

The Fantastic Escape: *Alice* and *Under the Hill* as Essential Regression Narratives

"The reality of life is chaos; the fantasy of man is order." – Eric S. Rabkin¹

In a 1978 critical article, S. C. Fredericks argues that "Fantasy... seems to appeal to the intellectual non-conformist in us all."² Similarly, famed cartoonist Lynda Barry is often-quoted as saying fantastic stories "can't transform your actual situation, but they can transform your experience of it. We don't create a fantasy world to escape reality, we create it to be able to stay."³ Though Fredericks was interested in discussing the nature of Fantasy as a literary genre and Barry was explaining her future interest in cartoons and the like, each enunciate a specific truth inherent in Fantasy literature: the fantasy appeals to people who have difficulty adjusting to the mundane, work-oriented world around them. This is not to say that fantasy appeals to those with mental illness, but to the large majority of people who, on some level, find the real world (and, more specifically, the adult world) a little disappointing. This disappointment with the real world came to a head during the Victorian era of the United Kingdom

Life has never been terribly easy; if disease, famine, or war didn't shuffle one off the mortal coil, there has always been the possibility of another human killing you. There has typically been some comfort available, most typically in the form of religion or belief in higher powers - be it as formulized as a deity or as nebulous as the concept of Karma- to help the average person through a reality that is riddled with disappointments and stress. However, dissatisfaction in life was at an all-time high in Victorian England,

¹ Eric S. Rabkin. *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.) 213.

² S.C. Fredericks. "Problems of Fantasy." (*Science Fiction Studies*: 5.1 (1978)) 40.

³ Susan E. Kirtley and Lynda Barry. *Lynda Barry: Girlhood Through the Looking Glass*. 1st ed. (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2012) 184.

as evidenced in the creation of "fantasy" as a genre, typified by *Under the Hill* by Aubrey Beardsley⁴, and both of the *Alice* books by Lewis Carroll⁵. While Victorian England appeared to be at the pinnacle of the civilized (read: Western) world, that pinnacle was on the edge of a dangerous precipice. While the name sake of this time period, Queen Victoria, was only crowned in 1837, it is more accurate to focus on the time period as beginning in roughly 1832 with the first Reform Act, and end it in roughly 1910 (a full 9 years after Victoria's death)⁶. The political environment of this era was a predominantly peaceful one, with only the Crimean War of 1854 and the Boer War of 1899 interrupting what historians would later call the *Pax Britannica*. Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism, most appealingly condensed to mean "The greatest good for the greatest number", was best exemplified by his 1789 publication *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*⁷ had a great many followers and was an extremely popular theory within the educated circles, particularly chapters I through VII⁸.

Despite the popularity of the idea of utilitarianism, with its legions of proponents that included such famed men as John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell, the culture and mindset of Victorian England was one of crisis, as a variety of factors converged at once. This time period is generally referred to as *Pax Britannica*, but such a moniker seems out of place for all of the international turmoil; for all that there were only two

⁴ Aubrey Beardsley. *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser or Under the Hill*. [1907] (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1974) 25-77. All future citations are from this edition.

⁵ Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass*. [1865-71] (Norwich: Fletcher & Son Ltd, 1948) 5-241. All future citations are from this edition.

⁶ Joseph Black, Leonard Conolly, et al. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*. Volume 5: The Victorian Era. (New York: Broadview Press, 2006.) XXXIII.

⁷ Jeremy Bentham. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. [1789] (Clarendon Press. Oxford: Library of Economics and Liberty, 1907)

⁸ Simon Petch. "Law, Equity, and Conscience in Victorian England." (*Victorian Literature and Culture*. 25.1 (1997)) 123-139.

majorly devastating wars at this time in British history, there were nevertheless significant international events that worried the well-informed Victorian. Each international event seemed another blow to the prestige of the British Empire: in 1842, Major-General Elphinstone's army was slaughtered in the midst of a retreat in Afghanistan; in 1845, the Irish famine began and would eventually halve Ireland's population; in 1857, the Sepoy Rebellion so worried the British government that India was thereafter put under the direct governance of the Crown; at the advent of the 1860s, a rebellion broke out in Taiping, China that left nearly 20 million people dead; in 1879, the Zulu nation in Africa rose up and won a number of battles against the British; in 1885, national hero Major-General Gordon was brutally murdered in the Sudan just days before a relief force from the British government arrived.⁹ Though the military fist of Great Britain still held a stranglehold on half the world during this time, at times it certainly seemed to be a very tenuous grip.¹⁰

Adding to the already difficult times was the degradation of religion; though Henry VIII's reformation of the English Church in 1533 had only minor effects at first, the ramifications of this choice grew as centuries passed. While belief was still a huge culture phenomena, by the time of the Victorian Era, much of the Christian population had lost the true spirit of Christianity. A "rapidly changing social order, accompanied by the predominance of scientific rationalism and empiricist method"¹¹ undermined the former certainty found in Church teachings. Scholars, in both in England and on the continent, had begun questioning the literal interpretation of the Bible since the

⁹ Harold E. Raugh, Jr. *The Victorians at War, 1815-1914: An Encyclopedia of British Military History*. eBook. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004.) 355-64.

¹⁰ Raugh, Jr., *The Victorians at War, 1815-1914*, XIII-1.

¹¹ *Broadbent Anthology*, 'Faith and Doubt', XLVIII

beginning of the century. Victorian writers began discussing their loss of faith, which for some such as Tennyson began as early as the 1830s¹². Scientific rationalism was further bolstered with the publication of Darwin's theories in 1859, as elites abandoned Creationism. Evolution had been simmering in the intellectual stew of Western civilization for decades, with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theory of evolution, as owed to environment, raising eyebrows in the beginning of the 19th century. Darwin's approach, however, rejected Lamarck's theories and included the "branching" of species, natural selection and competition of survival. These ideas had a massive and lasting effect, not only because they were judged scientifically reliable but because of the time period in which they were published.

Yet the entire population was not won to atheism solely by new scientific research; for some parts of the population, the crisis of faith found resolution not in an outright refutation of Christian dogma, but in either a yearning for past tradition that manifested in the Oxford Movement of the 1830-40s and the Decadent movement's later fascination with Catholic ritual, or a reformation of belief that birthed new branches of Christianity such as John Wesley's Methodists in the early part of Victoria's reign, or the Christian Evangelist movement in later decades. No matter the direction the spiritual dilemma took, whether it was to the Salvation Army or to the 1860 Huxley debate, the English population that had formerly united under the Anglican banner was now splintering in every conceivable direction. The metaphysical landscape of Victorian England was forever changed, and though there were clearly a multitude of options for the average citizen to find like-minded individuals, true solace was scarce.

¹² Critics typically assign the death of Tennyson's father in the same year as the death of his best friend in 1832 as Tennyson's loss of faith.

The loss of a collective group religious identity was not the only terrifying part of the Victorian Era; industrialization was rapidly devouring the English countryside and for many, this take-over was less a sign of human progress than a filthy, blackening disease that consumed able-bodied individuals in the dark mineshafts, poorly ventilated factories, and with brutal work hours. With a *laissez-faire* economy, businessmen were allowed to proceed almost entirely as they pleased, which often left the luckier workers worn out, and the less fortunate workers mutilated or dead. Regulation was scarce until 1842, when the passage of “The Mines and Collieries Act,” commonly known as ‘Ashley’s Act’ after the head of the commission, Lord Ashley-Cooper, finally broke through Parliament. Even with the brutality of conditions a popular topic in Victorian newspapers, truly effectual reform was slow going and typically bitterly protested; for instance, the creation of a 10 hour work day did not occur for another five years, and was then only applicable to women and children¹³. Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* and Thomas Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd* both accurately sum up the adverse effect of industrialization and the death of the pastoral, respectively. The mechanization of the British Isles was not solely restrained to the country factories but included the cities; as Engel’s wrote in 1844, Manchester alone had “piles of the refuse, filth, and offal...” in front of houses which were “all black, smoky, crumbling... with broken panes and window frames.”¹⁴ Outbreaks of disease, such as the cholera epidemics in London in 1832 and 1848-9, were frequent in these cities and the result of poor sanitation

¹³ G.M. Young, and W.D. Hancock. *English Historical Documents, XII, 1833-1874*. 1st. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.) 260-1.

¹⁴ Friedrich Engels. "The Condition of the Working Class in England". (Broadbent Anthology edition; New York: Broadview Press, 2006.) 60.

coupled with overcrowding and the weakened immune systems of a malnourished and overworked laboring class.

