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Confrontations with Absurdity and Disorder: A Comparative Analysis between Dante Alighieri's
Inferno and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates themes such as religion, logic, philosophy, political thought, time, and modes of didactics in order to illuminate the similarities and differences between Dante Alighieri's 14th century epic poem, *Inferno* and Lewis Carroll's English children's novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The analysis of Dante and Alice's transition from a world of order to one of disorder is what provokes these figures to not only engage in personal introspection, but also encourages them to deeply reflect on society around them. With major similarities such as the usage of a guide, implementation of allegory, and struggles with identity, several elements of these two texts prove to be analogous with one another despite having been written at very different time periods by authors of extraordinarily different backgrounds. The main discrepancies concern the implementation of religious reasoning, purpose for which Alice and Dante's journeys began, and the personal motives that sparked the curiosity of these two protagonists to explore the unknown.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, / ché la diritta via era smarrita” (“midway of the journey of our life /I found myself within a dark forest, / For the straightforward path had been lost” *Inferno, I :1-3*) These are the opening three lines of Dante Alighieri’s epic poem, *Inferno*. In this rather small stanza, it is revealed to readers that Dante has found himself lost in a dark forest to which the illuminated path to safety has been obscured. Despite the allegorical nature of the ‘forest,’ as it represents the dark and desolate nature of sin, it is Dante's state of lostness within this wood that sparks the initiation of his journey towards religious purification. Alighieri’s poem triumphantly tackles several different themes such as the limits of morality and immortality, the consequences of actions that contradict religion, and the physical depiction of pain and suffering. Although certain parts of the poem proved daunting due to their exploration of 14th-century ideologies, I realized that by breaking them down into smaller, more comprehensible fragments, these once challenging themes became far more manageable to understand. For example, when referring back to the opening lines of this poem, it became exceeding apparent to me that the concept of discovering oneself in a period of obscurity or uncertainty before embarking on a journey of rediscovery is a theme that is not specific to just the 14th century. Instead, it serves as a commentary on the human experience as a whole. This is largely because the process of growth is not one that is achieved in the absence of discomfort. At every point of his treacherous expedition through the infernal abyss, Dante is met with examples of the absurd that not only put his courage to the test,

but they also push him to experience compassion for those who are suffering and overcome extreme terror.

Having devoted these past four years at the Pennsylvania State University to the exploration of both Italian and English languages, as well as their respective literatures, I deeply desired for this thesis to reflect my depth of engagement in both of these areas of study. Upon finishing a four-month long independent study on Dante's *Inferno* in Perugia, Italy, I craved to know more about this poem upon my return back to State College. For that reason, I decided to make Alighieri's masterpiece the focal point of this thesis. That said, I had faced several major setbacks when trying to connect this masterpiece to any of the English novels that I had previously studied throughout my college career. It wasn't until I stripped Alighieri's poem from its religious, spiritual, and historical themes and instead analyzed its fundamental framework. What is at the core of this story? I often asked myself. What characteristics make Dante important? Is he the hero of his own story? Why was there the need for him to leave his own world? How did his journey come to fruition? What was the outcome of this expedition into the unknown? Upon answering these questions, it dawned on me that Alighieri's poem deeply concerns itself with the voluntary displacement of oneself from the "real" world into one that is intrinsically absurd in order to acquire a new level of profound personal understanding. Upon reaching these conclusions, the answer became more obvious than ever: I needed to take a step back from the more realistic English texts that I was trying to compare the poem with and instead look more deeply into some of the fantasy stories that I know by heart.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a unique text in that it mirrors Dante's journey through hell but is packaged to appeal to a younger audience. This story does not contain any religious undertones nor concern itself with the intentional betterment of its main

character. Instead, Alice's journey through Wonderland is posed as more of a hazy curiosity-based escape from the boredom of her lazy summer day at the riverbank. Carroll characterizes Wonderland itself as a place that is fun, colorful, and inviting so that readers are not fearful of the perplexities that they will come across throughout the duration of the story. In fact, readers are pushed to laugh at the strangeness that Wonderland presents. Much like Dante, Alice is put through several "tests" that prove her willingness to continue on her path even when things are tough. Throughout her time in Wonderland, Alice does not seek to "purify" herself in any manner like Dante does. Instead, as a young girl that is wrapped in the chaos of a big and unfamiliar world, her experiences in Wonderland influence her maturity, confidence, and assertiveness. That said, through the investigation of elements such as religion, logic, political ideologies, time, and pedagogical approaches, this thesis aims to conduct a comparative analysis between Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The intention of this discussion is to illuminate how exposure to absurdity and disorder allows for intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual growth.

Chapter 2

Getting Oriented

At the beginning of Lewis Carroll's novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), readers encounter Alice and her sister sitting alongside a riverbank. Whereas Alice's sister is engulfed in the pages of her book, Alice finds herself lost in a daydream. Even though it is a well-known fact that Carroll's story is characterized as a fantasy-adventure tale, its beginning does not contain any fantastical elements. Instead, it's rather "ordinary" introduction provides readers with a sense of familiarity, allowing them to relate to Alice and feel invited into the narrative. However, it appears that just as readers begin to feel comfortable, Carroll disrupts this normalcy with the addition of a fantastical character, The White Rabbit. This is an anthropomorphized animal that is not only never given a formal name, but his background is never shared with the reader. The role of this figure at this point of the novel is to entice Alice into following him down the so-called "rabbit hole," thereby initiating her journey into the madness of Wonderland.

Before diving into the intricacies of Wonderland itself, it is important to point out that Alice's alleged entrance into this world is not solely marked by her literal entrance into the "rabbit hole." Instead, as stated in the first line of the story and confirmed in the last chapter of the tale, during her time spent on the river bend with her sister, Alice had begun to fall asleep. This detail is extremely important to the facilitation of her journey into Wonderland because it highlights a change in the physiological state of Alice as fatigue begins to loosen her grip on reality. Carroll does not explicitly share with readers at this point in the novel that Alice's time in Wonderland can be boiled down to nothing more than a nightmarish dream. However, it can be

assumed that since the audience of this novel is predominantly children, this indirectness regarding Alice's entrance into Wonderland ensures that the spirit of the young readers will stay intact as they are not outright denied of the possibility that magic exists in everyday life. That being said, when revisiting Alice's 'descent' into the so-called "rabbit hole," Carroll depicts her in an extremely overwhelmed state as a series of confused thoughts and fragmented inquiries race around in her mind. She mutters, "down, down, down, would the fall 'never' come to an end? I wonder how many miles I have fallen by this time?... I must be getting to the centre of the earth..." (Carroll 14). Even though the function of these questions is to elongate this particular moment of the story, they also pose as a form of distraction from a small piece of narration that explicitly states that during this fall Alice felt herself not only dozing off but beginning to dream. Immediately following this comment, it is stated that her body abruptly hits the floor at the bottom of the "rabbit hole." Again, Alice did not *actually* find a rabbit hole by the riverbend and jump into it, instead, this fall is a flowery and enchantingly confusing description of Alice falling asleep.

