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Intentionally So: Morality in Children's Literature

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Intentionally So: Morality in Children's Literature



Honors Thesis

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Department: English

Advisor: Stephen Wilhoit, Ph.D.

April 2019

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Abstract

There are tales that follow us from childhood and into adult life: they take the shape of children's stories. Within these books there are moral lessons to be learned; often times these lessons are communicated through enchanting characters and strange settings. However, in addition to the morality that can be found in the pages of these texts, I believe there is also a morality surrounding their creation. More specifically, the way their authors approach their writing. By looking at the two works *The Complete Adventures of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, a relationship between the author's intentions and the way the moral narrative presents itself in a story comes to light. This is no simple relationship, and this project will prove that the connection between intention and morality easily becomes blurred. However, before this dynamic is revealed arguments by theorists Roland Barthes and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. are presented to first identify what the significance an author brings to their text, if there is any significance at all. A journey filled with rabbits, a world underground, and angry neighbors, it certainly may feel as though we have fallen down a rabbit hole. However, the moral of this particular story eventually becomes apparent: an author who writes their children's story intentionally lends their text a clearer moral narrative.

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Introduction

I. The Beginning

Children's literature is often the place of make-believe—these stories bring readers to secret gardens, a wintry landscape behind the doors of a wardrobe, and into the conversations between anthropomorphic animals. If a child is looking to escape, these stories are often the place to do so. However, within these fantasy worlds there is also something very real. Intricately woven in the words of children's literature are the lessons children carry into adulthood with them: whether it is Mary Poppins teaching children how to take their medicine or Winnie the Pooh modeling what genuine friendship looks like, there are various life lessons packed into what can appear to be light-hearted writing. Although some may be skeptical, I argue that there is importance in the world of children's literature. This is where the groundwork for many individual's morality begins; from these stories, children begin to better understand their relation to the world surrounding them. In these fictional worlds children are able to understand that they do not live in isolation. Just as the characters in the stories in front of them must navigate their own societies, so must children in the near future.

Although I believe it is evident that literature can provide children with a moral framework to incorporate into their own lives, what remains in question is the intentions of the authors behind these works. The questions I am asking are as follows: must these authors have good intentions when writing these works and what does that look like? In regards to these questions, I will be examining two works. The first, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, tells the tale of a girl who falls down a rabbit hole into a world where animals speak and playing cards come to life. The other story, *The Tale of*

Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter, and those that follow in its collection involve the adventures of small rabbits that face a large and often daunting world ahead of them. These stories are written roughly forty years apart, but have gone on to become staples on the bookshelves of many young readers. They both offer insight in the larger world surrounding their characters and readers; however, the authors behind these tales are very different. After exploring the merit of these individual books, I will then venture into the world of the authors themselves. In doing so, it becomes apparent that Carroll may have had questionable intentions in writing *Alice*. Potter, on the other hand, approached her work intentionally and with her audience in mind. In comparing these two novels, a stark difference emerges in how an author's morality can impact what results in their work.

In discussing whether or not the authors of these stories approached their work morally, some may be wondering what good this offers children or why there is a need for authors to approach children's literature morally so long as the story itself turns out okay. This is where I would like to introduce my first section, in which I will explain the necessity of approaching children's literature morally by examining an author's relationship to their text. This involves looking at the arguments of Roland Barthes and E.D. Hirsch, Jr., who disagree as to whether the author holds any significance in regards to their writing. However, because of the way many children's stories come to be, I do not think it is possible to ignore the author when examining these texts. In looking at these opposing arguments, my reasoning for agreeing with Hirsch before Barthes will come to light. Even before this exploration of morality, I know that there will be no clear answer. However, in exploring the place of morality within children's literature both internal and external to the literature itself, I hope to at least clarify what this process

looks like. As a result, through the various sections of my writing I hope to fall into the rabbit hole of literature and morality, but on this tale I do not intend to get lost.

Part One: The Author & the Story

I. In Death & Defense of the Author

Before I can claim anything about the moral relationship tying an author to his or her work of children's literature, we must first examine what the obligations are between an author and their texts. I believe that when analyzing children's literature, it is impossible to ignore the role the author plays in constructing the text. Children's literature typically contains a moral which the author purposefully constructs in his or her work—the moral reflects an intentional act by the author. Thus, I do not believe we can ignore the author. Yet, there are some who believe the author should not be considered when examining their work. To better understand these opposing views, I will examine the arguments of two theorists: Roland Barthes and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. We will begin first with Barthes, who believes that an interpretation of a text must be done without any regard of its creator and their intentions.

Barthes presents a relatively simple argument. In his eyes, there is no need to keep the author and their intentions in mind while attempting to understand a text. Instead, Barthes argues that when we begin writing all voices and sense of identity is destroyed.¹ Only the text can provide a sense of identity—it is futile to try any understanding of the text from the author themselves. Although this may seem impossible, for without an author no text would exist, Barthes provides convincing reasons as to why he has found this to be the case. He starts with the idea that when writing begins, “the author enters into his own death.”² It is not as though the author literally dies or ceases to exist—Barthes makes sure to point out that historically and biographically, of course, the author

¹ 386.

² 386.

is very real.³ However, Barthes wishes for people to recognize that in writing we must come to understand that it is not the author's voice attempting to tell us something; what they create does not function in the same way that a personal diary would. Instead, it is the words themselves who perform within a text; it from the language of a text that we must derive its meaning.⁴

To explain what he means by this, Barthes provides the example of time. Often, when we think of a book there is a timeline consisting of "before" and "after." What Barthes means by this is that the author is part of what happens before the book is born—the author conceives of the idea of the book and works to materialize it.⁵ Then, the book comes into being. However, Barthes challenges this timeline with the idea of the modern "scriptor." In this view, the author and the book are born into being simultaneously—there is nothing that precedes the text's existence and there is no after. Instead, the text is concerned with only the "here and now."⁶ If this is the case, then the author fails to be of any real importance. In Barthes' view of a text, what occurs before the text is written does not matter. Instead, texts are performative—they perform when they are being read and not at any other time.⁷ Thus, all that occurs before a text—like the authors approach and intentions—are irrelevant. Barthes argues that with this only momentary time in which a text is called into being, it is freed of any "assigned" meaning.⁸ There is nothing, or rather *no one*, imposing a meaning onto the text. People must look to the words within the story to find meaning, and to nothing else.

³ 386.

⁴ Barthes, 387.

⁵ 388.

⁶ Barthes, 388.

⁷ Barthes, 388.

⁸ 389.

