when one eats cake; but Alice had got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen, that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way.

Explanation:

At first we think Wonderland is going to be the complete opposite of the "real world," but then we realize that it's more inconsistent than that.

1. She generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears to her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people.

Explanation:

Early in the Alice books, we learn that Alice seems to have several personalities swirling around inside her. It's easy for her to pretend to be more than one person, to see both sides of an argument, and to get lost in the roles she's playing.

1. “What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?” Alice.

Explanation:

Alice asks herself this question in the start when she finds her sister reading a book that does not appeal to her. The book appears dull and unattractive. Alice in Wonderland is an illustrated book. Hence, both pictures and conversations echo profound messages. Unlike other children, perhaps Alice prefers learning through images. This quote is significant and shows the [power](https://literarydevices.net/power/) of visuals. It also means that during those periods children were not taught subjects practically.