These preliminary events of the tale are extremely important thematically because they establish a clear distinction between the 'real world' at the riverbend and the 'imaginary world' that exists at the bottom of the "rabbit hole." As Alice sleeps, her soul departs her physical body, which takes up space in the real world, and from there, enters a new body in Wonderland. This extraction of self takes a toll on Alice both mentally and physically given that her "new body" experiences several alarmingly physical changes. Such changes are induced by Alice's ingestion of a handful of magical potions and cakes that she encountered at the bottom of the "rabbit hole." Her body to shrinks and grows in an absurdly comical manner as with one bite of a delicious cake, she shrinks to the size of a mouse, to a small sip of a potion where she then grows nine feet

tall. Even though Alice's goal is to manipulate her size just enough to fit through one of the locked doors that resides in front of her, readers witness Alice experiencing several problems with both her identity and mental stability at this point in the novel. Even though Carroll packages this moment with a rather humorous way, it becomes increasingly apparent that upon slipping into this dream-like state, Alice loses her sense of self.

“Dear, dear!” she exclaims, “How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: ‘was’ I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?’” (Carroll 30).

Here, Alice attempts to grapple which points of her day could have gone awry, leading her to this uncomfortable state of confusion. Facing the absurdities that reside at the bottom of this “rabbit hole” prove to be an extremely taxing feat on an independent young girl. Carroll clearly highlights that this abrupt warp of reality that Alice experiences is not free from mental consequences as the emotional distress that this fall caused left her in her most vulnerable state throughout the entire novel.

Shortly after pulling herself out of her own puddle of tears, Alice enters a forest where she then runs into three anthropomorphized animals. These animals are a puppy, a blue caterpillar smoking a hookah, and a pigeon. It is here that we can begin to draw parallels between this text and the opening of Dante Alighieri's epic poem *Inferno*. The two texts mirror each other in that both protagonists are pulled from their respective worlds, where there is

comfort, and are then inserted into another that is absurd and nonsensical. Both Dante and Alice encounter three ferocious beasts at the beginning of their journeys that test their bravery.

Whereas the three animals highlighted in Carroll's tale do not play extremely significant roles in terms of the overall story, the three ferocious beasts (the leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf) in Dante's poem are extremely important due to their allegorical nature. Each of these beasts represent a different type of sin that Dante will encounter throughout his journey in the confines of Hell. The leopard represents lust; the lion, pride; and the she-wolf, greed. With that said, one may ask why a story like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* would adopt this similar structure if Alice's interactions with these characters do not carry any real significance to the story at large?

For Alice, the unique conversations that she had with each of these three animals play a role in giving her time to become familiar with her new surroundings. Whereas her encounter with the puppy is rather brief and unimportant, the second creature that Alice meets, the caterpillar, plays a fundamental role in helping Alice reclaim her identity that had been shattered following her fall down the "rabbit hole." During their rather troubled exchange, the Caterpillar rudely blurts out, asking, "who are you?" (Carroll 78) which prompts Alice to cautiously respond, "I- I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then" (Carroll 78). Even though Alice has now been in this environment for quite a while, it is evident that she still struggles understanding her role in this strange society. John Docherty's article "Dantean Allusions in Wonderland" explains that the Caterpillar "gives Alice invaluable advice but is not able to accompany her..." (14) consequently leaving Alice even more alone and confused than when she first arrived.

Upon the quick departure of the caterpillar, Alice soon finds herself in contact with a gawking Pigeon. Lauren Millikan toys with this idea in her blog titled, "Curiouser and Curiouser, The Evolution of Wonderland," where she analyzes the presence of the Pigeon in relation to Alice and her journey. She states that the Pigeon is not just a filler figure, but instead represents Alice's first encounter with the "flawed logic" of Wonderland: something that she will become very familiar with as the story progresses. An example of this would be when the Pigeon mistakes Alice for a serpent based loosely on the fact that she likes to eat eggs. For Alice, this connection is one that infuriates her.

“‘but I'm not a serpent, I tell you! I'm a – I'm a –’ [Alice exclaims,]

‘Well! What are you? Said the Pigeon. ‘I can see you're trying to invent something!’

‘I –I'm a little girl,’ said Alice” (Carroll 57-58).

Millikan argues that “Alice's encounter with the pigeon is... crucial in tracking the arc of Alice and her identity. By the end of these three encounters, Alice is now prepared to take on the strangeness of Wonderland with not only a newly intact identity, but a deeper awareness of the world around her” (Millikan 52). This goes the same for Dante as following his interactions with the leopard, lion, and she-wolf, he is ready to take on whatever dangers that Hell will present to him.

Chapter 3

How Wonderland Works

It must be made clear that Wonderland is not a place of total chaos. Instead, readers can grasp very early on in the novel that there is a clear system that governs the behavior of its inhabitants. Not only is everyone divided into distinct groups within a hierarchical structure, but the residents of Wonderland adhere to their very own justice and time systems. Alice's first glimpse at this occurs at the Mad Hatter's Tea party. Having plopped herself down at the table with the other guests, Alice immediately gets told off by the Mad Hatter himself for inviting herself to the table. Once this tension washes over, the Mad Hatter is quick to inquire, "what day of the month is it?" (Carroll 120) as he takes out his nifty pocket watch. To Alice's astonishment, she exclaims,

"What a funny looking watch!... it tells the day of the month and it doesn't tell what o'clock it is!" The Mad Hatter swiftly responds, "why should it?... Does your watch tell you what year it is?" "Of course not! [Alice responds] ... but that's because it stays the same year for such a long time together" (Carroll 79-80).

This moment highlights the first time that Alice confronts this new way of understanding the world around her. Although she struggles to interpret the system of time in Wonderland, as seen by the Mad Hatter's nonchalance to Alice's agitation, it is very clear that to everyone else sitting at the table that inquiring the day of the month is nothing out of the ordinary.

The discussion surrounding the time system in Wonderland appears once more at the end of the novel when Alice attends the trial of the Knave of Hearts who was accused of wrongly

stealing the Queen of Hearts' tarts. In this scene, the Mad Hatter stumbles into the courtroom late with a cup of tea in hand. The King inquires when his tea party began to which the Mad Hatter responds gleefully,

“‘Fourteenth of March, I think it was...’

‘Fifteenth,’ said the March Hare.