Barthes's ideas are certainly intriguing—after all, stories do appear to perform only in the moments that they are read. Moreover, stories may not be the birth of a new idea but a continuation: together, the author and text are continuing a discourse that has already been started. If this is the case, why must we bother taking into consideration what the author intended to be part of their story's meaning? Yet, I do not think this is the case for *all* forms of literature. In terms of children's literature, I would argue that these stories perform for much longer than the moment in which they are being read. Instead, there really is an "after" in the timeline of a children's story—the moral lessons children take away from these stories stay with them throughout their childhood and help shape their perspectives when entering adulthood. If this is the case, then the author and all that occurs before the text appears certainly is of some importance. It appears that I am not alone in this thinking, as authors like Hirsch make clear. To Hirsch, the author is essential in understanding a text. In his essay "In Defense of the Author," Hirsch provides a series of rebuttals to possible arguments people may present in favor of metaphorically killing the author. As we will see with Hirsch, the author might be worth saving.

As mentioned before, Hirsch provides a series of reasons as to why the author must not be forgotten when interpreting a text. Although all of his arguments are interesting, there are only a few that I believe necessary to focus on for the purpose of this project. Hirsch begins by pointing out what the consequences—often unforeseen—are when we "banish" the author. To Hirsch, the most apparent consequence of banishing the author is the removal of someone who can act as an adequate judge to determine what a valid interpretation of the text may be.⁹ Without taking into consideration an author's intended meaning for a text, there is nothing to compare one's own interpretation to. As a

⁹ 392.

result, Hirsch argues that people are not actually looking at what the texts says, but instead at what the text represents to themselves. And if we are not looking at the text means to the author, we are instead looking at what the text means to the critic.¹⁰ Hirsch reiterates the purpose of an author when he states, "...if the best meaning were not the author's, then it would have to be the critic's—in which case the critic would be the author of the best meaning. Whenever meaning is attached to a sequence of words it is impossible to escape an author."¹¹ The critic becomes an author of meaning themselves; as a result, it appears we never fully escape someone claiming ownership of a text. This ownership is merely transferred from the author to the critic.

Hirsch then argues against the idea that the meaning for a text may change over time, even for the author themselves. It is not that Hirsch argues against the idea that authors, like all people, change over time—certainly they do, and they may even understand their writing differently as a result. However, this is not what Hirsch believes the actual problem to be. What changes in the author who reexamines their texts and finds themselves viewing their writing differently is not the meaning of the text. Rather, it is the author's *response* to the text that has changed in this situation.¹² Hirsch wants to make it clear that the author's response to a text does not indicate any change regarding its textual meaning. Often what an author experiences when they change their opinion about their own work is a different understanding of the text's significance rather than what they intended for a text to mean. Hirsch differentiates significance and meanings in the sense that *significance* is the relationship between meaning and person, whereas *meaning* is what is represented within a text or what the author meant by a "particular

¹⁰ Hirsch, 392.

¹¹ 393.

¹² Hirsch, 394.

sequence.”¹³ Thus, when an author comes to view their work differently over time, there is nothing about the actual text changing—or the meaning of its events within it—but simply the relationship between the author and their text. The only way we would ever know if the meaning has changed to an author, rather than their relationship to that meaning, is they explicitly state that this has occurred. To Hirsch’s knowledge, this has never happened.¹⁴ Thus, the meaning that is within a text is one that the author has placed there—and there it will remain.

From this point, Hirsch continues to provide more convincing counter-arguments: how an author’s meaning is accessible to readers, the consciousness authors often place meaning into their texts, and the idea that texts cannot convey meaning without an author.¹⁵ The arguments presented above, however, play an important role in understanding an author’s relationship to children’s literature. As Hirsch argues, without an author there is no way of measuring what a valid interpretation of a text is. Thus, any understanding of a text becomes valid. However, when it concerns children’s literature there should be some interpretations that are invalid—for instance, it would be disappointing to think that Pooh in *Winnie-The-Pooh* by A.A. Milne could be understood as an aggressive or dangerous bear. While engaging with the text, it becomes evident that Pooh is gentle in nature; although his desire for honey sometimes overrides his sensibility, he never means harm towards anyone in the Hundred Acre Wood. Such an interpretation certainly could be considered invalid, especially when we consider that Milne wrote the stories of *Pooh* for his son Christopher Robin and the character within

¹³ Hirsch, 394.

¹⁴ 395.

¹⁵ Hirsch, 398-404.

the story represents him fictionally.¹⁶ However, without taking Milne and the reality surrounding his writing process, the risk of making room for such an interpretation arises.

In terms of the second argument explored in detail by Hirsch, I believe it is important to understand that the meaning of a text as intended by the author persists over time. Hirsch emphasizes that people, including the author, may arrive at a point when they change their viewpoint on a text. Of course this is going to happen, and has happened throughout history with authors and their writing. Yet, what changes in this instance is not the meaning of the text, but rather the author's relationship to that textual meaning. Some of the most famous and well-read children's stories are aged; yet, despite having been written in times before our own the author's meaning has not changed. When examining *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Complete Adventures of Peter Rabbit*, this point is important to keep in mind. The way these authors approached their stories and the meaning that resulted within them has not changed over time. In this instance, the authors may have quite literally died but, as Hirsch argues, the textual meaning is the same. The story remains intact. This observation can even be extended into the reader's relationship with a story's meaning: we as readers may eventually change our relationship with a text's meaning, but that is all that has changed. For example, by reading this project the significance of *Peter Rabbit* may increase to you. However, the meaning of the text remains. On the contrary, the significance of *Alice* may decrease in your eyes but the meaning of the text remains. All of this will result from an investigation into the author and the lives they lived while writing their texts, and the way that reflect in the story's moral narrative.

¹⁶ Carpenter, 192.

As we've seen, Barthes and Hirsch clearly hold differing opinions as to whether the author should be considered when understanding the meaning of a text. Although Barthes makes a strong point, it does not accurately apply to children's literature. This genre is one that continues to perform well after its reading; for this reason, we cannot ignore the author. Hirsch provides two relevant reasons for this: we cannot properly understand a text without the author's intention, and the idea that the author's meaning for a text is timeless. With the way that children's literature impacts readers, these two points are crucial. They reveal that an author is needed to validate the interpretation of their texts—thus, we must take the author into consideration. Furthermore, even for stories like those in the children's literature genre that are often written well in the past their meaning remains. Though these stories may be aged in the modern era, they managed to make it here relatively intact. In the investigation that follows, we must understand the role the author plays in their story, both within the novel—creating the plot, the characters, and all that occurs on the pages—and also outside of it, as a result of the author's life occurrence, morality, and intentions. When we examine the morality outside the text of children's literature, the author is certainly not dead—he and she are, in fact, breathing their experiences and moral views into these tales.