Realism, with its “Facts alone” attitude, was the typical mode of the day, with sensationalist journalism¹⁵ equally popular. Authors such as Dickens, Hardy, Eliot and others carried this genre to its melancholy peak, presenting the negativity and hardships that were a mainstay of the average Victorian life. By this point, the marriage plot was almost untenable, with novels such as George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* epitomizing this cultural realization. With an “absent” God and the disintegration of a unifying religious community, and the industrialization of the nation, the intellectual community embraced the theories of natural selection and the competitive environment thinning the herd. Combined with Malthusian population theories and Bentham’s utilitarianism, the world suddenly seemed a darker and harsher world. Nature was no longer a solace, but a threat; people were no longer “unfortunates” but had a hand in their own destruction, whether it was by physical design or through their own faults; people whose forefathers had found consolation in prayer now felt as if the sky was empty of a paternalistic deity. The popular literary style of Realism offered the distinct opposite of comfort and merely served to reinforce the schisms beneath the veneer of Victorian civility.

When combined with industrialization and the loss of a unifying belief system, it is not the penchant for Realist literature and journalism alone that contributed to the embittered social atmosphere of the Victorian Era but the collision of all of these factors. Over the cacophony of converging crises that rang in Britannia’s ear, another elegy was

¹⁵ Such as W. T. Stead’s “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of Our Secret Commission I-IV” (*Pall Mall Gazette*. 6 Jul 1885)

being sung: the death of imagination. With demanding work schedules and the constant threat of disease and starvation, many citizens of the United Kingdom found very little time for anything that did not lead to an eventual meal; leisure was a luxury for the rich, and thus so was imagination. As Dickens' character of Gradgrind summarizes in *Hard Times*, "Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else... nothing else will ever be of any service to them... Stick to Facts, sir!"¹⁶ After all, Dickens did not "want the reader to find the imagination a mere escape from the workaday world" but instead wanted "the reader to see what the curtailment of the imagination can lead to," which was, as anyone who has read his novels can attest to, unsatisfactory and unproductive lives¹⁷.

Where, in such a conflicted world, does a genre such as Fantasy come from? It is *from* the conflict that Fantasy was born. Fantasy is not a genre such as love songs or the epic tale, whose origins are so old there is almost no way to truly know; indeed, fantasy as a genre is a much later development in the history of Western literature. Though fairy tales, myths, and legends of course play a part in the development of fantastic literature, these narratives either elicited belief or rationalized fears; for example, Persephone's descent to the Underworld for six months of the year was not a story for ideal entertainment or subverting a painful world, but instead a method of explaining a yearly event that could not be otherwise explained. Mythology and legends were told as stories to explain, to simplify a very complicated world that lacked the instruments and ability to study its wonders. Fairy tales, as the Aarne-Thompson

¹⁶ Charles Dickens. *Hard Times* (eBook). (Web: The Gutenberg Project, 17 Mar 2013) 3.

¹⁷ John Pennington. "From Fact to Fantasy in Victorian Fiction: Dickens's *Hard Times* and MacDonald's *Phantasies*." (*Extrapolation* (Kent State University Press). 38.3 (1997)) 202.

classification index and the research of Vladimir Propp demonstrate, have structural and narrative repetitions, as well as intrinsic moral lessons. Fantasy as a full-bodied genre typically lacks those moral lessons and is more focused on the creativity of the mind. Even critics who have devoted their lives to the study of Fantasy as a genre have fallen into the trap; as Fredericks' complains of Jane Mobley, "too much of the theoretical discussion has centered on myths and fairy tales... even when these are not crucial to the actual narrative in question."¹⁸

The "fantastic novel" was a response to all of these issues, a way to release the social restraints and escape the restraints of the 'real'/adult world; by allowing the reader to experience the bizarre and witness variant forms of excess, Fantasy was a balm to the conflicted Victorian that celebrated the regression of the psyche. The three books that most demonstrate the potential exploration of a new, Victorian genre are both of the *Alice* books by Lewis Carroll - *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 and *Through the Looking-Glass, And What Alice Found There* in 1871 – and Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill* (also published as *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*) in 1907. It may seem incongruous to place two novels clearly aimed towards children in the same burgeoning category as an unfinished tale of erotica, yet their similarities should not be shorted. *Under the Hill* and the *Alice* books both require one of the most fundamental necessities of fantasy as a genre: the suspension of belief; as Julius Kagarlitski notes, "When disbelief arises side by side with belief, fantasy comes into being."¹⁹ In children's literature and particularly in the *Alice* books, this is a relatively

¹⁸ Fredericks, "Problems", 36.

¹⁹ Julius Kagarlitski. "Realism and Fantasy." Trans. Array *SF: The Other Side of Realism*. 1st. (Bowling Green, KY: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971) 29.

simple task, as the overt audience in question- children- is still delineating between “real” and “unreal” and the less ‘intended’ audience- adults- are deliberately seeking regression to the Romantic ideal of childhood²⁰. In *Under the Hill*, the erotic element supersedes the concern for logic. Much of sexual intercourse and activity is already based in suspended belief, from the banal such as the use of make-up and lingerie, to the more sophisticated sexual interactions of role-playing or bondage. For an orgasm-seeking adult, the reality of their own touch and the pleasure of imagination (or “make-believe”) generally overrules the need for logic. These three books in particular gave rise to Fantasy literature as it is known today after the convergence of three distinct factors: a desire to escape the current reality, the ability to suspend belief and necessity, and a turn to the supernatural for pleasure, and not out of fear. It is fascinating to consider that the fantasy genre of the modern day and their numerous offspring that appeals to the ‘nonconformist’ in us all and allows us to ‘stay’ in the real world came from a time of dissatisfaction in a world where escape seemed the only hope. To more fully understand fantasy as a genre, it is necessary to first create a definition and from there, move through the literature.

A definition for a genre is a difficult and frustrating idea to articulate; after all, critics have made entire livings off of doing just that. For example, Tolkien argues for the requirement of the “world-creating” dimension²¹, while Colin Manlove says that “A fantasy is: a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become

²⁰ Judith Plotz. *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 5-300.

²¹ J.R.R. Tolkien. "On Fairy Stories." [1939] Trans. *Tree and Leaf*. (Oxford: California State University, Northridge PDF, 1969) 3-83.

on at least partly familiar terms.”²² While Tolkien argues for a single, distinguishing characteristic, Manlove has more terms that must be met: it must contain an element of the supernatural, the characters must be mortal, and familiarity with the aforementioned element must be intrinsic to the plot. While Manlove’s definition is well-thought out, the stipulation for familiarity creates too narrow a definition; after all, any series of fantasy books continuously adds new elements, typically one per book, with which the main character and reader are unfamiliar²³. Others define fantasy by what is not; for instance, Scholes argues that fantasy “contributes to cognition, then, by providing us with models that reveal the nature of reality by their very failure to coincide with it.”²⁴ Eric S. Rabkin’s definition, though perhaps a little dated, seems to be the best set of qualifiers, as he says that fantasy is created when the reader “participates sympathetically in the ground rules of a narrative world,”²⁵ a world that creates escape as “the means of exploration of an unknown land, a land which is the underside of the mind of man.”²⁶ His definition hinges upon the necessity of a different realm that the reader visits through the willing suspension of belief, which allows for a temporary escape from the mundane. To some, such as S. C. Fredericks, definitions are pointless all together: “...attempting to “specify” those loose terms [fantasy, fantastic] as abstract generic literary concepts only leads to the reduction of the systems of these critics to private credos, and then to obvious

²² Colin Manlove. *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*. 2nd. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 1.

²³ Though the *Alice* books are the most obvious series to suffer from this stipulation, other classics such as J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series would as well.

²⁴ Robert E. Scholes. *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future*. 1st. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1975) 1.

²⁵ Rabkin. *The Fantastic in Literature*. 4.

²⁶ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 45.

contradictions among the various systems.”²⁷ Nevertheless, if other genres can be specified with ‘abstract generic literary concepts,’ so can the fantasy genre.

Though the “why” of the birth of the fantasy genre has been answered, it is important to clarify the unifying features of the genre that allow for a pleasurable escape through regression to childhood innocence or immersion of hedonist decadence. The most common factors are as follows: an explanation of the supernatural elements within the books either found by the character through experience or not forthcoming, the suspension of belief, a guide figure, a shift in landscape or realm, and a different focus on social restraint. A brief explanation of these points in relation to the selected works is essential, before further in-depth analysis can be accomplished. In regards to the explanation of supernatural elements being ‘found’ or ‘not forthcoming,’ one needs to look no further than the *Alice* books and *Under the Hill*. In the *Alice* books, she must find her own explanation of the strange events that surround her as when she attempts to ask even the most lucid characters, she is given quite the ring-a-round; after all, when the Cheshire Cat blithely announces that “We’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.” and Alice questions this, he responds that she “must be [mad]... otherwise you wouldn’t have come here.”²⁸ In this manner, she must *find* the rules (or lack thereof) through her experiences, as they are not forthcoming in the slightest. In *Under the Hill*, Beardsley’s descriptions are breathtaking, with the exception of his description of precisely *how* Tannhäuser comes across Venus’ realm. Again, the explanation is not forthcoming (neither is it found, yet the caveat of that definition of fantasy is the “or” statement). The suspension of belief, as previously addressed, is important to the fantasy genre as it is

²⁷ Fredericks, “Problems”, 33-34.