‘Sixteenth’ Said the Dormouse” (Carroll 200).

Although the failure on multiple characters' parts to acknowledge the correct time in this scene was overlooked, as the court procession continues without much interruption, it is reinforced to readers that time in Wonderland is an arbitrary factor that holds little to no importance at all to the function of society. Whereas this concept is both foreign and jarring to Alice, it is clear that the longer that she is in Wonderland, she adapts to these disordered qualities and begins to stop questioning their strangeness.

Moving away from the abstract characteristics of Wonderland and instead bringing attention to its more concrete attributes, another important aspect of this nonsensical society has to do with its strict hierarchy of its individuals. Upon leaving the Mad Hatter's tea party towards the beginning of the novel, Alice takes a door that leads her to the Queen's Croquet-Ground. Here, she is met with the three anxious gardeners, all of whom are fretting about upsetting the Queen. Shortly after Alice speaks with them, the Queen of Hearts enters the scene accompanied by ten soldiers carrying clubs, the royal children, guests (which are described mostly as other Kings and Queens) the White Rabbit, and then the Knave of Hearts. Although this procession does not include everyone who lives in Wonderland, it offers a broad overview of how these

figures are divided among themselves. At the top of the pyramid lie the King and the Queen.

They are followed by the upper-class bourgeois, leaving the peasants and workers to occupy the bottom. Although Carroll does not offer any concrete explanation as to why the class system of Wonderland is arranged in this way, it does convey to readers that each class plays a nonnegotiable role within the greater society. Alice, as a foreigner to this world, has no choice but to familiarize herself to the distinct class systems of Wonderland in order to not only reducing attention being drawn to, but also avoid overstepping any social boundaries.

Chapter 4

The Importance of the Body

The parallels between Dante's *Inferno* and Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* don't stop here. Even though these two texts were written hundreds of years apart from each other, they continue to overlap in more ways than what was previously discussed above. A possible explanation for this could be that both of these texts not only revolve around an adventure, but they also share with readers the feelings of discomfort that arise from leaving a place/situation of familiarity. Having said this, both stories can be considered as a type of fall. Raffaele Mantegazza describes in his book, *Di Mondo in Mondo* that "all'inizio di ogni storia educativa c'è un desiderio o una necessità di 'andare via' dall'angoscia che abita 'nel lago del cor'" (at the beginning of every educational story, there is a desire or necessity to 'leave' the anguish that lives in the lake of the heart, Mantegazza 12). The reference made towards education in this quote does not necessarily allude to the readers learning something from these texts, but rather the protagonists taking on an adventure that puts them in the position to learn from their experiences. For example, in moments of confusion, Alice relies on the opinions of those around her to help illuminate how she should proceed. The key part of Mantegazza's statement that ties both Dante's *Inferno* and Carroll's "Wonderland" together is the burning desire that both Dante and Alice felt to escape their respective worlds in order to explore the unknown.

At the beginning of the third canto of the *Inferno*, after having already "departed" from the real world, Dante finds himself at the gates of Hell. He is accompanied by Virgil, the spirit of the dead roman poet, who will serve as his guide throughout his expedition in this sorrowful

place. On the doors of the gate is written “lasciate ogni speranza voi che entrate” (surrender as you enter every hope you have, *Inferno*, III: 116). This inscription troubles Dante who looks to Virgil for understanding. According to Robin Kirkpatrick’s translation of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil informs Dante that in order to pass through the gates and experience the chaos that resides on the other side, Dante must surrender all of his doubts and cowardice. This brief exchange between Dante and Virgil not only offers readers a preview of the dangers that are to come, but it also sets a precedent that Dante cannot, under all costs, fear the unknown.

The first group of sinners that Dante and Virgil come across in Hell are those who, throughout their lives on the mortal terrain, struggled with indecisiveness. Dante finds these souls in a state of emotional distress as their “quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai / risonavan per l’aere senza stelle” (“sighing, sobbing, moans and plaintive wailing / all echoed here through air where no star shone” *Inferno* III: 22-24). These beings are not only completely naked, but constantly swarmed and stung by hornets and wasps. The blood and tears that drip off their faces are then eaten by worms that have infested their bodies. Dante’s initial encounter with these souls is extremely important to the overall story as it creates a clear boundary between those who are dead and Dante, who is very much still much alive. Although Dante’s introduction to hell is a bit more distressing than Alice’s introduction to Wonderland, it cannot be coincidence that he must also rediscover the meaning of the body early on in his journey through this new and perplexing place.

As discussed earlier, Alice’s abnormal growth and diminution that was caused by the ingestion of several potions and cakes gave her agency to play with the boundaries of her new body before finding the right height to successfully enter through the door. Whereas the

manipulations to Alice's body are seemingly innocent, Dante's understanding of the body is a bit heavier as he must learn to separate the physical pain that is experienced by sinners and the ease of his own body that is unaffected. In verses 70-120 of Canto III Dante meets a Demon by the name of Charon. Drawn from Greek mythology, Charon's role is that of a ferryman who transports souls across the river of Acheron to Hell and beyond. Charon is aware of his duty. He understands that only the souls that are both *dead* and *impure* are allowed to be taken across the river in the depths of Hell. Thus, when he first sees Dante he rashly refuses to offer him a ride. This is because unlike Virgil, who is a spirit, Dante is still a living being. His arrival in Hell was caused, similarly to Alice, by a dreamlike hallucination that removed his soul from the real world and deposited him deep in the dark forest where he then encountered Virgil and his journey began. Dante is not a soul; he is a sentient being. For this reason, the only way that Dante was able to cross the river was because Virgil convinced Charon that his journey is one that is willed by God.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the connection between Dante and Virgil it is important to note the key differences that separate them from one another. Firstly, Virgil is a soul that has been condemned to Limbo. In lines 34-39 of Canto IV, Virgil explains to Dante that the inhabitants of Limbo:

“chi non peccaro; e s'elli hanno mercedi,
 Non basta, perché non ebber batesimo,
 ch'è porta de la fede che tu credi;
 E s'e' futon dinanzi al cristianesimo,
 Non adorar debitamente a Dio:

E di questi cotai sono io medesimo” (*Inferno*, IV:34-39).

[Translation]

“never sinned; and some attained to merit.

But merit falls far short. None was baptized.

None passed the gate, in your belief, to faith.

They lived before the Christian age began.

They paid no reverence, as was due to God.

And this number I myself am one.”