Part Two: The Morality Inside

I. Morality in Children's Literature

Before we discuss the morality behind *Alice* and *Peter Rabbit*, I think it is important to speak of whether or not children's literature promotes moral values. When reflecting on my own experiences reading as a child, I am inclined to think that it does. Others, however, may remain unconvinced. Children's stories hold the possibility to allow children to learn from the text, whether this be a moral lesson or not. This lesson can be something as simple as the importance of brushing your teeth twice a day, or something deeper—for instance, within fables the story typically concludes with an actual “moral,” which might be something along the lines of *do not bite the hand that feeds you*. As a child attempts to understand what these morals mean—for it may not be apparent at first—they engage in critical thinking. Not only may a child's intellectual interest be simulated in reading these stories, but as they work to understand what the moral is they are also developing their own sense of what is right and wrong. What we learn from these stories as children may go on to become the lessons guiding us as adults, as we remember how the characters in stories faced the consequences in failing to act morally.

Working to facilitate philosophy for children, Beth Dixon had her graduate students create a curriculum for young students to better understand the morals of stories. This particular curriculum centers around Arnold Lobel's “The Lobster and the Crab.” When looking at this story, Dixon's question was not what the moral is within the story, but rather how to best lead children to an answer. She wished to direct her readers to engage with the entire story, rather than race to witness its typically witty end—Dixon

argues that the story allows for children to understand how moral decision-making works in different situations.¹⁷ Furthermore, by working through what happens in the story before the moral is revealed children are forced to genuinely think about the events of the story and what lesson the tale may be trying to demonstrate. Thus, Dixon set out to demonstrate the philosophy that resides in Lobel's story. She believes that this fable demonstrates the Aristotelean virtue of caring—to be virtuously caring is to be neither too pain causing nor pleasure giving as a friend.¹⁸ This is the idea that while we must be kind to our friends, we should also at times challenge them to grow.

Although this lesson may at first appear to be lacking in the fable, as the Crab is initially upset by the turbulence of the entire adventure, the Lobster is not cruel to his fellow crustacean. When the Crab voices his worries, the Lobster makes sure to comfort his anxiety—at the same time, the Lobster has brought the Crab into a situation that pushes him out of his comfort zone. To Dixon, this balance allows for the Lobster to accurately represent the mean of caring and in doing so the Lobster serves as a “decent” friend to the Crab.¹⁹ To ensure that her students understood what the Lobster represents in the story, Dixon made the lesson plan surrounding the fable to help facilitate this ability. Rather than starting with the fable itself, the first class meeting began with discussion questions. These questions surrounded the topic of risk taking, which is what the characters in the story do on their adventures, and how the children predicted the Lobster and Crab would interact with each other.²⁰ Often, these questions invited the children to place themselves into similar situations the characters of the fable would find

¹⁷ Dixon, 73.

¹⁸ Dixon, 74.

¹⁹ Dixon, 74.

²⁰ Dixon, 76.

themselves in—in this way, they were able to take the moral out of the story and place it into their own lives, before they even read.

While I am not advocating for facilitating philosophical discussions with young children—although, that is something I think can happen when looking at children’s literature through a critical lens—I think there is something important within Dixon’s experimental lesson plan here. Not only does Dixon reveal that there is a certain moral quality to Lobel’s fable, but also that children can actually pick up on these elements. On the second day of teaching, Dixon and her graduate students facilitated role-play activities for the children. When students were asked to “act out” how the Lobster and Crab care for each other that is not in the story, they usually—acting as the Lobster in this scenario—would take the time to explain to the timid Crab that although he may be apprehensive, the adventure they are about to embark on really *is* safe.²¹ Furthermore, the children were also asked about their own experiences with risk taking. One student, Emily, was informed by her close friend Kaylee that she would bring Emily on an airplane with her because she is scared of flying. Recognizing that in this situation Kaylee is more like the Crab and Emily is like the Lobster, Emily gave an insightful response to the question, “Do you think, once a crab, always a crab? Can you change?” She answered that when people “try something, you can get through it.”²² What may first appear as a simple story of a lobster and a crab actually holds something of much greater worth for children; they learn not only of friendship, but of virtuous caring. The two characters of Lobster and Crab demonstrate the way in which friends must balance being both kind and challenging to one another, something we see in their sea-side adventure.

²¹ Dixon, 78.

²² Dixon, 79.

This caring is what we see the young Kaylee and Emily, among other students, picking up on.

Dixon is not alone in her quest to teach children the philosophical and moral worth of children's literature. While reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with her daughter Rebecca, Virginia Lowe was surprised to witness the young child's resonating experience with the text. Before explaining this experience, however, Lowe was quick to point out that *Alice* is a piece of literature that many children have heard of even if they have not actually read the book.²³ In other words, *Alice* has become a classic piece of children's literature. Lowe, and many others, wonders as to why this is—perhaps, as Lowe discovers with Rebecca, this attraction is due to its philosophical nature. Soon after they read *Alice*, the mother and daughter moved to *Through the Looking Glass*. It was when they read of Alice being in the Red King's dream that Lowe began to realize the philosophical impact the books were having on her daughter. Rebecca remarked to Lowe, “Wouldn't it be funny if we were all just in a dream? Like Alice being in the Red King's dream?”²⁴ An existential question for a child of four years old, Carroll and his tales of *Alice* caused Rebecca to begin wondering what it actually means to be “alive.” Lowe would continue to hear Rebecca having these conversations with friends, as she mulled over her young existence.

This type of questioning did not stop with Lowe's daughter, but her son Ralph also shared a similar philosophical experience with the text. After reading *Alice*, Lowe and Ralph were completing an alphabet jigsaw. For the letter *T*, the two interested a tortoise into the puzzle and Ralph remarked that “That tortoise is looking sad.” When

²³ Lowe, 55.

²⁴ Lowe, 57.

Lowe asked why Ralph thought such a thing, Ralph replied “Because he wanted to be a *real* tortoise. Don’t cry tortoise, I’ll make you real with my magic.”²⁵ Lowe saw this comment, combined with other stories they had read, as a result of comments from the Mock Turtle in *Alice*. When Alice asks the Mock Turtle for his personal history, he shares: “Once,” said the Mock Turtle at last, with a deep sigh, “I was a real Turtle.”²⁶ In a similar vein to Rebecca’s experience with dreaming and existence, Ralph is also able to understand the difference between fiction and reality through his experience of reading *Alice*. Lowe, however, points to “The Jabberwocky” from *Through the Looking Glass* as the most impactful reading for Ralph. At the age of seven, Ralph found himself enamored by the poem. Reading this poem was a feat for Ralph, who Lowe admits was “not an early reader.”²⁷ However, despite the poems winding words and loft images, Ralph was able to tackle a piece of reading that can be considered tough for a child of seven. He successfully read the poem in its entirety aloud to his entire family while on holiday, and would continue to quote the poem through the day—at one point, Ralph called to his younger cousin and commanded, “Come to my arms, my beamish boy!”²⁸ The triumph of accessing “Jabberwocky” for Ralph was no small feat, and it mirrored the archetypal hero quest found within the poem. Lowe claims that both the archetype and his love for the poem have continued into Ralph’s adulthood.

