ALICE'S ALLEGORICAL JOURNEY *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND* AND *THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS*. THE ALLEGORIST: CHARACTER AND NARRATOR

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Abstract: Lewis Carroll has remained in the memory of universal literature as the writer of two of the most famous books in history, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There. Although both Alice books were initially considered as belonging to the category of children's literature, in time they have proven to have a much more complex structure, similar to the one of 20th and 21st century literature. Starting from this idea, the present paper aims at discovering the allegorical structure of the narrative and the characters of the two books, proving that they are more than fairytales dedicated to children, but a complex literary expression of the Victorian society and of the British writer's original ideas.

Keywords: allegory, identity crisis, body, characters, narrator, allegorist, clothing

Despite the fact that more than a century and a half has passed since the publishing of the two Alice books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), they keep raising the interest of both readers of different ages, and literary critics and specialists from different areas (psychology, sociology etc.). This dual interest is an interesting one, which should be taken into consideration, even more because of the fact that, according to most opinions, the two books belong to the category of children's literature. Of course, having this in mind, numerous questions arise regarding, first of all, this specific categorization.

Starting from the idea that the two worlds created by Carroll, together with the characters that populate them and with the events they take part to, have characteristics specific to allegory, one question arises – whether the fact that the two books were introduced in the category of children's literature was not based initially on the literary critics' focus on the surface level, one of the levels identified by Vera Călin in *Alegoria şi esenţele* (*Allegory and Essence*), the second level, the one of 'meanings', being ignored (1969:22). As John Hughes underlines: "every Allegory has [...] two Senses, the Literal and the Mystical; the literal Sense is like a Dream or Vision, of which the mystical Sense is the true Meaning or Interpretation." (1715) The limitation to the literal meaning, the one at the surface of the text is mostly specific to narrative allegories, this also being the case of the two Alice books.

This first level is so captivating through the richness and the originality that characterizes all its elements, spreading from events and characters to language, so that it is obvious why, in the first decades after the two books were published, this level was the only one accessed. Only with the following century, due, amongst others, to a growing interest towards fantastic literature, allegory, metaphor and subtext, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* started to be considered and analysed also from a more profound point of view. It is also the purpose of the present paper,

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which focuses on decoding the narrative path followed by the main character, some of the characters Alice comes in contact with, including the author-narrator which appears in both worlds as an adjuvant element, and the evolution of the heroine, all based on the pattern specific to allegory.

The purpose of allegory is "to communicate an excessively stylized image of the human condition in its most ontologically decisive hypostases. The allegorical poet [narrator] is looking for the great quests and questions of existence, for the paths followed by the material and spiritual being of man, either taking a passive role […], or as one who is searching for a meaning, a traveller on a road belonging to outer spaces or the ones inside the being, a path with decisive stages, in the process of initiation." (Călin, 1969: 8) (translated by Andreea Sâncelean). The path followed by Alice in the two worlds takes the form of an initiation process by putting the self face to face with the absurd society that has rules which prove to be rigid and incomprehensible for a spirit defined by innocence and desire for freedom.

What lies beneath the heroine's journey is, in fact, the confrontation between the spontaneous childhood, enchanted by play and simplicity, and the world of adults, where everything is dominated by oppression and limitation, transforming the enchanting universe of the age of innocence in a terrifying one. All through the allegorical journey, Alice's identity is questioned both by herself, and by the other characters, this aspect being more obvious in Wonderland that in the Looking-Glass World.

In the first adventure, Alice has to deal with 'attacks' on her corporality, suffering from transformations of her dimensions from the first moments spent underground. The first effect consists in a grotesque fragmentation that has obvious comic effects which, however, do not diminish the consequences it has on Alice's identity: "'Oh my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears? I'm sure I shan't be able! I shall be a great deal too far off to trouble myself with you: you must manage the best way you can - but I must be kind to them,' thought Alice, 'or perhaps they won't walk the way I want to go! Let me see: I'll give them a new pair of boots every Christmas.'" (Carroll, 1998:16)

As the connection between corporality and the spiritual self is a very strong one because "the body is the man's home, his face" (David leBreton, 2002:150), the effects on the heroine's identity become stronger and stronger, Alice asking herself a question that will follow her throughout her journey: "Who in the world am I?" and wondering whether she has not become someone else overnight. The identity crisis she goes through will deepen once she meets some of the Wonderland creatures, like the Caterpillar, that will either insistently ask her the same question, or make her even more confused by taking her for being something or someone else, like the White Rabbit who mistakes her for Mary Anne, his maid, and the Pigeons who is absolutely sure that Alice is a serpent trying to eat her eggs. The meanings that lay behind these mistaken identities are very interesting, as they take the forms of 'labels' that the heroine cannot escape.