Given that Virgil is an inhabitant of Hell, he inherently holds more power than Dante as he has complete knowledge of how his surroundings function around him. That being said, it needs to be made clear that Virgil technically could have never left Limbo, nor escaped his eternal punishment, if he weren't chosen to be Dante's guide. This position is what gave him a sense of mobility that would have never been awarded to him otherwise. For both Alice and Dante, a journey away from reality results in a startling encounter with the limits of order and hierarchy of their new worlds. Speaking on behalf of Dante, his journey into the inferno is characterized by a loss of morals. This is not quite the same thing as Alice's loss of identity, however, both experiences can be referred to as a form of disorientation that provokes self-examination. On the opposing side, whereas Dante seeks to understand how to avoid sin through a journey of self-purification and understanding of God's word, Alice takes the dive into Wonderland based

primarily on her own curiosities. This is a key difference that separates the initiation of these two journeys from one another. That is, Dante has a motive for his journey while Alice does not.

Mirko Tavoni highlights in his article, “Dante ‘Imagining’ His Journey Through the Afterlife”, that Hell “begins as a vision, but continues as a realistic, extremely detailed, and purely literary narrative of a physical journey” (1). This reference to a “vision” directly aligns with the rather hazy-hallucinogenic descriptions of Hell and Wonderland at the beginning of both of these stories. Once Dante and Alice arrive in their secondary worlds, they are both incredibly disoriented. Their engagement and interpretation of the unfamiliar is limited due to the inherent newness of everything around them. However, it is clear that as both of these stories progress, and Dante and Alice find themselves more settled into their unique environments, their increased comfort within disorder is demonstrated by more in-depth descriptions of the locations that these two protagonists explore. For example, once Alice hit the bottom of the rabbit hole, the only descriptive details of this location that are given to readers is that it is dark overhead and there is a long corridor filled with doors. Carroll does not offer any further description of this area due to the panicked pacing of the moment that Alice finds herself in. Instead of taking her time to fully comprehend her surroundings, Alice only seeks to visually take in what is directly in front of her. This is different from the middle/end of the story where places, such as the Queen’s Croquet-ground, are described in a degree of detail that makes them appear almost life-like.

In the introduction to his translation of Dante’s *Inferno*, Kirkpatrick poses the question: “where the mind is expected to engage in the pursuit of rational good, what part does the body have to play in such a journey?” (ii). In the *Inferno*, the punishments that are brought upon souls

are oftentimes ones that are purely physical. Not only do these punishments bring corporeal pain and suffering to sinners, but some distort the body so far from its natural form into something horrifically unrecognizable. For example, in Canto XX, Dante encounters sinners who on the mortal terrain meddled in magic as fortune tellers. These wretched individuals are depicted as having their heads placed backwards on their bodies. Dante explains the reasoning for this punishment by saying that “perché volse vedere troppo davante / di resto guarda e fa retroso calle” (“as once he wished to see too far ahead / his tread is backward, and he stares to the rear ” *Inferno*, XX: 38-39). In other words, those who once sought to look into the future, are dealt a punishment that *literally* prevents them from looking forward. Their bodies are warped in such a way that they can only ever see what is behind them for the rest of eternity.

Theologically speaking, fortune-telling is a sin against the order of divine providence. As described by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, God is the only being that has the power to be “omniscient or all-knowing: he knows all of the truths that they are true, and all of the falsehoods that they are false, whether they pertain to past, present, or future” (McCann and Johnson). These sinners surpass their limitations as humans and instead assume an unjust level of divine power through soothsaying. This idea regarding the limitations on the human perspective most closely relates to the notion that human beings only have the ability to reference the past via memory and interpret the events that are happening in the present. They do not have the power to interpret or modify the future as this is God’s job. Considering that the punishments within each of the circles of hell are physical, Alighieri’s decision to distort the bodies of these sinners in this respect serves as a very poignant way to display their blatant distrust in God and his plan.

Regarding a direct mention of the body in Canto XX, as Dante first encounters the warped bodies of the soothsayers, he exclaims, “come l viso mi scese in lor più basso, /mirabilmente apparve esser travolto/ ciascun tra ‘l mento e ‘l principio del casso...” (*Inferno* XX: 10-12). The word “ciascun” that is used in these lines translates to “each” or “each one” in modern day Italian. However, there seems to be some inconsistency in the English translations of this section regarding the descriptions of these bodies. In Kirkpatrick’s translation, this line is translated as, “then, as my gaze sank lower down these forms, /each was revealed... twisted /around between the chin and thorax” (*Inferno*, XX: 10-12). In Kenneth Mackenzie’s translation, he describes these bodies as, “weeping folk who walked around the valley at the pace that in our world is used for litanies” (*Inferno* XX: 7-9). Despite there being several other English translations of this section of the poem, the words “each,” “forms,” and “folk,” that are used to describe the physical appearance of the soothsayers in both Kirkpatrick and Mackenzie’s editions strongly suggests a degree of misrecognition of the human body. To Dante, these bodies are not bodies. Instead, they are vestibules that not only contain some undefined lifelike quality but carry an outward appearance that is alarmingly indistinguishable from what he considers normal.

In terms of Dante’s physical presence in hell, Mantegazza describes that “un corpo che impara, dunque, quello di Dante, e una pedagogia squisitamente fisica...” (a body that learns, however, that of Dante, is an exquisitely physical pedagogy, 28). Dante’s journey through hell mimics that of Alice’s in Wonderland in that they are both tasked with learning about these worlds strictly from the experiences they have in that place. For example, in Canto XIII, Dante enters the seventh circle of hell where he encounters a group of individuals that have committed violence against themselves in the form of suicide. The physical punishment for this sin is that each and every sinner is transformed into a tree, meaning that they are not only robbed of their

bodies, but stripped of their humanity. As Dante fearfully inches closer to them, Virgil proposes that “Se tu tronchi / qualche fraschetta d’una d’essa piante, / li pensare c’hai si faran tutti monchi” (“if you wrench away / some sprig from any tree you choose, / that will lop short your feelings of such doubt” *Inferno*, XIII: 28-30) Following Virgil’s suggestion, he plucks a small bit off of one of the branches. To his surprise, the tree screams back at him, “perché mi schante?” (“why splinter me?” *Inferno*, XII: 33). This type of experimentation with senses such as physical touch is imperative because it provides Dante with a degree of concrete feedback that helps him gain a clearer understanding of the world around him. In the absence of this element of trial and error, Dante would deduce himself to a mere spectator to the absurdities of Hell as opposed to a true adventurer.