It is clear that both of Lowe’s children were drawn to *Alice* and other stories from Carroll; more than that, these stories offered pathways for them to engage in higher thinking. The children become better aware not only of their surroundings, but also their

²⁵ Lowe, 60.

²⁶ Carroll, 63.

²⁷ Lowe, 60.

²⁸ Lowe, 60.

existence. At a young age these children became more conscientious of their being—something that can only lend itself into also developing a better sense of morality. This moral development is more directly seen in Dixon’s work with “The Lobster and The Crab.” Developing a lesson plan for this fable, Dixon was able to facilitate ways for young students to recognize the virtue of caring in the tale. Pressing the students with thought-provoking questions, the children in the classroom were able to see the way Lobster and Crab care for each other; in return, students like Kaylee and Emily could recognize the ways in which they must support each other on their adventures. Upon entering these stories, children enter into worlds that may appear unlike their own. However, this is not to say that there is no moral worth in the *Alice* book. As demonstrated above, Alice’s adventures certainly stimulate deep thinking in children about important concepts. Yet, these concepts are rather abstract; it is less clear in these stories what exactly is being communicated to the reader. Yet, those lessons are still there in both stories. When children are willing to engage, there is much to be learned.

Thus, it appears that when children’s literature is artfully written there can be more than *just* a story. Sub-stories of morality and philosophy are present, and will resonate with children as they continue to grow up. However, this morality is all internal to the stories. As seen in this section, there is a philosophical and often moral layer to *Alice* and the world Carroll creates in his imaginative writing. At times, these layers are confusing; it becomes unclear what is being communicated to the children reading these books. In Lobel’s work, this moral purpose of the story was much better messaged to its audience. The morality is in both stories, but one is much clearer than the other. As a result of this discovery, I want to know more of the morality that resides outside of the

story. In exploring the story of the authors and their backgrounds, it appears that morality also involves itself to children's literature externally: there is a relationship between how an author approaches their stories and the way the moral narrative presents itself in the story. In the case of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, morality becomes far more blurred when the nature of Lewis Carroll is revealed. I will now shift my focus from morality that is found within the actual pages of children's literature, and instead look to the lives of the authors who reside just outside of what is nestled between the front and back cover.

Part Three: The Morality Outside

I. The Worlds of Beatrix Potter and Lewis Carroll

To begin looking at how authors approach their writing, I think it would be wise to investigate their backgrounds. The beginning of this second section will look at the lives of Beatrix Potter and Lewis Carroll, and an examination will follow of how their lifestyles are reflected in their publications. I believe that the way an author lives—even if they believe it will not affect it—does indeed sneak its way into their writing. Thus, if an author has amoral intentions when writing children’s literature this will be reflected. This does not necessarily mean that the piece of writing itself will lack morality; however, it will be less clear as to what the moral intention of the writing is. When it comes to children’s literature, I do not think there should be confusion as to what the moral narrative of the story is—as seen in the first section, children’s stories certainly make an impression on children as they read. We must be aware of what children’s stories communicate to children, especially when it concerns morality.

It is not uncommon for children’s literature authors to write from a place of trauma; in writing for children, this allows for authors to return to moments in their own childhood in which something was lacking. For Beatrix Potter, this was no particular event but rather how her parents treated her in a child-like way well into her adulthood. Children’s stories, as a result, may have been a way for her to escape. Ironically, Potter saw very little of her parents—this was typical for the wealthy of London’s society, who parented their children from a distance.²⁹ Potter was close with her bother, Bertram, and together they entertained themselves with the natural world. Collecting small animals and

²⁹ Warne, 12.

insects from outside, they would often create worlds of scientific curiosity and exploration. Unfortunately, when Bertram came of age he was quickly sent away to school and Potter was left on her own.³⁰ Despite the distance Potter experience with her parents, her mother still oversaw how Potter was to be raised. She did not want Potter mixing with other children—without her brother at home, Potter did not have many close friends. As a result, Potter did not form many close friendships in her youth and did not experience the warmth often found in these types of relationships.³¹

However, it was in her lonely childhood that Potter found the inspiration for her charming works. Potter's initial interest in the natural world may have only been out of curiosity at first, but it soon turned into something far more serious. Potter first attempted to enter the world of science, but found that—even after having a study in fungi published—it was far too difficult to enter the male-dominated study.³² Not to be discouraged, Potter turned her efforts towards the stories many have come to know today. Yet, even as a well-known published author and illustrator Potter still lived at home with her parents. Her parents, as a result, controlled many aspects of her life. Not only did they disapprove of her first engagement to Norman Warne, they also disliked her eventual marriage to William Heelis.³³ With the money from her publications and independent nature, it could be thought that Potter would have more control over her life. However, this was not the case; writing served as a way for Potter to exercise self-rule. Into her writing Potter would escape, and her readers have followed her into the world of Peter Rabbit ever since.

³⁰ Buchan, 11.

³¹ Buchan, 12.

³² Warne, 20.

³³ Warne, 72.

Despite being a world of fiction, the stories of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny are based entirely on real life. The rabbits in *Peter Rabbit* are modeled after Potter's own rabbits, as her fondness for animals continued into adulthood. One of her rabbits, Benjamin Bouncer, had a "fondness for buttered toast" and would come running upon hearing the bell for tea.³⁴ After Bouncer died, Potter acquired a new rabbit by the name of Peter Piper who also displayed humanistic qualities. These rabbits would accompany Potter everywhere, and her acquaintances would come to enjoy the small animals as well. Much like her own stories, there was a magical quality to Potter. It was not just rabbits inspiring Potter, but everything she happened to chance upon in life. For instance, it was a family visit in Gloucester that Potter discovered her inspiration for *The Tailor of Gloucester*. It was there that Potter was told the story of a tailor who left his shop on night with a unfinished waistcoat for the mayor, and returned in the morning to find the coat had been finished and left only with the note, "No more twist."³⁵ In Potter's version of the story, it is mice that helped the tailor with his task.

The timeline of Potter and Lewis Carroll's lives overlapped for a short while; however, they lived their lives very differently. Growing up, Carroll was raised by a respectable family—with a father who was a "moderate High Church Anglican," Carroll was no stranger from discipline.³⁶ Yet, his father also sparked Carroll's interest in literature. Educated at home until the age of twelve, Carroll was exposed to many pieces of instructive religious literature.³⁷ However, his creativity was not stifled by any means in this setting. Once described as the entertainer of the family, Carroll often invented

³⁴ Warne, 22.

³⁵ Buchan, 25.

³⁶ Douglas-Fairhurst, 34.