²⁸ Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass*. 58.

to erotica and children's literature, hence the combination of *Under the Hill* and the *Alice* series. As Rabkin says, "We make believe because we *want* to believe.... When we accept a world in which the make-believe is real, we participate in... a form of escape."²⁹ While crucial to Fantasy, this suspension is a demand found in almost all fiction, making it a necessity *to* Fantasy but not to Fantasy alone. The guide figure and change in landscape or realm are both fairly basic conditions, both of which the *Alice* books and *Under the Hill* satisfy; the guide in *Under the Hill* is clearly Venus, for all that she very rarely speaks, and for the *Alice* books, the guides are more numerous than *Under the Hill* but they present themselves, such as the Queen of Hearts, the Caterpillar, the White Knight, and multiple other characters.

Lastly, the most important definition as sired by these two examples is the shifted focus on social restraint. For Alice, this shift is two-fold: first and foremost, she is allowed an opportunity for adventure in this Fantasy world. For a modern audience, this seems an odd removal of restraint, yet the almost-universal struggles of an age that held "an ideal of childhood-in which the child has plenty of leisure and keeps early hours- with the reality factory children faced- long work hours and no leisure at all..." is well summarized in a piece published in the American magazine *The Youth's Companion* in the same year as the first *Alice* book: "...but little boys who have to get up in the morning at five o'clock and work in the mill till seven at night, must get their hair cut when they can."³⁰ The second social restraint that finds itself reworked within the *Alice* books is the necessity of order, and consequently, the necessity of rules. As Daniel Bivona argues, "Carroll has constructed a world that is radically indeterminate, a

²⁹ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 43.

³⁰ Unknown. "A Keen Retort." *Youth's Companion* [Boston] (20 July 1865) 116.

world from which most of the "frames" that guide perception of the meaning of events, "frames" usually unreflectively assumed by Victorian children (or adults, for that matter), have been removed."³¹ As for *Under the Hill*, the removal of social restraint is evidenced in the wild sexual abandon and the pomp of Venus's court. The perversity of social restraints and consequence that manifests in the odd behavior in both *Alice* books is mirrored in the perversity of behavior that is born of removed social constraints and the neglect of logic in *Under the Hill*.

Despite what seems to be a contrasting nature, it is the semiotics of the fantasy genre that unite the *Alice* books and *Under the Hill*, not the explicit content. Fantasy is not a genre such as "biography" that is defined in terms of a specific structure, but instead the larger tropes and symbols present in each story. Children's literature and erotica are widely agreed to be the exact opposite ends of the literature spectrum and yet they both can be read under the title of Fantasy. It is difficult to find another type of literature that can encompass both venereal lore and youthful adventures, yet Fantasy does just that, since Victorian readers needed it. These three novels have intrinsic links that both demonstrates the potential of a fantasy novel, since it can appear within a multitude of other genres (i.e. children's fiction and 'deviant' literature), all while appealing to the nonconformist within us from the cradle to adulthood.

Keeping this definition of fantasy and the conflicted 19th century in mind, it is clear that Fantasy was a Victorian response to a time period that is peaceful only on the surface. The fantasy genre was a panacea that allowed the 19th century soul-in-strife a

³¹ Daniel Bivona. "Alice the Child-Imperialist and the Games of Wonderland." (*Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 41.2 (1986)) 150.

pleasant escape from the real world comes primarily from the inherent regression it fosters. While Sigmund Freud's initial work has been largely discredited, because of the work of Ernst Kris and Carl Jung, the idea of regression is still accepted by psychologists and sociologists alike³² thus it is this piece of psychoanalytic work that shall serve as the focus, and not Freud's more controversial or refuted ideas. While regression once signified a complete refusal to cope with the real world, the regressive quality of the Victorian fantasy genre came in two ways: the regression to psychosexual stages of development or the ARISE regression. The psychologist jargon may seem jarring, but the essential idea is that Victorian fantasy allowed one of two regressions. The first example of regression within the genre is the popular/common connotation of regression, which is the return to earlier psychosexual stages of development as postulated by Freud³³. Victorian fantasy allowed this form of regression by removing the social, moral, and spiritual restraints of adult society with imagined sexual release; as evidenced in *Under the Hill*, the characters' only sexual stipulation is that it feels good; there is no further restraint on those pleasures and there is no constraint within the community of Venus' court to act in the prudent/temperate manner associated with adults but there is every allowance to act in a manner associated with children (the "I will do it because I like how it feels" concept). The secondary possible regression is a return to childlike *simplicity* and involves the return to innocent pleasures of childhood by allowing the relief of the ego through engaging "in behavior that has been given up or is considered to be part of an earlier" life stage, such as using the imagination to recreate the world, as Carroll essentially does in the *Alice* series. This is known as

³² Philip E Slater. "On Social Regression." (*American Sociological Review*. 28.3 (1963)) 339.

³³ David Hothersall. *History of Psychology*. 4th. (New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities, 2003) 290.

ARISE (Adaptive Regression in Service to the Ego) or simply “Adaptive Regression”³⁴.

The concept of ARISE was most bolstered by Jung, who said that regression is sometimes a relapse to infantilism but an attempt to return to the “universal feeling of childhood innocence”³⁵, which is precisely the aim of both *Alice* books, and by extension, much of the Fantasy genre. After all, it was Jung who is often quoted as saying, “All the works of man have their origin in creative fantasy. What right have we then to depreciate imagination?”³⁶

While Charles L. Dodgson³⁷ wrote other stories besides *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) under the *nom de plume* of Lewis Carroll, it is these two works that are his most famous. Each of these works offers the former of these two regressions: the return to childhood, so to speak. Though Carroll wrote the two books for the daughters of the Liddell family, they appeal to adults by not infantilizing children readers with silly sentences such as “See Alice walk”, but instead allowing for a return to the childlike mindset. In actuality, both of the *Alice* books are a little terrifying, because being a child is quite a frightening experience. For example, rules must be learned in childhood that often make very little sense to a child, just as the strategy of Wonderland make very little sense to Alice. What makes the *Alice* books such fascinating stories is that Alice, as a character, is “both child and adult- and a person in transition”³⁸; after all, she is at once the adult reader, the real Alice Liddell,

³⁴ Eda G Goldstein. *Ego Psychology and Social Work Practice*. 2nd. (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 64-5.

³⁵ C.G. Jung. *Practice of Psychotherapy* [1961] Ed. Gerhard Adler. Digital. (Princeton: Princeton University Press / Bollingen Paperback, 1985) 32.

³⁶ C. G. Jung. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* [1955] 2nd ed. (Florence, KY: Routledge Classics, 2005) 67.

³⁷ To be henceforth referred to as ‘Lewis Carroll’ or ‘Carroll’ as this is the name associated with his works of fiction, which are the focus of this paper, and not with his mathematical theorems, which are of no context to this work.

³⁸ James R. Kincaid. "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland." (*PMLA*. 88.1 (1973)) 93.

and a child protagonist forging her way through a land with no forthcoming explanations. It is in her characterization that escape is possible for all audiences, as it allows the regression of the adult and the exploration of the imagination of a child. Additionally, her characterization satirizes the guide figures that are a requisite of the Fantasy genre; her guides are so odd that Elaine Ostry even argues that despite being “nonsensical, [Alice’s] dialogues with herself are often more meaningful than the ones she has with authoritarian but not authoritative creatures...”³⁹. Though James R. Kincaid argues that these guide figures are presented so the reader may question why the world sees “the sophisticated and sad corruption of adults as preferable to the cruel selfishness of children”⁴⁰, it is tempting to disagree with his statement in favor of Ronald Reichertz’s analysis that Lewis Carroll is instead parodying the conduct books of Edwardian and Victorian England⁴¹; by not giving the guide figures the immediate answers to Alice’s question, Carroll is demonstrating how children learn through experience and not rote memory. This is an important factor in Alice’s journey down the rabbit hole and through the mirror, since she (and the reader) are *experiencing* the fantastic, instead of *learning* the fantastic. Furthermore, this relates to the earlier genre definition of Fantasy in that explanations must either be found within the text itself (as they are through the course of the narrative) or not found at all. Fredericks’ may have dismissed the *Alice* books from the Fantasy genre, but it is this lack of explanation of the supernatural elements, despite the presence of guide figures, as well as the absence of social constraints,

³⁹ Elaine Ostry. "Magical Growth and Moral Lessons; or, How the Conduct Book Informed Victorian and Edwardian Children's Fantasy." (*Lion And The Unicorn*. 27.1 (2003)) 38.