Speaking more in depth on the movement that Alice and Dante make in Wonderland and Hell, it is evident that both adventurers need to overcome a handful of physical boundaries in order to continue their respective journeys. For Alice, these boundaries are represented as doors, gardens, and locks. For Dante, they are manifested as gates, openings, and rivers. According to Mantegazza, “I confini e i passaggi aiutano il viandante e lasciare alle spalle lo spazio precedentemente abitato e a fare il proprio ingresso, spiritualmente prima che fisicamente, nel nuovo dispositivo spaziale” (the boundaries and passages help the traveler to leave the previously inhabited space behind and enter, spiritually before physically, into a new spatial disposition, Mantegazza 42). Even though Alice’s journey is not one that is inherently “spiritual,” it can be argued that, just like Dante, each event that Alice participated in (i.e. the tea party, the court case, and so on) demanded a different mentality from her. The act of learning and the re-learning how to comport herself at different points of her journey is what not only helped Alice grow as an individual, but it also influenced her ability to confront the chaos and disorder

of Wonderland with ease. For Dante, these passages functioned in a similar yet different way.

Like Alice, at every boundary a new level of thinking and perception was required from him.

However, spiritually speaking, each threshold in Hell represents one step closer to Dante

fulfilling his mission of achieving religious purification. One can think of these boundaries like

chapters in a book. As each and every chapter passes, the reader will find themselves closer to

finishing the story. It is important to shed light on the fact that the boundaries that Dante

encounters throughout his journey are not created solely to test his willingness to proceed.

Instead, they dually function as a way to organize sinners into specific groups based on their sin

so they can be punished equally.

Chapter 5

Logic, Division, and Political Thought

As the similarities between these two texts begin to reveal themselves, it is important to illuminate that the main difference that sets these two narratives apart resides in the motives for which Dante and Alice's journeys began. Whereas Alice's journey through Wonderland "forces her to confront and question her own identity and values..." (Literary Devices in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland) in order to find her place in the world, Dante seeks to understand from a Christian point of view how the relationship of one's classical past on the earthly terrain, and the choices one makes there, are represented in life after death. Jacob E. Weinraub describes in his article, "Dante's Philosophical Hierarchy," that Dante created the human being as, "a dualistic creature whose body is temporal and whose soul is eternal" (86). This line of thinking exemplifies the strictly dichotomous nature of *The Divine Comedy* as it charts Dante's experience through the three realms of the afterlife: hell, purgatory, and heaven all while referring back to the moral life. The ideas of eternal punishment and eternal suffering that are present in the *Inferno* allude to the plight of the soul after having disobeyed the word of God in the "temporary" sphere of the earthly terrain.

When focusing more closely on the construction of the *Inferno*, it appears that every passage that Dante makes into a different circle of Hell presents him with a different ethical challenge. These ethical challenges are presented allegorically. In Carroll's novel, political allegory functions to satirize the Victorian government: the arbitrary, convoluted and illogical hierarchies of the tea-party mirror the absurd rigidity of the Royal state. Dante's use of allegory functions as a way to not only to bring attention to events that have happened in Italy's historical

past, but also to provide a moral map for a possible future free from sin. In “Allegory in Dante’s *Commedia*,” Robert Hollander argues that Dante’s allegory “has a moral value as what we see there [Hell] tells us what we should do here [Earth]” (50). Not only does Dante represent Hell as a place that has the potential to carry some form of ethical meaning, but literary speaking, its depiction is much less chaotic than one might assume. As a potent political thinker, the creation of the circles and the punishments that sinners will receive within those boundaries are directly related to Dante’s principled judgment on morality. Despite the manifest differences, the same can be said for Carroll’s *Wonderland* as it is a satirical replication of Victorian power structures at odds with Carroll’s more democratic political leanings.

The division of souls within the Hell reflects Dante’s commitment to spiritual order and structure. Through the creation of the nine circles of hell: Limbo, Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Anger, Heresy, Violence, Fraud, and Treachery, Dante places emphasis on the separation of individuals based on the seriousness of the sin they committed on the earthly terrain. These divisions, and their specific order, are based heavily on both Classical Greek and Medieval Christian philosophy. Dante himself, as a committed political figure during his time, took liberty in inserting several conniving politicians within several of these circles based on the crimes that they had committed during their lifetimes. Given the funnel structure of the *inferno*, each level, or circle, is heavily separated and entirely self-governed. This means that sinners are divided based on their sin, placed in an environment with no upward or downward mobility, and are left there to be continuously tortured for the rest of eternity. Like Carroll, perhaps, Dante is a poet of order in a world of chaos; it is as though sin (for Dante) and democracy (for Carroll) are ways in which they find order within disorder.

Even though the type of physical punishment varies depending on the level of hell that a sinner will inhabit, it is a non-negotiable fact that each soul within any given circle of Hell will be punished in the exact same manner. This idea concerning the equal allocation of pain and suffering, appears to be a reflection of classical Christian thought on egalitarianism. As defined by Will Kenton in his article, "Egalitarianism: Definition, Ideas, and Types," egalitarianism is a system that is, "based on equality, namely that all people are equal and deserve equal treatment in all things" (2). Stripped from divisions of class, political beliefs, and gender, the specific modes of punishment are what unites this diverse group of individuals. Kenton continues to argue that this egalitarianist viewpoint considers the "overarching principles of the Bible to be that men and women are equally created in God's image; equally responsible for sin; equally redeemed by Christ; and equally gifted by God's spirit" (Kenton 7). In terms of this perspective, if people are equally responsible for committing sin, then they are equally responsible to receive punishment. Having said that, given that Dante caters each punishment to the gravity of the sin, this creates some differentiation in Hell as not every wrongdoer will be exposed to the same kind of pain. For example, in the second circle of hell, those who are guilty of lust are whipped around in strong, storm-like winds. In the fourth circle, those who are guilty of excessive greed are forced to push heavy weights into one another. In the sixth circle, those who are heretics are trapped inside burning tombs. Due to these differentiations, Dante's representation of Hell in his *inferno* is a place that is made up of a variety of several smaller egalitarian societies.

Something particularly fascinating is the "self-governed" nature of punishment that Dante develops in his *Inferno*. This is seen through the idea that at each level of Hell, the punishment is pre-set and the terrain is specifically created to enable the transmission of that particular punishment. Thus, each sinner who is implanted within any given level of the inferno is

subjected to a punishment that is administered even in the absence of an oppressive authority figure overseeing it. Even though this is not the case for all of the circles in the inferno, as there are demons and other figures that operate as guards, torturers, figures who patrol, and modes of transport, it is clear that for a place this large, there does seem to be a lack of control by appointed personnel. This is very different from Carroll's novel where The Queen of Hearts makes all of the decisions concerning what goes on in Wonderland. Not only is she oppressive to the working class, but Carroll paints her as someone to be feared among the entire community.