³⁷ Douglas-Fairhurst, 35.

games for him and his siblings—days were spent crafting toy railroads in the garden and writing rulebooks in which arrangements for passengers of the railway were laid out by the young boy.³⁸ Although this childhood may sound idyllic, Carroll had a speech impairment. From its description, Carroll’s stammer was rather severe. At times, he was unable to make certain sounds and when speaking “language would simply crack apart.”³⁹ Unpredictable and making conversation difficult, Carroll’s stammer often made him to be perceived as a bit socially awkward.

While Potter often resided in the Lake District of England, Carroll could be found further south in the small town of Oxford. After attending Rugby School, an experience Carroll did not enjoy, it was in Oxford that Carroll could be found for the rest of his life. Here, however, Carroll was mostly known by his real name Charles Dodgson as he studied mathematics and was eventually offered residency in Christ Church.⁴⁰ While living in Oxford, Carroll would come to meet the young Alice Liddell. Author Robert Douglas-Fairhurst claims that Carroll most likely first saw the children through the windows of Christ Church, as there was an excellent view from his office into the Deanery garden where the children often played.⁴¹ Liddell, as one could guess, is who the character of the young Alice in *Wonderland* is based on; much like we saw with Potter, Carroll too tapped into real life for inspiration in his writing. However, unlike Potter this inspiration extended beyond an admiration for rabbits and instead festered into an obsession with a young girl. Their relationship first began as Carroll acting as Liddell’s

³⁸ Douglas-Fairhurst, 36.

³⁹ Douglas-Fairhurst, 41.

⁴⁰ Douglas-Fairhurst, 62.

⁴¹ Douglas-Fairhurst, 81.

tutor; Carroll would go to the family home and work with the young girl.⁴² What started as a time for education soon turned into photography sessions; in addition to his academic pursuits at Oxford, Carroll was an avid photographer. For the most part, the subjects of his photography were young girls—more than that, these subjects were more often than not Alice and the other Liddell daughters.⁴³

Although Carroll spent most of his time in Oxford, he would frequently visit London for entertainment or escape to the countryside for vacation.⁴⁴ During the Victorian Era, the area of Eastbourne began to develop as a popular holiday spot. Particularly, Eastbourne was known for being a more conservative area compared to other seaside cities. It is thought that for a variety of reasons—from Carroll’s stammer, shyness, general dislike of crowds, and contempt towards common people—that Eastbourne was the perfect vacation spot for the Oxford academic.⁴⁵ It was on these vacations that his obsession with children and young females would manifest. Carroll’s attentions were not merely given to Liddell; rather, he liked making friends with all children. Several friends commented on his tendency to interact with children in Eastbourne rather than those of his own age. For instance, one friend noted that while sitting at the beach Carroll enjoyed watching the children play and could usually “entice” one to come and talk with him.⁴⁶ Another friend, and it is unsure what is exactly meant by their choice of words, remarked that Eastbourne was a “happy hunting ground” for Carroll and his quest of befriending children.⁴⁷

⁴² Douglas-Fairhurst, 90.

⁴³ Douglas-Fairhurst, 80-81.

⁴⁴ Bale, 2.

⁴⁵ Bale, 2.

⁴⁶ Bale, 3.

⁴⁷ Bale, 3.

While at the beach, Carroll would people watch and sketch. Although he frequented Eastbourne and the beach, he did not swim himself. This could have been for a variety of reasons—he may have never learned, believed the water to have been dirty, or perhaps Carroll was embarrassed by his slim build.⁴⁸ Whatever the reason, Carroll continued his visits to the beach for one reason alone: the children. While sitting and sketching, sometimes the children would swim too far from the shore. Carroll, recognizing a moment in which he could play the hero, would call the children back to the beach, wrap them in towels, and deliver them back to their parents.⁴⁹ Yet, even in his playful engagement with children there was darkness. For the young girls he so tenderly wrapped in sun-bathed towels, there appeared to be a risk of being played *with* versus innocent play-time.⁵⁰ Luckily for Carroll, Eastbourne offered an additional observation site outside of the beach. Devonshire Park was also a popular site in town, and it was here that Carroll could also gaze at little girls. Within his diary, Carroll provided detailed accounts of the ages of the girls he encountered. For example, in August of 1879 he met “two splendid beauties” who were aged seven and eleven. His logging of the children’s ages could be viewed as a form of collecting; as was common in the Victorian Era, it is believed that Carroll “collected” little girls in the way others may have collected antiques.⁵¹

No one is perfect—although she did not have an obsession with small girls, Beatrix Potter certainly had her flaws. Like all of us, both of these authors are human. However, the behavior Carroll exhibited during his life towards small girls and children

⁴⁸ Bale, 7.

⁴⁹ Bale, 3.

⁵⁰ Bale, 3.

⁵¹ Bale, 4.

would be considered highly inappropriate today. Certainly, this is someone people would question not only having relationships with children, but writing children's literature. Yet, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* remains a highly-read piece of children's literature today despite knowing Carroll's past. Similarly, *Peter Rabbit* and the tales of his many adventures remain just as well-read and adored by its readers. Thus, the question remains how the author's moral intentions go on to affect their writing and what readers are able to take away from their stories. The next section will be looking at the how the lives of these two authors lent themselves—or rather, failed to lend themselves—into their stories and the moral narratives they display. As hinted at earlier, there is a relationship between the way the author approaches their work and the way the moral narrative presents itself in the story. For Potter, this moral direction is much clearer than her Victorian counterpart Carroll.

II. The Moral Narrative of *The Complete Adventures of Peter Rabbit*

While composing *Peter Rabbit* and her other stories, Potter wrote with purpose and intention. Potter was aware of the impact of her writing, and she is quoted to have once said to a friend “My stories will be as immortal as those of Han Christian Anderson.”⁵² In other words, Potter knew the gravity of her work—considering the fame they received in her lifetime, she may have suspected the way children would continue reading her stories even after her death. Thus, she knew in that her stories she must be conscious of how her work might impact young readers. Through her stories, Potter proves that creating children's literature *is* a moral operation; children's literature must be written intentionally and with the children in mind. As Potter writes of Peter and the other rabbits, she incorporates elements of reality with fiction—children are able to

⁵² Buchan, 9.

escape into a world of literature that is not entirely removed from their own world. The impact of this on children is invaluable, serving as both an entertaining and educational purpose. To understand how exactly this plays out in her writing, we must turn to Potter's work itself.