⁴⁰ Kincaid, "Alice's Invasion", 93.

⁴¹ From Ronald Reichertz *The Making of the Alice Books: Lewis Carroll's Uses of Earlier Children's Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1997) as quoted in Ostry's "Magical Growth and Moral Lessons", 29.

suspension of belief, and factor of the paranormal/supernatural that solidifies their place in the genre⁴².

While the guide figure is repeatedly mocked in the *Alice* books, it is clearly intentional, since it is the girl child who was seen, by Victorians, as perfect. In Catherine Robson's book *Men In Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentlemen*, she describes how the fascination with girl children that consumed much of elite Victorian culture. This fascination, though most strongly evidenced by the literature of Wordsworth and Ruskin, was not confined solely to the written word, but experienced great popularity in photography⁴³. Carroll combined both his skill with a pen and his considerable photographic talent in the fulfillment of the character of Alice. As Robson writes, Carroll "created one of the most fascinating little girls of all time. In all her different and associated forms- underground and through the looking glass, textual and visual... as Carroll's brunette or Tenniel's blonde... in novel, poem, satire, play, film, cartoon, newspaper, magazine... - Alice is the ultimate cultural icon"⁴⁴. She represents a fulfillment of the dream of childhood: unconcerned⁴⁵ by her sister's initial indifference⁴⁵, her adventures pave the way for hundreds of children who later read her story. In fact, she has become the quintessential icon for all of childhood fancy: Carroll's photographs, but more importantly his literature, fulfill his "impossible quest to catch the child he himself had once been"⁴⁶. While Carroll and Alice were of different genders, in order to create the icon of childhood, Carroll deliberately selected a girl protagonist for two

⁴² Fredericks, "Problems", 38.

⁴³ Catherine Robson. *Men In Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*. 10th. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 129-153.

⁴⁴ Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, 137.

⁴⁵ Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass*. 114.

⁴⁶ Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, 139.

reasons. The first is of course, his original audience; Alice Liddell would have found very little in common with a boy protagonist, especially since the adventures of little boys were a common narrative structure, as boys are typically stereotyped as more playful and prone to adventures; Lundin even alleges that children's literature was deliberately gendered, with "adventure fiction for boys and domestic chronicles for girls."⁴⁷

Secondly, when considering his childhood, he is known to have said "as a little boy, I was simply detestable..."⁴⁸ Thus for him, the gender selection of Alice is not a sexual choice corresponding to the vile allegations of pedophilia by later critics, but a choice to relate to his original audience as well as relating to the *ideal* of childhood (and not the sex-based reality).

This idealized childhood that so consumes the *Alice* narrative is directly correlated to power, and thus regression. For instance, in the adult world, power is everything, with a myriad of examples: the power over another adult, the power to make decisions, to power to come and go as one pleases. However, this is not a tangible power, and thus can be incredibly frustrating. For the Victorians, power was enforced through arbitrary (and typically invisible) rules of class, ethnicity, and even marital status. It is difficult for a functioning psyche to keep track of these rules that seem to have little concrete basis; after all, despite the myth of charismatic lineage, an infant of the upper-class emerges bloody and screaming from the womb in a manner identical to an infant of the working-class. In the adult world, power comes primarily in the form of laws, and though these laws may be written down in the dusty vaults of Parliament, the

⁴⁷, Anne H. Lundin. "Victorian Horizons: The Reception of Children's Books in England and America, 1880-1900." (*Library Quarterly*. 64.1 (1994)) 42-3.

⁴⁸ Quoted from Evelyn M. Hatch's *A Selection from the Letters of Lewis Carroll to his Child-Friends* [1933] in Robson's *Men in Wonderland*, 140.

average citizens knows only of the punishment incurred by those who break the rules. However, for a child, power is almost always directly linked to size, with physical “growth related to power and independence”⁴⁹; as Alice grows and shrinks throughout *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, she helps erase the divisions of “big and little, powerful and powerless”⁵⁰. Alice grows and shrinks, allowing the fear of those larger than oneself that is present in most children to be overwhelmed; it is shown to be as inane as the rules of adults because it has no “sticking” power in the world of Wonderland. The reader is allowed to escape the Victorian confines of civility and regulations by regressing to childhood, to a time of easier fears and problems (such as the size differential) and to confront, and ultimately negate, such fears in a way that the adult world makes no allowances for. Alice, a child, is shown to combat her initial fear in response to her surprising ability to grow and shrink, which allows her to proceed through the story. For example, in ‘Advice from a Caterpillar,’ she is initially alarmed at not knowing which side of the mushroom to eat, but after she looks “thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute,” she simply breaks “off a bit of the edge with each hand.”⁵¹ She moves past her initial confusion and proceeds as best she can, instead of losing her mind in a panic. As Sarah Gilead notes in her article “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction,” when she says that “child-directed projects... satisfy adult reader’s notions about children’s tastes and needs, as well as fulfilling the needs” of adult society⁵². Thus, in Lewis Carroll’s fantasy story, it is not the child protagonist who is left reassured, but the adult reader who learns to pass fear, even when that fear

⁴⁹ Ostry, “Magical Growth and Moral Lessons”, 27.

⁵⁰ Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, 141.

⁵¹ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 47.

⁵² Sarah Gilead. “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction.” (*PMLA*. 106.2 (1991)) 277.

seems a very reasonable response to the current situation, in order to proceed with their own story, just as Alice does. While the “purpose of children’s literature” is “simple and benevolent: to beguile, amuse, and soothe the child”⁵³, the participation of a child’s book in the genre of Fantasy allows the reader the same amusement and soothing structure.

The escape from the fears of the current reality into a fantasy world of a child’s design, in which a common fear (size) is overcome, is facilitated by the suspension of belief key to the fantasy genre’s narrative. All the same, the prized escape from the social trials by Victorians sought finds relief in the size-changing of Alice, an escape that manifests in a supernatural form. Since part of Rabkin’s definition of Fantasy is that “the fantastic contradicts perspectives”, Alice’s consistent surprise at the supernatural elements of the story, such as the talking flowers, “signals the fantastic”⁵⁴. In using the term “supernatural,” it is best to define it in a similar manner to “fantastical”: the OED labels supernatural as an adjective implying “belonging to a realm... that transcends nature, as that of divine, magical, or ghostly beings; attributed to or thought to reveal some force beyond scientific understanding”⁵⁵. Similarly, Merriam-Webster’s secondary definition of “supernatural” is “departing from what is usual or normal especially so as to appear to transcend the laws of nature.”⁵⁶ Thus, the bizarre events of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, such as Alice’s shape-

⁵³ Gilead, “Magic Abjured”, 283

⁵⁴ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 4.

⁵⁵ “supernatural, adj. and n.” *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, March 2014.)

⁵⁶ “Supernatural.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

shifting⁵⁷, discussions with talking flowers⁵⁸, and a conversation with a pigeon⁵⁹ – to name but a few - are “supernatural” as they “transcend [the laws of] nature”.

By the Victorian era, the supernatural is no longer solely frightening, as it had been in earlier times. Up to the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras and even to the late 18th century, the supernatural was almost entirely frightening. For audiences of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, when Prospero bids Ariel to hunt Trinculo, Caliban and Stefano with the words “Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour // Lie at my mercy all mine enemies”, the sprite’s magic is frightening because it appears in a form that terrorizes, a form that many believed was possible⁶⁰. After all, magic was still so widely accepted as real that Britain executed its last witch in 1682⁶¹, a full 71 years after the first performance of *The Tempest*⁶². In Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, the unnatural pervades the entire play, forming the main characters, dialogue, and even the setting; in sum, Marlowe’s terrifying play of a man dragged to Hell is loaded with the supernatural inspiring fear, a fear of harm not only to the flesh but to the soul, for all of eternity. For both *The Tempest* and *Doctor Faustus*, the supernatural reflects cultural belief⁶³ in the possibility of magic- until roughly 1680- and of eternal damnation- until the shift from Christianity presented in the Victorian Era. While other examples exist of Elizabethan

⁵⁷ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 18, 47-8.

⁵⁸ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 135-144.

⁵⁹ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 48-50.

⁶⁰ William Shakespeare. *The Tempest* [1611]. Arden Edition. (Massachusetts: MIT, 1993) IV.i.