The first one hides the destiny of many of the Victorian women, whose role was generally related to the home, most of their responsibilities being taking care of the house and of their family (Goldthwaite, 1996:127-128). The second one is the image of the perfect Victorian mother, as seen by society at that time, but characterized by Carroll as being excessively worried about her children's wellbeing through the image of the Pigeon who

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becomes hysterical when its nest is threatened. At the same time, the fact that the heroine is mistaken for a serpent reminds of the myth of the primordial woman lured into disobeying God's will and becoming the victim of the first sin, but also the one responsible of the cast away from the Garden of Eden. The strong erotic meanings that lie beneath this identity should also be taken into consideration (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, vol. III, 1994:308) all these encoding characteristics considered inacceptable for women in the Victorian period. Similar allegories are found in other episodes too. One of these, which also comes as a warning to Alice's destiny as a Victorian young lady, is found in the chapter *A Caucus Race and a Long Tale*, when, after winning a race, Alice receives a thimble as a price, while the others receive candy (Sâncelean, 2012:60). The Duchess and the Queen of Hearts are also allegories of the Victorian woman, but presented as anti-models for the heroine (although the same could be said about the Pigeon), the first one being the embodiment of the shallow woman, who finds no pleasure in the traditional roles she has to fulfill (Goldthwaite, 1996:128), while the Queen of Hearts is the allegorical figure of the authoritarian woman who tries to impose her will no matter what, using in this sense the power given by her social status.

The identity crisis the heroine goes through is not so strong in the Looking-Glass World as it is in Wonderland, although here her evolution is much more clearly underlined by the author right from the beginning, when the reader finds out about Alice's intention to become queen and that, in order for this to happen, she will follow a certain path on the chess board. However, in the reversed world, not only her identity is put into question, but her own existence when Tweedledee and Tweedledum make it clear that she is nothing else but the result of the Black King's dream: "Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!''If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out — bang! — just like a candle!' [...] 'You know very well you're not real.'" (Carroll, 1998:118) All these tense moments are nothing but stages in the initiation process that Alice goes through either in the undergrounds of reality, as it happens in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, or in the mirrored world in *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. The difficult road she has to follow, full of surprizing events and characters has no other purpose but to give Alice the chance to see beyond the obvious, in the essence of the world of adults to which she will soon belong and whose rules she will have to follow.

These allegorical worlds have the same effects on Alice – they terrify her, they irritate and determine her to be more and more confused up to the key-moments the author inserts to help her return to her inner self, helping her to become more confident in her own existence and identity. In the first Alice book, this happens after the encounter with the Caterpillar, whom Alice confronts with the problem of her own metamorphosis into a butterfly. The Caterpillar's answer is prompt: "'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis--you will some day, you know--and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?' 'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar" (Carroll, 1998:41), which will determine the heroine to change her perspective on things. The same thing happens in the Looking-Glass World, where, after becoming queen, Alice realises the mistake she has made when she wanted to change her identity, the company of the characters who reign over the fantasy world proving to be extremely boring. Thus, at the end of both adventures, Alice's replies become sharper and more incisive, the once confused little girl deciding to rebel against the

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supreme authority (Bernays & Kaplan, 2000:138), questioning its supremacy and managing to escape the two worlds, stage similar to a catharsis.

Another aspect that should be taken into consideration is the heroine's structure itself. In most cases, the allegorical hero is the embodiment of a virtue chosen by the allegorist, working as an 'effigy' (Călin, 1965:60), but in the case of Alice there are certain particularities and, more than this, she is the fictional embodiment of a real person – Alice Liddell, the daughter of a family that Carroll had a close relationship with at one point and with whom he had a very special connection throughout his life (Goldthwaite, 1996:84). Impressed by her strong personality, Carroll chose her as the image of his feminine ideal at the age of innocence. The fascination this little lady awakened in Lewis Carroll has raised many questions, the writer being even accused by some later critics of pedophilia. Not even his contemporaries saw his close relationship with Alice with good eyes, mostly her parents, which determined the breakup between the two. Consequently, although Alice, the heroine, is not the allegory of a virtue, she still has the function of an 'effigy', representing the allegorist's vision on the child who comes in contact with the absurd world of grown-ups and, more than this, the one of the destiny of any young girl in the Victorian epoch, who had to conform the norms of a society which proved to be harsh and inflexible towards the female sex.