One way Potter's moral intention appears is how she incorporates her reality in her writing—the sense that her characters inhabited the same world as Potter, further extending to the world of her readers, is part of what makes her stories so appealing.⁵³ Writing on the way Potter pays attention in great detail to both her writing and illustrations throughout all of the *Peter Rabbit* stories, Katherine Chandler points out that Potter may have wanted the children reading her writing to view the animals as genuinely real. For instance, in the midst of editing a draft of *Peter Rabbit*, Potter wrote to the publisher that some of the browns were wrong in the shading of the rabbit. It is this type of accuracy that Chandler argues allows its young readers to not only differentiate between the various characters in the story, but also the type of species.⁵⁴ Accompanying many of the illustrations are words reiterating Potter's accuracy. Whenever Potter describes plants and animals, she uses very specific words. Rather than a generalized “fish” or “tree,” readers are instead give descriptors like “minnows,” “trout” or even “the crooked chestnut tree.”⁵⁵ With Potter, readers are given lessons far beyond one of just literary terms.

Some may be hesitant to grant Potter this degree of accuracy in her writing; after all, at the end of the day *Peter Rabbit* is a fictional story often featuring wild animals wearing human clothing. However, alongside the images of the rabbits and other small

⁵³ Warne, 37.

⁵⁴ 51.

⁵⁵ Chandler, 52.

creatures in their fashionable outfits, Potter almost always illustrates at least one image of the rabbits without their clothing on.⁵⁶ Once again, readers are able to gain something more than just excitement from Potter's writing due to these realistic portrayals of the characters in her stories. In the stories of *Peter Rabbit*, the rabbits really do "rush" into gardens and run rather "lippity."⁵⁷ From these descriptions young readers are able to be both entertained and educated, as they understand how rabbits and other animals move in real life; often, this sense of reality is something that can be lost within the pages of a story. A fellow author of children's literature, C.S. Lewis is said to have had firmly believed that it is in fictional stories where children are best prepare for reality, and it appears that Potter follows a similar line of thinking within her stories. Despite creating an imaginary landscape that both children and Potter could escape too, Potter is able to do so in a moral manner. What develops into a magical world of humanistic rabbits among other animals seemingly becomes a perfect combination of reality and fantasy.

Potter's wish to accurately reflect reality within a world of fiction plays out rather interestingly in the texts of *The Complete Adventures of Peter Rabbit*. As previously mentioned, Potter frequently depicts her animals wearing human clothing. In fact, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* features its star rabbit Peter in a blue jacket and little brown shoes. Interestingly, Peter's clothing becomes the focus not only of his own story but also *The Tale of Benjamin Button*. For example, as Peter escapes from Mr. McGregor in the garden, Peter loses "one of his shoes among the cabbages" and "the other shoe amongst the potatoes."⁵⁸ Moments later, Peter then becomes caught in a gooseberry net. In his attempt to free himself from the web of netting, Peter's jacket becomes caught and he is

⁵⁶ Chandler, 53.

⁵⁷ Chandler, 57-58.

⁵⁸ Potter, 17.

forced to leave “his jacket behind him.”⁵⁹ Following this sudden loss of shoes and jacket, the illustrations in the next passage all display Peter in his natural rabbit form. In these images, Peter no longer fashions his iconic blue coat and brown shoes. As a result, children are able to place themselves in this story due to the world surrounding them being realistically represented. This becomes a moral aspect of the series—Potter is able to create a fictional world without misleading children about their actual surroundings. However, the scenario Peter Rabbit finds himself in in this instance is moral for more than just its realistic illustrative quality. Rather, this is a situation many young children find themselves in at some point in their childhood.

When Peter returns from his fright-filled day of adventure, Mrs. Rabbit is not concerned about where Peter has been, but she immediately wonders where his clothing has gone. Busy with cooking, Mrs. Rabbit “wonder[s] what he had done with his clothes. It was the second little jacket and pair of shoes that Peter had lost in a fortnight!”⁶⁰ Like many other young children, even Peter Rabbit is prone to losing his belongings. Also like other children, such a tendency causes his mother distress. The story of Peter’s clothing continues in *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, as Peter and Benjamin return to Mr. McGregor’s garden to retrieve the lost clothing. Readers know that Peter’s clothes are hanging on the scarecrow outside the garden to “frighten the blackbirds,” and both readers and the rabbits are nervous to arrive back at such a scene.⁶¹ Unlike Peter, Benjamin is greatly concerned with the state of his clothes. He tells his fellow rabbit, “It spoils people’s clothes to squeeze under a gate; the proper way to get in, is to climb down

⁵⁹ Potter, 18.

⁶⁰ Potter, 23.

⁶¹ Potter, 23.

a pear tree.”⁶² Peter, like others in childhood, encounters someone his age who thinks differently than he does—this is something young readers will be able to relate to while reading *Peter Rabbit*. Once again, when the young rabbits return home Mrs. Rabbit comments that “she was so glad to see that he found his shoes and coat.”⁶³ Both the tales of *Peter Rabbit* and *Benjamin Button* display the hybrid of real and make-believe present in Potter’s stories. Although rabbits in clothing may be unrealistic, the idea of young rabbits raiding a garden would not be so surprising—for both young rabbits and children. Moreover, a mother chiefly concerned with their child’s clothing and appearance is something many experience during their own childhoods. Thus, there is something in *Peter Rabbit* and all of the exciting tales in the complete collection for children that allows them to escape reality while also learning to understand it more.

III. The Moral Narrative of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

It is tempting to say that when Alice enters into Lewis Carroll’s *Wonderland* she suddenly arrives in a place where all is well—those inhabiting this land are creatures with championing morals. However, it quickly becomes apparent that this is not the case. Characters within *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* at times present themselves as short-tempered and unkind. As the story progresses, some characters appear to become ever more malicious. With this in mind, *Wonderland* becomes a place and story in which Alice, although still unclear by the end of the story, has her morals uncovered in a setting where morals are lacking—the upside down world of *Wonderland* itself. Alice, as a result, serves as a way for Carroll to capture the real-life Alice Liddell in a time of her childhood that quickly, just as it does for everyone, slips away.

⁶² Potter, 31.

⁶³ Potter, 40.

Many characters in *Wonderland* act in a manner that could be considered immoral or at the very least unusually harsh, when speaking with a child. For instance, Alice's first conversation with the Mouse is as they find themselves floating in her pool of tears. Although Alice chooses an unwise topic of conversation with the Mouse—after all, it makes sense that a mouse would be upset to speak about the character of a cat—the Mouse makes no effort to be kind to Alice. Even after Alice offers to change the subject of the conversation the Mouse states, “As if *I* would talk on such a subject! Our family always *hated* cats: nasty, low, vulgar things! Don't let me hear the name again!”⁶⁴ As the Mouse lists off his reasons for disliking cats, it feels as though he is speaking of Alice in such a manner—it is not just cats that are lowly, but the young girl herself. A young girl who has fallen into a strange territory completely alone, Alice does not find a friend in the Mouse. Shortly after meeting the Mouse, Alice encounters a group of other personified animals in her pool of tears. As mentioned earlier, all of the characters in this “queer looking party” are based on people from Carroll's real life.⁶⁵ The Dodo represents Carroll, the Duck is Reverend Robinson Duckworth, the Lory is Lorina Liddell, the Eaglet is Edith Liddell, and, of course, Alice is meant to be Alice Liddell.⁶⁶ As the party argues over how to best dry themselves from Alice's tears, Alice finds herself speaking rather liberally. Lory, not liking what Alice has to say, states “I'm older than you, and must know better.”⁶⁷ In this instance, Alice is quickly reminded that she is only a child. Although this may appear to be only a random moment of the Lory being unexpectedly dismissive, the Lory embodies a figure who is Alice's older sister. Thus, this moment

⁶⁴ Carroll, 12.