⁶¹ Douglas Linder. "A Brief History of Witchcraft Persecutions before Salem." *Salem Witchcraft Trials*. (University of Missouri-Kansas City, n.d.)

⁶² William Shakespeare. *The Tempest* [1611]. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Oxford Shakespeare edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 1-3.

⁶³ R.E. Saleski. "Supernatural Agents in Christian Imagery: Word Studies in Elizabethan Dramatists." (*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. 38.3 (1939)) 431-439.

and later plays with themes magic and spirituality, *The Tempest* and *Doctor Faustus* are excellent examples of how earlier literature did not fit the genre qualification of Fantasy in that there is no ability to suspend belief; Hell and mysterious islands with captive spirits, demons such as Mephistopheles and sprites such as Ariel, the power of damnation and the magic of a spell, all of these elements of the supernatural in both plays had at least a trace of belief, if not wholehearted faith, as to their truth. Belief in such paranormal events had rapidly faded by 19th century Britain, with the later crisis of the soul, the conflicted political and social scene, and the rapid advancement of science allowing for the supernatural to be a source of pleasure and amusement, and not of fear.

By the Victorian era, literature with similar narrative elements of the “inexplicable”, replaced the fear of magic or spiritual retribution with fears of science gone awry. The more popular example would be Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. The fading superstitions of the populace who were once awed and frightened by sprites and demons, was finding fear in something new: science. As the OED definition points out, the supernatural is ‘beyond scientific understanding,’ thus disqualifying Shelley’s fiction narrative from the fantasy genre; Frankenstein’s monster is not created by witches or summoned from Satan’s domain, but created by an obsessed scientist. Thus, by the publication of the *Alice* books, the magical or supernatural is no longer feared; the talking flowers of *Through the Looking-Glass*, or the Gryphon of *Alice’s Adventures* are neither possessed nor monstrous, but almost silly citizens of Wonderland. Even the name of Alice’s new world is telling, since it is Wonderland, a literal land of wonder, albeit with frightening undertones but nevertheless

an almost magical place. It is in this supernatural environment that Alice finds herself strangely transported to, but it is the reader that finds solace in the wonder there. The ability of suspended belief allows the supernatural to be understood as fanciful and delightful, and removes the threat of fear by controlling the ramifications of the situation in which the supernatural appears. While Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* has tormenting ramifications when the demons appear in the final Act, Alice has no such future terror in store for her when she exclaims "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"⁶⁴ because, as she established earlier, "Why, they're only a pack of cards... I needn't be afraid of them!"⁶⁵ The supernatural is no longer frightening because it is all a creation of innocence for a child, and a facilitator of regression for an adult reader.

While there are a host of supernatural elements in each of the *Alice* books, from the speaking dormouse to the hookah-smoking caterpillar, there is a subtle edge to the supernatural factor of the *Alice* books: the removal of social constraints. As Bivona notices, what is normal "in an English setting is inappropriate in Wonderland; the social codes that determine what is and is not "natural" are very different in the two spheres."⁶⁶ While it has been previously mentioned that the social constraint on Alice's curiosity has been removed, the supernatural is also apparent in the complete lack of rules. The very nature of the supernatural is that it disregards the natural rules of the world, and thus, rules are of no consequence here. "...The very notion that there might be a realm of experience *not* governed by rules"⁶⁷ engages the imagination of the reader and allows the embrace of the supernatural as a form of excess, since it removes the restraint of

⁶⁴ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass*. 113.

⁶⁵ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass*, 72.

⁶⁶ Bivona, "Alice the Child-Imperialist," 145

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the real world that fundamentally operates on regulations of logic and sense. To put it another way, the excessive nonsense of the supernatural that is granted by the hallmark of the Fantasy genre, the suspension of belief, is so granted by not so much flipping rules (as in *Under the Hill*) but by completely ignoring them. It is impossible to say that Wonderland functions with its own rules, because it is in actuality a place *without* consequence and rules. As Mobley says of the Fantasy genre, “The reader and the hero alike must confront the passing strange and wondrous fair without any of the standards or norms applicable to physical reality.”⁶⁸, and nothing could be truer of both *Alice* books.

Even though Bivona states that “Alice has no vantage from which to judge whether the creatures are following or breaking the rules”⁶⁹, it is obvious with a close reading of the original texts that there are no rules for her to “judge” because Wonderland is a place without consequence. For instance, the Queen of Hearts repeatedly cries out “Off with his head!” but when she asks “Are their heads off?” the soldiers uniformly reply with “Their heads are gone, if it please your Majesty!”⁷⁰ It is not a rule that the Queen of Hearts can behead whomever she likes, because there are no consequences, and a rule is only as legitimate as the enforcement. The Queen of Hearts’ constant attempts to use power over other citizens of Wonderland and the consistent lack of result to her demands makes the reader realize that when “there appears no sane choice for humans but to seize power, to impose the fragile, artificial, arbitrary order of... law, culture, and social conventions... such order and such power

⁶⁸ Jane Mobley. "Toward a Description of Fantasy Fiction." (*Extrapolation*. 15. (1974)) 119.

⁶⁹ Bivona, “Alice the Child-Imperialist”, 149

⁷⁰ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 75

are merely our own silly, upside-down inventions...”⁷¹ Wonderland has the characteristics of adult games, such as the cards and the chess pieces, but it functions in a manner more closely resembling a child’s game. Even in violent games for children that involve warring factions, such as “Cops and Robbers,” when a ‘robber’ is ‘killed’ by a ‘cop,’ it is a game because one child has not actually murdered another but merely ousted them from play. As opposed to the adult world where rules and power are everything, Wonderland’s rules are nothing since no one has any real power, and thus Alice’s adventures border on playing a game, albeit a game that Alice seems to only win when she is too frustrated to play anymore.

Just as the supposed “rules” of Wonderland more closely resemble a children’s game than any real doctrine, lessons learned in one part of Wonderland cannot be applied to other parts because of the lack of repeated consequence. One such example is that in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice is perfectly capable of shaking or touching the other characters; for instance, in her interactions with the White Knight, he has difficulty with his helmet but she “manage[s] to shake him out of it at last.”⁷² In this instance, the White Knight maintains his human form, despite her touch, yet in Chapters X, and XI (the former of which is appropriately titled ‘Shaking’), when she shakes the Red Queen, the Queen’s face “grew very small, and her eyes got large and green... – and it really WAS a kitten, after all.”⁷³ These governing rules of interactions have no consequence and are ever-changing, thus, to quote a recent film, they are “more what

⁷¹ Donald Rackin. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass: Nonsense, Sense, and Meaning*. 1. (New York: Twayne's Masterwork Series, 1991) 99.

⁷² Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass*. 205.

⁷³ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 233-35.

you'd call 'guidelines' than actual rules"⁷⁴. The supernatural, and thus Fantasy as a genre, is a refusal to play by the norms of the normal world, where rules have fixed consequences, and the nonsense of Wonderland is a prime example of such an occurrence.

Thus, the *Alice* books are two of the first true Fantasy novels, both born of the frustrations with the real world as experienced by Victorians. They fit both the genre qualifications of guide figures, the suspension of belief, a shift in landscape or realm, and a different focus on social restraint, in this case the lack of rules and the adventures in which Alice is allowed to participate. Furthermore, there is no explanation of the supernatural elements. For all that the Caterpillar demands Alice "Explain yourself!" when she says "I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir, because I'm not myself, you see"⁷⁵, he offers no explanation of himself or of any of the mystery of Wonderland; she must experience them herself and draw her own conclusions. Both *Alice* books allow the return/regression of the adult reader to the simple world of childhood wonder, facilitating the escape so coveted by Victorians, as there is no true belief associated with the stories of Wonderland, and no fear of the supernatural.

Regression to a childlike state of simplicity was not the only regression found in the burgeoning and highly Victorian genre of Fantasy literature. For some, the restrictive society was escaped only in the submersion of the mind in sensualist literature. Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill* typifies the secondary regression of Victorian Fantasy. Also called *The Legend of Venus and Tannhäuser*, Beardsley's work was left unfinished at

⁷⁴ Gore Verbinski, dir. *Pirate's of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. Perf. Geoffrey Rush. (Cascade Film, 2003) Film.