Chapter 6

Emotional Development

Whereas the power that the Queen of Hearts holds comes off in a comical way to readers, it is clear that her actions oftentimes promote fear within the inhabitants of Wonderland. Even though Alice is very much afraid of the Queen at the beginning of the novel, as she spends more time in Wonderland, she soon outgrows this fear. Alice shifts from accepting the rather rude tendencies of the authoritative figures around her as a helpless girl, to becoming an outspoken young woman who not only stands up for herself, but also questions authority when necessary. The progression of this change can be mapped from the first interaction that Alice had with the Queen of Hearts in the beginning of the novel to her final interaction with her at the end of the novel. As the King and Queen approached Alice for the first time on her croquet-ground, the Queen immediately asks for Alice's name to which Alice responds to her in a clear and polite manner. To Alice, there is nothing strange or fearful about this interaction. However, in response to the fear that the King and Queen's presence arouses in those around her, Alice ponders, "why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!" (Carroll 93-94). Whereas Alice's internal monologue serves as a type of self-reassurance that she does not need to be afraid in this particular moment, these thoughts are resurrected once again at the end of the novel but with a drastically different context and tone.

In the final scene, the trial of the Knave of Hearts, Alice is chosen by the Queen of Hearts to testify. Already enraged because the trial is not going in her favor, the Queen instigates an argument with Alice regarding the manner in which she is speaking. Their quarrel goes as follows,

“No, no!. Sentence first - verdict afterwards’ ‘Stuff and nonsense!’ said Alice loudly.

‘The idea of having the sentence first.’ “Hold your tongue!’ Said the Queen, turning purple.”

‘I won’t!’ said Alice.

‘Off with her head!’ the Queen shouted at the top of voice. Nobody moved.

‘Who cares for you?’ said Alice (she had grown to her full size but this time). ‘You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’” (Carroll 222).

This dispute serves as a big turning point for Alice as she fearlessly stands up to authority. By outwardly calling the Queen “nothing but a pack of cards” while the several other inhabitants of Wonderland are watching, she not only publicly diminishes the Queen’s power and ego, but she also shifts pre-existing power dynamics.

Whereas Alice’s journey in Wonderland concerns itself with overcoming fear of authority, Dante’s journey through the inferno is more complex. Robert Hollander argues that fear is not the only emotion that Dante is faced with. Whereas fear is something that is associated with the unknown, pity is a driving force that helps Dante understand the pain and suffering that sinners are subjected to. Much like Alice, Dante is only an onlooker into this world. Therefore, he can observe sinners’ pain, but he will never be able to share their sorrow. Having said this, the expression of emotions such as pity, serves as the most effective way for Dante to bring himself closer to the sinners he encounters to understand their plight.

This idea of pity is first introduced in Canto II as Dante reflects on his ambitions to traverse through Hell. He says, “io sol uno m’apparechiava a sostenere la guerra / si del cammino e si de la pietate” (“I myself / alone prepared to undergo the battle/ both of the journey

and of the pity” *Inferno*, II: 3-5). Here, Dante recognizes that this journey will not only be physically challenging, but also spiritually taxing. As Dante reaches the second circle of Hell, in Canto V, that is occupied by sinners who were driven by lust, he experiences pity upon meeting the tormented souls of Francesca da Polenta and Paolo Malatesta. Dante listens to the young Francesca recount her difficulties with her love life. As for many young Italian women in 14th century Italy, Francesca was set up for an arranged marriage. It was agreed upon by her family that she shall marry one of two brothers of the Malatesta family, Paolo or Giovanni. In brief, Francesca was forced to marry Giovanni. However, she fell deeply in love with his younger brother, Paolo. One day Paolo and Francesca were caught together by Giovanni who then murdered both of them in cold blood. This resulted in the condemnation of both Francesca and Paolo to Hell where they are to pay for their lust for the rest of eternity.

Dante was very moved by this story as he exclaimed, “Francesca, I tuoi martiri / a lacrimar mi fanno tristo e pio (“Francesca, how your suffering saddens me! / sheer pity brings me to the point of tears” *Inferno*, V:116-117). As a foreigner in this world, Dante cannot understand the physical pain of punishment from the perspective of a sinner. However, through pity, he can more easily approach understanding thereby giving him the opportunity to emotionally feel the sinner’s struggle. It is made clear that for Dante, to feel is to understand. Therefore, once he is able to understand the motives for a sin, he can not only make sense of the factors and circumstances that drove people to commit it, but he also is given the opportunity to see and interpret what that particular sin had cost them through the analysis of their physical condition in hell. This reflection grants Dante agency to make an assessment whether the punishment of sinner is a proper reflection of the sin itself. All in all, through the process of

opening himself up to experience pity and vulnerability, Dante finds himself better equipped to continue journey in a meaningful and educated manner.

Chapter 7

The Pedagogies of Wonderland and Hell

As Alice wandered through Wonderland, it was inevitable that she would come across some rather interesting figures. Whereas some played rather insignificant roles, others were extremely important to Alice's overall journey. In terms of analyzing the more important characters, it is imperative to start at the beginning. The White Rabbit was the first character that Alice sees from Wonderland. His role at the start of the novel was to lure Alice down the "rabbit hole." At the opening of the first chapter, it is said that Alice,

"...has 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 Alice went after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (Carroll 12).

Although Alice and the White Rabbit never formally speak to one another, his physical presence holds immense narrative value as he is the one that sparks Alice's curiosity to start her journey. Alice uses the movement of the White Rabbit as a marker that she is not only going in the right direction, but also that she is not alone. Once she finds herself deep in the complexities of Wonderland, the importance of the White Rabbit to Alice's journey decreases significantly. So much so that he eventually fades into the background as another guide, the Cheshire Cat, takes over.

When one thinks of a guide, it is common to associate it with someone who not only closely follows another, but also readily offers advice when needed. In Alice's case, the Cheshire

Cat does not follow this trend as he fluidly comes and goes throughout the duration of Alice's time in Wonderland. This detail is significant because whereas Virgil is attached to Dante's hip throughout the entirety of his journey in Hell, Alice is given much more freedom to explore Wonderland and make choices that are free from outside influence. Despite the apparent similarity of Alice and Dante both having guides to lead them through unknown terrain, the manner in which these guides function is very different. The Cheshire cat takes a more autodidactic approach where he seeps into Alice's consciousness when she is in need. Virgil, on the other hand, not only accompanies Dante, but strategically leads him directly to where he needs to go. Mantegazza states that the relationship between the master and the student is one that needs to be cared for in order for both parties to gain trust within one another. Beyond the idea of trust, it is evident that Dante regards Virgil with due reverence. Within the allegorical construct of Hell, Virgil is particularly important as he not only represents qualities such as wisdom and human reason, but he also possesses a degree of divine sapience. Having prophesied Christ's birth in his Eclogue 4, Virgil's poetic talent was widely known by many in ancient Italy. For this reason, Virgil is a highly regarded figure in both life and death as he succeeds to demonstrate a level of moral excellence. The Cheshire Cat, on the other hand, does not have any form of long-winded backstory. Instead, he is just an established character of Wonderland that has the knowledge and ability to steer Alice away from any possible danger.