⁶⁵ Gardner, 28.

⁶⁶ Gardner, 28.

⁶⁷ Carroll, 12.

hardens as we realize the characters treating Alice so poorly in *Wonderland* are no longer strangers—they are family.⁶⁸

Unkind instances continue to present themselves in *Wonderland* as Alice ventures forward. In particular, the Duchess positions herself in the story as a character who deals entirely with morality. When Alice first meets the Duchess, the large woman is sitting and nursing a baby. Although she initially appears maternal, the Duchess soon reveals that there is nothing motherly in her nature. In one of their first interactions, Alice shares that before meeting the Cheshire-Cat she was unaware cats could smile.⁶⁹ The Duchess, disliking this remark, tells Alice, “You don’t know much... and that’s a fact.”⁷⁰ Alice comments on the Cheshire-Cat’s smile due to observing his smile, something the Duchess can also observe in small living room. Yet, despite knowing the source of Alice’s information, the Duchess—much like the Lory—dismisses Alice’s commentary. As the Duchess nurses and holds a child in her arms, she completely ignores the thoughts of another. If there was any doubt about the Duchess’s moral character, she further exposes her severe manner while singing to the baby in her arms. The Duchess sings, “*I speak severely to my boy, I beat him when he sneezes....*”⁷¹ This frightening nursery rhyme is not far off from how the Duchess actually treats the baby; moments later, she flings the baby at Alice. Unfortunately, this violent interaction is not the last time Alice will encounter the Duchess in *Wonderland*. As Alice walks arm in arm with the Duchess in the Queen of Heart’s garden, the two speak directly of morals. After Alice suggests that there may not be a moral to something the Duchess has said, she is told

⁶⁸ Gardner, 28.

⁶⁹ Carroll, 38.

⁷⁰ Carroll, 39.

⁷¹ Carroll, 40.

“Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”⁷² In reading *Alice*, there certainly are different ways to interpret and understand what Alice experience. However, I am still left unsure what exactly the moral narrative in *Alice* is that we have found.

In the world of Wonderland, Alice’s morality speaks of something a bit more positive than those of who she encounters. Throughout the story, we are given insight in Alice’s character. Alice’s character is far different than those in *Wonderland*—she is kind and caring even in the face of cruelty. Alice’s conscientiousness is almost immediately apparent, as it appears even as she falls down the rabbit hole. During the fall, Alice accidentally grabs an empty jar of marmalade off of a shelf she passes. Unsure of where she should place it, Alice thinks to herself that “...she did not like to drop the jar, for fear of killing somebody underneath, so [she] managed to put it into one of the cupboards as she fell past it.”⁷³ Even in the midst of a long fall, in which Alice has no idea where she is going, Alice exhibits a thoughtfulness not typically associated with someone of her age. Only moments later Alice thinks to herself, “I hope they’ll remember her saucer of milk at tea-time. Dinah, my dear! I wish you were down here with me.”⁷⁴ Dinah is Alice’s cat; not only does she wish her cat was accompanying her, but she is also thinking of her cat’s well-being as she falls. Many fail to think of others during every day interactions, nonetheless when they have fallen down a rabbit hole. The greatest example of Alice’s thoughtfulness is when she eats the small cake that causes her to suddenly become very tall. Noticing that she can no long see her feet Alice thinks to herself, “Oh my pool little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stocking for you now, dears?”⁷⁵

⁷² Carroll, 59.

⁷³ Carroll, 2.

⁷⁴ Carroll, 3.

⁷⁵ Carroll, 7.

Unconcerned by the fact that she has suddenly grown grossly tall, Alice is worried for no one other than her feet. Once again we see Alice thinking of someone other than herself in a moment of crisis.

As Alice continues to venture further into Wonderland, her actions more than just her words begin to reveal a growing sense of morality. In the beginning of the story, Alice takes orders without question. Finding a bottle labeled “DRINK ME,” Alice hesitates momentarily, but soon deems the bottle acceptable to drink.⁷⁶ This is not the first nor the last time we see Alice blindly following orders in *Wonderland*. Spotting the White Rabbit hopping around in a hurry, Alice begins to help him find the gloves he has lost. The White Rabbit, mistaking Alice for someone he knows, orders her to run home and look for the gloves there. Alice notes, “...[she] was so much frightened that she ran off at once in the direction it pointed to, without trying to explain the mistake it had made.”⁷⁷ Rather than explain to the White Rabbit that she is not his servant-girl, Alice instead does exactly what he has told her to do. In these interactions, Alice’s freedom is limited. Allotted little ability to make decisions on her own, Alice seeks directions from others in regards to what she should do. Yet, as Alice ventures through *Wonderland* and its many strange experiences, she also finds herself becoming freer. Gaining the confidence to make her own decisions, Alice demonstrates her new-found decision making ability near the end of the story. When the Queen of Hearts proclaims that the Knave is certainly guilty of stealing the tarts in question at court, Alice is quick to point out the foolishness of this decision. She tells the Queen, “It doesn’t prove anything of

⁷⁶ Carroll, 4.

⁷⁷ Carroll, 19.

the sort. Why you don't even know what they're about!"⁷⁸ In this situation, Alice not only interrupts the somewhat scary Queen of Hearts, but also presents an immoral verdict from being made. Alice enters into *Wonderland* passive, but exits with a mind of her own.

IV. Moral Implications

In the two sections above, I am not arguing that *Alice* is completely void of morality in its entirety or that *Peter Rabbit* is a stronghold of morality that all children's literature should aspire to. As we can see, the character of Alice offers moral insight in her tale through her interactions and decision making. There is much to learn from a young girl who is left to her devices in terms of journeying through a new, and sometimes frightening world, that is completely unlike her own. However, the moral lessons within *Alice* are much less clear than those presented in Potter's writing. In *Alice* we may learn how not to act at a Mad Hatter's tea party, but in *Peter* we learn about our natural surroundings alongside the consequences of failing to listen to our mothers. This is not to say that there is no value in fiction that is, perhaps, written purely as a tale of wild imaginary happenings. However, that is not what is occurring with *Alice* and the intentions Carroll approached his writing with are awfully suspicious.