⁷⁵ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 43.

his death 1898 and was unpublished until 1907. It is an erotic reworking of the Tannhäuser legend, a medieval legend originating somewhere around 1430 that gained considerable fame after Wagner's three-act opera in 1845⁷⁶. It has been speculated that the mythical trip to Venusberg is "an hallucinatory experience or dream" and that the historic Tannhäuser "actually believed he had visited" Venus's realm, since the historic figure's "known poems show an erotic strain"⁷⁷, but it is not with the legitimate historical figure with whom Beardsley concerned his narrative; in reality, the Tannhäuser was merely a popular story that Beardsley reworked to satisfy his own desires, desires that were not uncommon in his time. This story would have additionally appealed to Beardsley pornographic intentions, as the legend ends with an alleged miracle of Pope Urban IV's papal staff blossoming with flowers, and "anticlericalism is a standard feature of Victorian pornography."⁷⁸

Recent scholarship has been hard at work overturning the once-predominant idea, propagated by historians such as Stephen Marcus, that Victorians were prudish, repressed, and borderline asexual. For instance, the work of Stearns and Stearns' argues that "Victorians were, in the main, sexually healthy," yet they also acknowledge the substantial body of Victorian literature that completely denied women of having any sexual desire and was "supplemented by other works which were only slightly less extreme in judging women's sexual needs"⁷⁹. Furthermore, they note that it is highly likely that girls were frightened with tales of the "horrors of masturbation" and "denied

⁷⁶ Claude M. Simpson, Jr. "Wagner and the Tannhäuser Tradition." (*PMLA*. 63.1 (1948)) 244-261.

⁷⁷ Cicely M. Botley. "The Tannhäuser Legend." Correspondence. (*Folklore*. Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Dec 1935) 400.

⁷⁸ John Woodrow Presley. "Finnegans Wake, Lady Pokingham, and Victorian Erotic Fantasy." (*Journal of Popular Culture*. 30.3 (2004)) 74.

⁷⁹ Carol Z. Stearns and Peter N. Stearns. "Victorian Sexuality: Can Historians Do It Better?" (*Journal of Social History*. 18.4 (1985)) 627.

frank discussion about female anatomy and the prerequisites of sexual satisfaction”⁸⁰. It appears that, though Stearns and Stearns argue against the idea of Victorians as prudish and repressed, socially accepted views on sexuality nevertheless “said one thing about sex while doing another”⁸¹. Even men, who have historically been more free to engage in pre- or extra-marital affairs, were challenged by 19th century British sexual hypocrisies. Though “molly houses” for sexual experimentation between men existed until roughly 1830, homosexual men were nevertheless routinely imprisoned⁸². Bisexual and heterosexual men were restricted by the focus on ‘respectability’ espoused by the “highly vociferous... evangelicalism [movement], which saw the pursuit of pleasure and personal gratification as sinful”⁸³. When the hypocrisy is combined with the otherwise tumultuous climate of 19th century British society, it is reasonable to presume that these conflicted attitudes towards sexual pleasure would have left very few individuals completely well-adjusted. While it is historically incorrect to say that the covert satisfaction of sexual desires emerged during the Victorian Era, the turn to alternative forms of gratification gained large numbers of followers, as evidenced by the tremendous growth in the publication of sexual pamphlets, poetry and narratives (erotica), as well as sexual photographs (pornography)⁸⁴. It is in this sexual underground that parts of Beardsley’s *Under the Hill* were originally published, and it is in this search for deviance that his Fantasy work found supporters. It is important to clarify that Beardsley’s work were not the result of just the volatile Victorian Era in which

⁸⁰ Stearns and Stearns, “Victorian Sexuality”, 628.

⁸¹ Stearns and Stearns, “Victorian Sexuality”, 626.

⁸² Catharine Arnold. *City of Sin: London and Its Vices*. (New York: Simon and Schuster Ltd., 2010) 10-352.

⁸³ Mike J.Huggins. "More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England." (*Journal of Social History*. 33.3 (2000)) 586.

⁸⁴ Allison Pease. *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*. Reprint. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 37-135.

he lived, meant for himself alone, but intended to be more widely read by the audiences already engaged with 'deviant' sexuality that allowed for the regression of the reader by their willing suspension of belief. Many critics have seen *Under the Hill* as "speaking... from Beardsley's frustrated inner life"⁸⁵, yet it is not Beardsley's frustration alone that this work springs, but rather the frustration of his time period. Consequently, while it is correct to argue that *Under the Hill's* "significance extends beyond the narrow limits of the period"⁸⁶, the tortured period of British history from which it comes should not be overlooked either.

Beardsley is best known for his sexually explicit artistic works and his friendship with Decadent writers; however, just as Lewis Carroll was more than an author of children's literature, Beardsley was more than a writer allied with the Decadent movement, but also one of the first Fantasy authors. True, his work did not pioneer quite in the way that Carroll's did, but it is the semiotics of his work that ally him with the Fantasy genre. While "the traits subsequently associated with literary decadence [are] excessive morbidity, the celebration of useless artifice, hedonism, disease, cruelty, and insanity"⁸⁷, *Under the Hill* can only be said to contain the celebration of useless artifice, and hedonism. As Chris Snodgrass argues, it was primarily the work of Symons that characterized Beardsley as a member of the Decadent movement; Symons' work "denies some of the most significant elements in Beardsley's works"⁸⁸. If one dismisses

⁸⁵Linda C. Dowling. "'Venus and Tannhäuser': Beardsley's Satire of Decadence." (*Journal of Narrative Technique*. 8.1 (1978)) 27.

⁸⁶Dowling, "Venus and Tannhäuser", 27.

⁸⁷Christine Ferguson. "Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment." (*PMLA*. 117.3 (2002)) 470.

⁸⁸Chris Snodgrass. "Decadent Mythmaking: Arthur Symons on Aubrey Beardsley and Salome." (*Victorian Poetry*. 28.3/4 (1990)) 62.

the assumption that Beardsley is a quintessential member of the Decadent movement⁸⁹, it allows for a fully appreciation of Beardsley as an author of Fantasy. If so considered, it is immediately noticeable that *Under the Hill* contains the key qualifiers of the Fantasy genre, which, to reiterate, are: the suspension of belief, a shift in landscape or realm, the omission of social restraint, the explanation of the supernatural elements within the books either found by the character through experience or not forthcoming, and a guide figure. *Under the Hill* only allies Beardsley with the Decadence movement on two particular counts, but, as demonstrated earlier and as will be further analyzed, *Under the Hill* firmly plants him within the Fantasy genre, albeit to the erotic side of the style.

The shift in the writing of fantastic novels, from the time of the *Alice* books to *Under the Hill*, is reflective of currents in Victorian desires. In William A. Madden's dated but still valued article "The Victorian Sensibility," he notes how "Romantic exaltation of the mind's creative powers is consistently qualified by a complementary awareness of external "presences" which constitute an inescapable Other, against which it is self-destructive"⁹⁰ to rebel, yet by the time of Beardsley's piece in 1907, the Other is gone. There is no external presence against which Tannhäuser and the Court of Venus rebel, as they are completely absorbed within Beardsley's imagined Court of Venus. For example, in the first page of *Under the Hill*, it does not say from where Tannhäuser is arriving, simply beginning once he already *has* arrived. The journey is not present; he does not have the epic convention of overcoming the Green Knight or outwitting the Cyclops, as it is not a story of a journey, but a story of regression to sybarite impulses. This is in part due to the erotic focus of the story, as Steven Marcus describes erotic

⁸⁹ Snodgrass, "Decadent Mythmaking", 102.

⁹⁰ William A. Madden. "The Victorian Sensibility." (*Victorian Studies*. 7.1 (1963)) 70.

literature as catering to the “increased ‘privatization’ of experience”⁹¹, but also due to the nature of the Fantasy world, in which the “relationship between “imagination” and “reality” is a fluid one”⁹² and thus a believable Prologue or any sort of description of ‘before the story’ is unnecessary. After all, it was not just his erotic bent that proved “so powerfully scandalous to Victorian sensibilities” but the fact that it tended “to blur and pervert clear logical categories”⁹³. Since these “logical categories” are of no interest for those seeking escape, his ability to “blur and pervert” them was a positive factor for the original reader and not a source of scandal. For those as conflicted as the Victorians, an apt metaphor would be a drug addict in search of faster ways to get high; while an addict may shift from inhaling cocaine to smoking it, a Victorian Fantasy reader similarly abandoned the niceties of explanation in favor of the immediate immersion into the story.

Under the Hill allows for the regression to earlier psychosexual stages, in which pleasure is not withheld, by way of Fantasy is one to decadence and corporeal pleasure, as allowed by the auxiliary nature of real belief. As erotica’s chief aim is the physical attention and sexual release of the reader, many pieces of 19th century erotica may lay claim to regression to pleasure, and they do indeed fulfill Freud’s initial theories, as erotica focused on male penetration may signify a regression to the phallic psychosexual stage. *Under the Hill* is different from these other pieces in its alignment with Fantasy, an alignment that allows a more fluid scheme. Well-known pieces of erotica at this time typically contained uniting themes, such as flagellation in Algernon

⁹¹ Steven Marcus. *The Other Victorians*. (New York: Basic, 1964) 282.