Due to the structure of *The Divine Comedy*, in that it is a three-part journey (Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven), Alighieri makes it clear that Virgil is the only guide that is suited to lead Dante through Hell. This point is important to demonstrate that Dante, like Alice, uses more than one guide throughout their journeys. The usage of several guides in Carroll's tale goes to show that as Alice begins to familiarize herself more with Wonderland, a different guide with different

qualities is necessary to help her move forward. As for Dante, as he traverses Hell and Purgatory, Dante needs Virgil to instill within him qualities such as purity and reason. However, given that Virgil “possesses neither the gift of grace nor the Christian faith, he cannot accompany him through Heaven” (Falvey Library Exhibits:: Dante’s Guides). For that reason, Beatrice, a more worthy soul, will take Virgil’s place. This exchange of mentorship mirrors Alice’s switch between the White Rabbit as her guide in the beginning of the story, to the Cheshire Cat who takes over until the end of Alice’s time in Wonderland. This element of change is important to the growth arc of both Alice and Dante because it clearly shows how as these figures develop both intellectually and emotionally, there needs to be an adjustment in their teachers in order to better fit their needs. Mantegazza expands on this idea from a different perspective by saying that, “se non fossimo ignoranti non potremmo incontrare quelle persone meravigliose che sono i maestri” (if we were not ignorant we would not meet those wonderful people who are the teachers, Mantegazza 43). In other words, the teacher, or guide, would not have any intrinsic value to the journeys of these two figures if Dante and Alice were all-knowing beings. According to this claim, it can be argued that guide needs the follower as much as the follower needs the guide.

Speaking more specifically of the ways in which the guides in both of these stories were chosen, Dante declares to Virgil in Canto I, “Tu se’ lo mio maestro e ‘l mio autore, / tu se’ solo colui da cu’ io tolsi / lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore” (“you are my teacher. You, my lord and law. From you alone I took the fine-tuned style that has, already, brought me so much honor” *Inferno*, I: 85-87). Here, it is evident that Dante outwardly names Virgil as his trusted teacher and guide. Operating as the “chosen one” Virgil stays by Dante’s side. This is different from Alice as she did not have the ability to choose her guide. Instead, she was led into the “rabbit

hole” by the White Rabbit whom she then continues to follow until she finds herself deeper into the chaos Wonderland. From here, the Cheshire Cat seamlessly takes over as he identifies Alice as a lone foreigner traversing her way through a daunting land and attempts to redirect her from danger. This difference is important when considering the relationships that both Alice and Dante share with their guides. Mantegazza describes that the rapport between Dante and Virgil is fatherly. This is attributed to the fact that that Virgil not only leads Dante through Hell, but also serves as a type of guardian angel that protects him when necessary. For example, in Canto IX, when Dante and Virgil come across Medusa, the ancient Greek goddess, Virgil instructs Dante to tightly cover his eyes: “ed elli stessi / mi volse, e non si tenne a le mie mani / che con le sue ancor non mi chiudessi” (“he [Virgil] made me turn and, not relying on my hands alone, to shield my eyes he closed his own on mine” *Inferno*, IX: 58-60). This act of selflessness performed by Virgil to help protect Dante from the piercing vision of Medusa is a quality that sets Virgil apart from the Cheshire Cat.

The Cheshire Cat is far more reserved and cryptic than Virgil as he tends to appear from thin air and speak in riddles. For example, in one of Alice’s encounters with the Cheshire Cat towards the middle of the novel, she asks him,

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“that depends a good deal on where you want to get to” responded the Cheshire Cat

“I don’t much care where.”

“Then it doesn’t much matter which way to go.”

“... so as long as I get somewhere.”

“oh, you’re sure to do that, if only you walk long enough” (Carroll 71-72).

This section shows that instead of explicitly telling Alice which path she ought to take, the Cheshire Cat questions her motives for the journey in the first place. It is resolved from this brief conversation that if Alice cannot admit where she wants to go, then it doesn't matter which path she takes. This laissez-faire approach from the Cheshire Cat by placing the power in Alice's hands to make her own choices in Wonderland enables her to walk straight into danger. When comparing the relationship that Dante and Virgil share, it is clear that whereas the Cheshire Cat is not there to lead Alice in person, his voice and his teaching are what stick with her throughout her journey. Virgil, on the other hand, plays a role as Dante's protector and point of reference to gain wisdom.

Chapter 8

Time and Viewpoint

Even though both Dante and Alice's journeys are tales of self-formation and discovery, one may ask why Alice is venturing more or less alone through Wonderland as a child while Dante is being handheld throughout Hell? Does this mark a historical difference between a more modern conception of truth and autonomy? Is it true that Alice needs time to discover the world on her own due to her age and gender? If so, is there a correlation between one's age and the freedom they might feel to explore the unknown with or without another being to help them? Despite not having any definitive answers to these questions, they begin to chart the differences between how Dante and Alice fit into the framework of their worlds. Dante, as a highly educated man seeks to find answers about the world and religion that cannot be found in books. He focuses on interpreting the feelings and emotions of the sufferers around him in order to understand how physical torture plays a role in the justification of sin. Alice, on the other hand, given that she is just a child, cannot completely understand the emotional motivations as to why certain characters in Wonderland act the way that they do. Therefore, her thought process towards understanding the absurdity around her is focused heavily on the comprehension of the physical characteristics of not only the people that she encounters, but also the places that she visits.

Carroll, writing in the Victorian era, was in the midst of dawning thought about the distinction of 'the child.' Children are malleable beings. Their sense of self, thoughts on others, and interpretations of the world around them have not yet been fixed. Thus, through the process of self-exploration, they are given time develop thoughts of their own. Alice must navigate how

to interact with particularly frustrating figures, listen to the opinions of those around her to grasp a broader understanding of how Wonderland works, and face challenges that have no apparent solutions. Despite everything being new, all of these experiences and encounters serve as educational moments. Towards the beginning of the novel, readers can see Alice trying to fit in and follow the rules. However, as time progresses, she assumes a stronger sense of self and starts to articulate her own opinions. As for Dante, he begins his journey through Hell as not only an adult, but also as a self-proclaimed poet. This being said, whereas Alice's journey can be viewed an exploration to develop understanding of how the world works around her, Dante's journey through Hell can be interpreted as a process of forgetting the structured opinions of the world around him.