Consequently, in the situation in which the allegorist cannot (or does not want to) be involved to a very large extent in the construction of the heroine because of the solid structure of the one who was transferred from the real world into the fantastic one, he participates at the level of the text both as narrator, and as a character. And this is when things become even more intriguing. In the first Alice book, he takes the form of the Dodo bird, the character that announces the different facets of the destiny of the Victorian woman the heroine will come in contact with, the Dodo being the one who gives Alice the thimble as a prize. Later, Carroll participates at the events in Wonderland through the Cheshire Cat, that Alice meets when, after leaving the Duchess's house, she does not know which path to follow. But this character does more than help her find the way she should follow – the cat unveils the secret that lays at the basis of the underground world: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad […] or you wouldn't be here" (Carroll, 1998:58)

The reason why the allegorist chooses to take the form of a cat can be easily understood, considering that, from the first pages of the book, the reader notices that whenever Alice finds herself in a difficult situation she thinks of her cat Dinah. But the Cheshire Cat is not a regular cat. First of all, its image is antagonistic: "It looked good-natured, she [Alice] thought: still it had very long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect" (Carroll, 1998:56), embodiment which is representative for the author's personality and the way he was perceived in society, as, because his unique way of thinking, he was loved by children and often rejected by adults. Secondly, the Cheshire Cat has the ability to appear wherever it wants, whenever it wants and even to show only some parts of its body. This is what happens when Alice plays croquet with the Queen and King of Hearts and the Cheshire Cat appears, showing only its head, which gives everyone the impression that it is floating in the air, image which could be associated with the author himself looking over the manuscript and, thus, watching over Alice and the other characters. The same attitude that Carroll had towards authority is shared by the Cheshire cat (Goldthwaite, 1996:89) when it refuses to

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respect the customs and kiss the king's hand or later, when, after infuriating the king, it refuses to show the rest of its body for the king to decapitate it.

In the Looking-Glass World, Carroll becomes part of Alice's adventures through the White Knight who comes to save the heroine from the Black Knight and to help her reach the final stage of becoming queen. Through the image of this character another Lewis Carroll is revealed – an incurable romantic, reminding of Don Quixote, a dreamer who is profoundly impractical, but who has a rich imagination which, unfortunately, proves to be worthless. Following the same pattern as the Cheshire Cat, the White Knight is the only character in the fantasy world that Alice creates a bond with, suggestive in this way being the melancholy she feels when she has to leave the knight in order to gain the crown. The moment when they have to go their separate ways, although spiced with humourous details, considering that clumsiness is one of the words that best define the knight, is a clear allegory of the moment when Carroll had to give up on spending time with Alice Liddell after her parents forbid it.

Besides these elements, the allegory is present also through the characters' clothes. Although the author does not give many details in the written 'version' of the book, these can be noticed and analyzed in the illustrations created by Tenniel under Carroll's guidance. And they are of great importance in analyzing and understanding the two worlds created by the British author. As Vera Călin mentions: "Being an effigy of man, consequently a protection of his inner being, but also of his social role on a figural level, the clothing takes his place and symbolically represents its bearer, to which it is linked through a complex system of connections and responsibilities." (1965:119) Thus, the White Rabbit's clothes (the vest and the jacket) and his accessories (the chain clock and the umbrella), Alice's Victorian dress and apron, the Dodo's walking stick, the Caterpillar's oriental cloak and hookah in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the similar clothes that Alice wears, the White Knight's armour etc. in *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* are all symbols either of Victorian society, or of the author's ideas and principles. For example, considering their accessories and their clothes, the White Rabbit and the Dodo are allegories of Victorian gentlemen, the first being the most representative through its chain clock which always shows that he is late for some important meeting. There is also Alice, who, through the dress and the apron she wears in both books, is the embodiment of any Victorian young girl who has to deal with the peculiar world of adults. On the other hand, there are the characters which are clearly from a world different from the Victorian one, like the Caterpillar, with its oriental air, and the White Knight, coming not from a different part of the world, but from a different time, both of them having the purpose of helping the heroine reach a new stage in her initiation.

Through all these characteristics, the two Alice books prove to have a structure specific to allegory not just at a shallow level, but one that goes beyond the surface, encompassing in their structures and substructures elements that work together in a very complex way, creating fantasy worlds which can be identified as specific to modernism and even postmodernism.

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