⁹² Fredericks, “Problems”, 39.

⁹³ Snodgrass, “Decadent Mythmaking”, 103.

Swinburne's mock heroic poem *The Flogging Block*, or the sexual maturation of a male, such as in the four-volume narrative *The Romance of Lust*, published anonymously from 1873 to 1876. Beardsley's fantasy work, unlike other erotica published in his time, goes beyond the limitations of ordinary erotica, primarily in the sheer scope of the potential for erotic fulfillment within its pages. *Under the Hill* was not confined to a single fetish or even a single sexual orientation, but included a variety of both; from the usage of inanimate objects for sexual pleasure⁹⁴ to Felix's coprophilia⁹⁵, even to Tannhäuser's homosexual pedophilia⁹⁶, almost every sexual desire is met within the pages of Beardsley's work. Hence, the erotic needs that foster regression satisfied partially by most erotica is more fulfilled in *Under the Hill*, as it allows the reader to return to a time when sexuality was not confined, and thus satisfaction was not withheld⁹⁷. The natural connection between imagination and sexual desire allows for the appreciation of this wide breath of sexual tales under the theme of Venus' supernatural and socially indifferent court and thus fundamentally fits with the suspension of belief necessitated by the Fantasy genre; after all, the solitary act of masturbation alone requires the use of imagination, to say nothing of the interpersonal pursuits of bondage, role play, or lingerie.

The escape for the Victorian reader of *Under the Hill* is primarily sexual, as it is erotica, but the story also provides an escape through decadence possible only through a Fantasy world. For example, as Tannhäuser enters the Hill of Venus, the description

⁹⁴ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 42.

⁹⁵ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 67.

⁹⁶ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*. 59-60.

⁹⁷ Sigmund Freud. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. Ed. James Strachey . Standard Edition. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990) 125-42.

is almost beyond compare; for Beardsley, the descent into the underground of the imagination is nothing like the descent to a real place. Every sense is catered to in the opening pages of the story, with “strange flowers, heavy with perfume, dripping with odours...”, “loving sculptures, showing... such a curious knowledge” and “faint music as strange and distant as sea-legends that are heard in shells” all serving to introduce the reader to Venus’s strange land⁹⁸. Even the description of the lead character is fully encompassing, with everything from his hand, “slim and gracious”, to the “tangle in the tassel of his stick” written with exquisite detail⁹⁹. The decadence and gratuitous use of adjectives is not confined to the opening pages, but is a recurrent theme throughout Beardsley’s work, as he seeks to create a Fantasy world that is not alien to our own (as Wonderland is) but is instead a perfection of the real world. This perfection is realized in his literal descriptions, but also in the narrative structuring of a world without limitations.

The limitations present in the real world border on innumerable, as there is the worry of payment, of appearance, of taboo; yet in the Venusberg, there is no such restriction. For example, while a monarch may have a sumptuous feast for a special occasion, Venus’s world seems to treat every day as a festival. In the description of Tannhäuser’s first dinner, expense is clearly not even of the remotest consideration, as they dine on a “veritable tour de cuisine” that Beardsley relays in such detail that he is restricted to the use of French terminology¹⁰⁰. The costuming is equally detailed (though thankfully Anglicized), with clothing “of peacocks’ feathers, of gold and silver threads, of swansdown, of the tendrils of the vine, and of human hairs”, to say nothing of “tunics of

⁹⁸ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 25.

⁹⁹ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 25-6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

panthers' skins" and "capotes of crimson satin trimmed with the wings of owls"¹⁰¹. There is not a single mention of purchasing the fine garments or food, or indeed of how the Court maintains such a gay and expensive lifestyle, simply because it is another constraint that is abandoned.

The supernatural elements of the story also add to the full immersion of the reader's mind. After all, the very location is the court of a goddess; it is not the court of a woman comparable to Venus but the same Venus as seen "in the Vatican, in the Louvre, in the Uffizi, or in the British Museum"¹⁰². She is referred to as a queen but also a "divine mistress"¹⁰³, which harkens back to the original medieval legend. However, she is not the goddess as believed by the Greek or Romans, since she does not appear to have any real powers; she is a redacted form of the original figure of divinity, more of a supernatural character than a powerful deity. Furthermore, Titurel's ballet that is witnessed after dinner is "founded upon De Bergerac's comedy of "Les Bacchanales of Fanfreluche""¹⁰⁴. In a world of fantastic extravagance, it is only fitting to see the ballet as a part of the action of the story, and not simply an activity the characters witness; after all, it is portrayed with as much detail as earlier scenes and with the same realism. In the ballet, a "troop of satyrs" are the opening focus, coming "upon the altar of the mysterious Pan"¹⁰⁵. Clearly, the intent of the action is the focus on the mythical and magical, each a significant focus in the Fantasy genre. Within the ballet, Beardsley describes the "rout of dandies and smart women" as "wearied by the pleasures offered

¹⁰¹ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 36-7.

¹⁰² Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 31.

¹⁰³ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 37.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 44.

by the civil world” and thus interested in sexual play with the previously introduced satyrs¹⁰⁶; in this manner, the ballet’s internal actions mirrors the actions of the story itself, with the reader as the dandies and smart women. The style here is similar to the literary device of a microcosm, as Beardsley describes another type of art (the ballet as a microcosm) within his own art (the macrocosm) to convey deeper meaning¹⁰⁷. The ballet further translates to in-scene action, as Beardsley refers to Sporion and other characters acting in the ballet more frequently by their real names and very rarely by the name of their on-stage characters, with the exception of the “inflamed woodlanders”¹⁰⁸. For example, it is “Sporion and each of his friends” who take a “satyr or a shepherd” as sexual partners¹⁰⁹, which grounds the ballet as equivalently legitimate to the reality of earlier scenes. His blending of the action of the ballet to the action of the story makes the supernatural characters of the satyrs and fauns no less a part of the story than any other part, as for the length of the scene is impressive, encompassing the entire fifth chapter¹¹⁰, as well as the detail of the ballet, from the splendid costumes to the particular sexual acts, such as mammary intercourse and cunnilingus¹¹¹. The explanation of these supernatural characters is found in the logic of the ballet, yet they are given as much legitimacy as the “dwarves and doubtful creatures”¹¹² who dress Venus, or even Venus, a goddess, herself; it is the experience of Tannhäuser and his location within the Court of Venus that legitimizes the ballet into *more* than just a light entertainment but a full point of action. For the most part, it is not full-blooded creatures

¹⁰⁶ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 44-7.

¹⁰⁷ "microcosm, n." *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, March 2014)

¹⁰⁸ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁰ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 43-51.

¹¹¹ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 51.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

of legend that give the novel a supernatural theme- as there is only mention of a single unicorn and a handful of dwarves- but instead supernatural *elements* splashed throughout the story, such as the goddess Venus, Titirel's ballet, and even the figures painted upon the bodies of the courtiers by Dorat that include satyrs, "an old man scratching his horned head," and "a drunken dwarf"¹¹³.

As is the case with many of pieces of Fantasy literature, there are two guide figures in *Under the Hill*; one is a supernatural creature, and the other is typically another ordinary human, in this case Venus and Priapusa respectively. Neither of these guides attempts to truly teach Tannhäuser anything, nor do they explain the wondrous court of Venusberg. They serve not as guides to the Venusberg itself, but to the experiences available therein. For example, there are only around seven pieces of exact dialogue between Venus and Tannhäuser, yet they have sex twice. Even in their brief snippets of dialogue, there is a sexual reasoning: when Venus replies to Tannhäuser's query as to whom a character is, her only specifically noted response is to give Felix's name; Beardsley proceeds to say "she went on to explain [Felix's] attitude"¹¹⁴, but it is he who takes the role of the illustrator of Felix's fetish for the reader and not Venus. Other snippets of dialogue between Venus and Tannhäuser have even less worth as instructions or explanations, such as when Venus is fondling Tannhäuser and says "Is it all mine? Is it all mine?" which explains absolutely nothing and exists only to further illuminate the "fascinating things" she is doing "under the lace flounces of his trousers"¹¹⁵. Venus is a guide figure in that it is her court and the most detailed sexual

¹¹³ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 37.

¹¹⁴ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 68.

encounters are with her, but she is a guide of experience and not of information.