As mentioned earlier, the longer that both of these figures stay within their absurd worlds, the more they learn. However, in both stories, time itself is a quality that is undefinable. In the "real world," time is something that provides order and structure to our lives. Given that both Hell and Wonderland have vastly different systems of keeping time, it can be determined that these worlds lack order at the most basic of levels. Tim Carmody in his article, "The Experience of Time in Dante's *inferno*," speaks about the concept of time travel in The Divine Comedy. Carmody's use of the term "time travel" is not connected with one's movement within time as, "you can't change the past or the future, as it has all in some sense already happened. But you can greet the dead, gain wisdom from them, know their love, and meet their souls" (Carmody). In this case, Dante's journey can be defined as a departure from the structured timeline of the real world. This kind of reasoning – where stepping away from actuality to arrive at a higher knowledge of the given world -- can also be applied to Alice's journey. As mentioned earlier, she enters Wonderland through a dream. Within this dream-like state, there is a fixed amount of time

that passes in the real world. However, Carroll never clearly defines how long Alice spent in Wonderland nor how long her nap was. Alice grows tremendously in character from the beginning of her journey to the end when she gets shaken awake. Upon waking, she has the newly found ability to take the lessons that she has learned during her adventures in Wonderland and apply those principles to the real world. The same can be said for Dante as the knowledge that he accumulates through his journey through Hell is not forgotten. Instead, it is something that will remain with him and can be referred back to in times of confusion. Despite the proto-surreal aspect of these stories as they both contain the “the disorienting, hallucinatory quality of a dream” (SURREAL Definition in American English | Collins English Dictionary) they are both equally as fruitful in the end.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Having now analyzed many connections that exist between both Dante's *Inferno* and Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it is evident that the degree as which these two texts are similar cannot be a mere coincidence. Starting with the hallucination/dream-like state that enables both Alice and Dante to enter their respective absurd worlds, to then the manifestation of the three beasts that they must confront in order to get out of the dark wood, it appears as though the construction of the beginning of both stories is structurally homologous. Both Alighieri and Carroll pull their protagonists from the real world, place them in a state of confusion which leads them to question their identity, and then presents them with a series of challenges to force both Dante and Alice to reassert their grounding. Once they have surpassed this initial shock, it is time for them to truly start their journeys.

Another striking similarity between these two stories is that both Alice and Dante have more than one guide. This correlates to the immense intellectual and emotional development that both of these figures endure throughout their journey which requires them to have multiple teachers. The more time that both of these figures spend in Hell and Wonderland, the more that they start to recognize that these absurd worlds have not only definitive structures, but also pre-determined hierarchies of power. Being labelled as an "outsider" is an extremely important quality for both Alice and Dante because it enables them to form opinions, speak to people, and learn without the intervention of pre-existing biases.

In terms of purpose, Dante began his journey with a specific goal in mind. Thus, every step that he took, and arguably every direction that Virgil led him in, was made to fulfill this

specific goal or spiritual edification. On the other hand, Alice's journey to Wonderland was fueled by curiosity and childlike excitement to experience something new and exciting. Thus, the important things that she learned throughout her exploration can be considered as byproducts of her curiosity. That said, with such different starting motives, why is it that their stories are so similar? Without dipping into the dangers of the intentional fallacy in terms of trying to dissect what Carroll intended for Alice to gain from her journey into Wonderland, this question can be analyzed through the investigation of the literary genre of an epic.

According to the Academy of American Poets an epic is defined as a "long, often book-length narrative in verse form that retells the heroic journey of a single person, or a group of persons." (Poets) In addition to this, epics often contains other qualities such as supernatural forces, expansive settings, stylized language, and a zeal for adventure. Dante's *Inferno* is considered an epic poem because it contains several of these qualities. Dante, as a heroic figure, takes on the adventure through the depths of Hell in order to reveal a greater truth about humanity. While he is there, he encounters supernatural figures such as demons and beasts. *The Divine Comedy* itself was originally written in Florentine *volgare* which was a spoken dialect that differed from Latin. During this time period, Latin was the official language spoken by both highly educated people and officials whereas *volgare* was the language of the common folk. Thus, for Dante to write this poem in *volgare*, as opposed to Latin, it increased the accessibility of this text to be understood by a wide range of individuals belonging to all different classes.

Carroll's "Wonderland" contains many qualities of an epic even though it is not written in verse. For example, the story is centered around Alice who embarks on a trip to Wonderland. Even though Alice's journey is not necessarily devised to benefit the greater good like Dante's, it

is equally as heroic. Alice embodies many of the qualities of a hero in the sense that she is compassionate, brave, and courageous in her efforts. Speaking on behalf of Wonderland itself, there are many elements of the supernatural. For example, Alice encounters talking animals and a king and queen made out of cards. The elements of magic within this story appeal to child and adolescent readers due to its silliness. Whereas in Carroll's tale, qualities like comedy are to be expected, in Dante's poems, the supernatural elements that are present are meant to not only carry a much heavier weight but have distinct allegorical connections. That said, even though *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is classified more as a fantasy novel rather than an epic, it is undeniable that it makes an attempt to assume some of the characteristics of a classic epic in regard to elements of heroism and attention to the supernatural. Even though these pieces are written for very different audiences, the basic formula of the hero exiting the real world to enter one that is completely new in order to acquire knowledge is a common theme that runs between both stories.

Genre aside, Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is also very similar to Dante's *Inferno* in the sense it was regarded as a literary innovation during its time. This was due the fact that Carroll placed a young female protagonist at the forefront of the adventure. Given that the story itself ventured into untouched territory within the fantasy genre of the 19th century, it greatly impacted many of the stories that followed it. In addition to that, it is evident that the story's innate "uniqueness" enabled it to seep into the long-term memory of many readers across multiple generations. Like Dante's *Inferno*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a timeless story. That being said, beyond the strangeness that exists on the surface of both Dante and Alice's adventures, both of these stories have the power to affect readers on a deeper emotional level by

offering us the chance to put ourselves in these characters' shoes and see the world through their eyes.

When analyzing these stories from a 21st century perspective, both Alice and Dante's journeys are still relevant. Regardless if we pick up Dante's *Inferno* to learn about Christian purification, or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to experience again the nostalgia from childhood, it is evident that at the heart of both stories resides a lone protagonist that is fueled by curiosity. No matter the subject matter, the gender or age of the protagonist, or even the period at which it was written, these two texts prove that the desire to explore and learn is a mythic paradigm that is not only timeless, but everlasting. All things considered, these two incredibly prevalent texts demonstrate to us readers that in order for us learn something new or welcome a new experience, we need to make ourselves open to the absurdity that comes with disorder.

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