With *Peter Rabbit*, we are given Beatrix Potter. An author, illustrator, conservationist, and involved figure in her community, Potter was a woman who did everything thoroughly. Her thoroughness is reflected in her writing—she knew children were the audience of her books and she wrote for them accordingly. Thus, when Peter finds himself unwell and in need of chamomile tea⁷⁹, it is hard not to feel as though you

⁷⁸ Carroll, 81.

⁷⁹ Potter, 24.

also need a cup of something warm. This reaction is largely due to the fact that Potter seamlessly incorporates reality into her writing, but does so purposefully. As mentioned earlier, Potter wished to have her readers receive a realistic portrayal of nature in her stories. Rabbits, even in their human outfits, act as rabbits in real life would. Yet, they also display characteristics many children would be able to relate too—after all, in childhood we often fail to listen to our mothers. There is something in this story that lifts readers out of the element of reality, but is also extremely relatable. Moreover, if Potter inserted her own reality into this story, it may have been in the form of her own pet rabbits or the idea that she did not enjoy her childhood. However, she was not writing to hold onto anyone in particular, such as a young Alice Liddell.

It is on this point that we see *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* differing from *Peter Rabbit*. The world of Wonderland is much unlike our own, and to experience it through Alice is both exciting and frightening at times. After all, even as adults it is hard not to be delighted by a caterpillar who smokes or even a game of croquet in which flamingoes are the mallets. However, in this world existing beneath a rabbit hole morality becomes much less clear. When we respond emotionally to Alice, it is not necessarily because we are able to relate to her experience. Rather, we feel sad that this is a young girl who, completely alone, must navigate through a world filled with often malicious characters. The reality of her situation is that through the delight of the oddities in her surroundings, the tale is also one of terror. Part of the reason the story may fail to deliver a strong sense of morality may be due to Carroll's intentions. As we learned, he wrote *Alice* as a Christmas gift for the real-life Alice Liddell. More importantly, the nature of his relationship with the young Liddell, and other young girls later on, became

questionable. As a result, *Alice* appears to be not just a story of a young girl falling down a rabbit hole, but a man who has also fallen down a rabbit hole of inappropriate emotions for a girl who should not be subject to his affection.

Thus, in looking at these two stories it becomes apparent that the role of the author certainly plays a part in the moral narrative of children's literature. With *Peter Rabbit* we are given an author who approached her work with the intention of writing for children. As a result, children are presented with stories that are morally clear—we learn to respect our neighbors, to take care of our clothes, and how to deal with those who have differing opinions than those of our own. Of course, these lessons appear through the actions of rabbits and other small creatures, so the element of fiction still exists. Yet, the purpose of *Peter Rabbit* takes on a role that is greater than just entertainment. In *Alice*, on the other hand, the moral narrative appears far more blurred. By the end of the story, we are not really sure what lessons have been learned. Many of the characters appear to be without morals, and treat Alice very poorly—if anything, we may learn how *not* to act from *Alice*. Moreover, Alice awakens and attributes her experience to that of a dream.⁸⁰ Often when we wake from dreams, we can either remember too little of what we have dreamt to make sense of it or do not attempt to make sense of it at all. For some readers, there may be no take away from this tale. Reflecting the authors' reality, *Alice* becomes a piece of children's literature showcasing Carroll's messy morals whereas *Peter Rabbit* stands a part as containing clearer moral narrative.

⁸⁰ Carroll, 84.

Conclusion

I. An Ending

It appears that we come near to the end and closer to a conclusion—when analyzing children’s literature we must consider the life of the author and how they approach their text. Of course, there is no possible way to allow Beatrix Potter and Lewis Carroll to speak for themselves. Perhaps, if they were able to be present they would say something far different about the nature of their literature. Yet, something speaks in the way the moral narratives within their stories present themselves and how they approached their work. With *Peter Rabbit* we see a much clearer message being communicated to children—we learn to stay out of our neighbor’s garden and to keep track of our clothes. These simple lessons we learn from *Peter* as children can be applied at all times in our lives; it is always wise to recognize boundaries and to keep track of your belongings. Throughout the entire *Peter Rabbit* book set, there are many more lessons and an emotional depth to these tales. Moreover, these lessons are embedded in simple but enchanting prose—something that does not happen very frequently today with children’s literature.

Carroll, on the other hand, did not set out to write *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* with the clearest intentions. This does not mean that such a piece of literature is worthless; in fact, it is completely the opposite. Carroll’s *Alice* and the stories that follow in the series have long been highly regarded and loved by children and adults alike since their publications. However, it is worth understanding how Carroll’s life complicates the moral messages within the novel. As we have seen, it is rather unclear what the nature of his feelings towards the real-life Alice Liddell were—in fact, it is unclear

how he understood himself in relation to children in general. As a result, when Carroll enters into the literary imagination of children with *Alice*, morality becomes a bit murky. There is no clear lesson within the story of young Alice falling down the rabbit hole, who awakes to find that it was all merely just a dream. When children read this story, it is unsure what they will take away.

I would like to clarify once again that I am not making the claim that there is nothing to be learned from *Alice* as a story. Alice is an adventurous young girl who faces an often frightening journey ahead of her. Furthermore, she faces this journey bravely—there is much to be learned just from this aspect of the story. However, it could be argued that Carroll did not write *Alice* with the intention to show his readers an independent female literary figure. As we learned with his background, this story was most likely written for Alice Liddell with the hopes of pleasing her. An innocent gesture at first glance, his intentions become complicated when we understand the way literature immortalizes its characters; the Alice in Carroll's story will always be there—a young girl of eleven years old, forever at his side to revisit in story. Within this story there are lessons, but it is unclear exactly what they are. Moreover, it is unclear if these lessons were intentionally placed there by Carroll—Potter, in contrast, intentionally integrated moral lessons into her writing. It is in here that the difference lies.

With children's literature there certainly is a relationship between the author and their text; these stories are derived from a place within their own childhood. In a sense, these stories hold healing powers for their writers as they revisit a moment in childhood that may have been unpleasant. As emotional of a bond the author has with their text, it is not hard to imagine that the reader experiences a similar sensation. This occurs both

within *Peter Rabbit* and *Alice*, as we feel attached to the rabbits and Alice throughout the events of their stories—emotion will be conveyed in a text regardless of its morality. However, whether it be emotion or morality there is something within children’s literature that speaks to its reader. It converses with children about rabbits who not only drink tea, but frantically check their pocket watches for the time. Children’s literature whispers of something more in these stories: it whispers of morality and life lessons. Knowing this, we should want to approach such a genre with the best intentions. We should want children to stumble down a rabbit hole of literary imagination when reading, but also ensure there is something worthwhile for them to return with—however, we would prefer their blue coats and small shoes only to be weathered, not torn.

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