Typically, the human guide or companion figure can be relied upon to verbally relay information to the titular character (and thus the reader), but it is not the case with the other humans with whom Tannhäuser interacts; though he has repeated interactions with Priapusa, she does not inform him of anything. In reality, the only acknowledgment of Priapusa's mouth opening towards Tannhäuser is, when at dinner, she slips "her tongue down [Venus' and Tannhäuser's] throats, and refused to be quiet at all until she had had a mouthful of the Chevalier"¹¹⁶, and that can hardly be called "guiding". Even Cosmé, another human in Venus' court who attends dinner with them at De La Pine's gives Tannhäuser no information, and it is only through Beardsley's explicit notation that the reader is aware that Cosmé speaks¹¹⁷. Each of the guides presented to Tannhäuser is a guide to sexual experience, with Venus providing the most explicit experience and Priapusa appearing to be an odd sort of voyeur. As *Under the Hill* is an erotic regression specifically written to soothe the British soul in crisis, it is not what the guides say that is important but what they do. Despite the usage of words to convey Beardsley's work, they are words in the service of painting a particular mental picture, namely an erotic reverie; as Presley notes, "Victorian pornography used its language in constant attempt to transcend language as a medium"¹¹⁸. By removing instrumentality of the speech of the guides to further the reader's imagination, Beardsley is similar to the producer of a modern film of pornography: he allows his characters to act and satisfy his audience's sexual desires, while filling in any other necessary information through the camera-lens of his pen.

¹¹⁶ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 42.

¹¹⁷ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 77.

¹¹⁸ Presley, "Victorian Erotic Fantasy", 77.

The flight to unbridled decadence that is *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* or *Under the Hill* reflects Beardsley's reputation for incorporating "sexually explicit tropes" while maintaining the ideal "of these works as high art..."¹¹⁹. Thus, the regression Beardsley fosters in his work *Under the Hill* is not only sexual but worthy of praise for the inherent "technical accomplishment"¹²⁰. It is not the childish flights of fantasy and problem-solving capacity found in *Alice*, but a regression to a focus on the senses that was accepted for its skill, if not necessarily its intended purpose. In simpler terms, while *Alice* allows a Fantasy reader to escape adult problems with impossible and childish wonder, *Under the Hill* allows the reader to escape adult problems with impossible hedonism and complete sexualization. Ferguson argues that this presents the "cool and rational antithesis to the alleged childish mysticism, emotionalism, and falsehood"¹²¹ of earlier art forms, and though Ferguson compares this extravagance to the Decadent movement's alignment with scientific positivism, her quotation is equally applicable to comparing *Alice* and *Under the Hill*.

It has already been established that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *Through the Looking-Glass* are each respective members of the Fantasy genre and are not, as Fredericks asserts, "bizarre, unique works of fictions" that "cannot be regarded as typical examples of Fantasy"¹²²; likewise, Beardsley's *Under the Hill* should be qualified under the Fantasy heading and not merely demoted to having been "a

¹¹⁹ Pease, *Modernism*, 73.

¹²⁰ As quoted from *The Beardsley Period* by Osbert Burdett [1925] in Pease's *Modernism*, 72.

¹²¹ Ferguson, "Decadence", 467.

¹²² Fredericks, "Problems", 36.

constant among the shifting demands of his one-off commissions”¹²³. It is important to conclude by pulling these stories together and noting how it is not simply their individual characteristics that label them as such a genre, separated from one another, but the semiotics within them. While individual analysis of the texts demonstrates their rightful place within the genre, it is critical to compare the semiotics of each to unite such analysis. By using a character shared in both sets of work, namely a unicorn, it is possible to highlight what unites such diverse genres. It is additionally fitting that each of these British authors used a unicorn, as the unicorn is one of two animals on the Royal Coat of Arms for the United Kingdom and, in such a capacity, a symbol of the nation.

For each author, the unicorn holds a special place and can be seen as symbolizing the intended regression of each author’s works. For instance, in *Under the Hill*, Adolphe is another sexual participant within Venus’s court who she satisfies with such daily regularity that “the etiquette of the Venusberg compelled everybody to await” her activities “before they could sit down to déjeuner.”¹²⁴ It is important to identify that it is not just Venus masturbating the Unicorn, as he is an active participant who touches “the Queen’s breasts with his quick tongue-tip.”¹²⁵ He is not a passive recipient of Venus’ manual dexterity but a willing partner who feels “distressing agony lest that day should have prove the last of Venus’s love.”¹²⁶ Beardsley’s unicorn has been anthropomorphized and given emotions (such as distress), as well as an interest in active sexual contact. However, it would be too hasty to say that Adolphe is given full

¹²³ Matthew Sturgis. "The Beardsley Boom." *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*. Reprint. (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999) 210.

¹²⁴ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 64.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

human characteristics since, for instance, Adolphe is mute. While his body language is interpreted to signify acceptance, he does not speak; he is another sexual commodity, as many characters in *Under the Hill*. He is both willing, but mute, with the emblem of his sexuality (his “scarlet John”¹²⁷, the “mark of manhood”¹²⁸) of more consequence than anything else. This is equally evidenced by the conclusion of the episode; after Adolphe is “quite profuse” and Venus licks up “her little aperitif,”¹²⁹ he is of no further consequence, since the sexual use of him is over. He epitomizes the regression fostered in *Under the Hill* with his sexual willingness but his overall silence, since it is for the gratification of the reader that erotica, such as this, exists.

The unicorn in *Through the Looking-Glass* is a reflection of the regression inherent to the story equivalent to the Unicorn in *Under the Hill*. While Adolphe demonstrates the regression to a completely sexualized outlook that steers *Under the Hill*, the Unicorn from *Through the Looking-Glass* clearly symbolizes the regression to childhood by the origin of the fight enacted before Alice, which is a children’s nursery rhyme¹³⁰. As the scene actually unfolds, the regression to childishness is further demonstrated as, once again, Wonderland fails to operate by the consequence-driven rules of the adult world; when the King cautiously criticizes the Unicorn for using his horn against the Lion, the Unicorn blithely responds with “It didn’t hurt him”¹³¹, despite the general consensus that being stabbed would very much hurt. The ‘rules’ of Wonderland once again fail to have serious consequence and, as follows, are not truly

¹²⁷ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 63.

¹²⁸ Beardsley, *Under the Hill*, 64.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Steve Roud. *Check-List of Recorded Songs in the English Language in the Archive of American Folk Song*. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1942) Roud Number 20170.

¹³¹ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 199

rules at all. This serves as testimony to the childish nature of Wonderland and the regression it allows, as rules in children's games typically have no consequence, such as when a 'robber' is 'killed' by a 'cop' in the children's game "Cops and Robbers". In this way, though the Lion and the Unicorn are said to be "fighting" and the duel between them is repeatedly referred to as "the fight"¹³², the lack of consequence demonstrates the juvenile heart of the game in which no one is hurt. Further validation of the fight as an ideal childhood game is that when the King neither agrees nor disagrees with the Unicorn's proclamation that "I had the best of it this time!" but instead merely says "A little – a little."¹³³; an ideal game for children is generally considered one in which no one is a "loser," as is the case with Lion and Unicorn's fight.

Further analysis into the inverted categorization of the characters involved in Chapter Eight of *Under the Hill* displays just how much the Fantasy genre can overwhelm; in this case, the fantastic overwhelms the norms of behavior. Between the two characters actively involved, it is Venus, the close approximation of a human, who is "freakish" and unnatural. If the definition of supernatural holds as "departing from what is usual or normal," bringing a mythical creature to ejaculation certainly fits those parameters. It is Venus who, despite being fully characterized as capable of thought and reason, seems abnormal. The restraint of the normal, civil world typically lays in the expectation of particular behavior that resides within a set norm; by rejecting the norms of animal vs. human behavior, Beardsley's disdain for these restraints, as previously demonstrated through the omission of sexual inhibition and the overwhelming decadence, is once again in play with the scene of the fondling of Adolphe.

¹³² Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 197-8

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 199

Just as the norms of expected human and expected animal behaviors are inverted in *Under the Hill*, the Unicorn in *Through the Looking-Glass* also fails to meet expected behavior (as much as one can “expect” behavior from an imaginary beast). From Alice’s first interaction with the Unicorn, he walks by “with his hands in his pockets”¹³⁴, which immediately strikes the reader as odd, as a unicorn is consistently imagined as “...having the body of a horse with a single horn projecting from its forehead.”¹³⁵ Needless to say, a horse would have no reason to put his hands in his pockets, as assumedly he would have neither hands nor clothing with pockets. As Alice’s interaction with the Unicorn continues, she is regarded as an aberration that is studied by the Unicorn “with an air of the deepest disgust”¹³⁶; it is she who is “a fabulous monster”¹³⁷ and not the strange creature that Alice can only “distinguish... by his horn.”¹³⁸ In the natural world, it is little girls who believe in unicorns, but in Wonderland, they must reach an arrangement of belief, since neither Alice nor the Unicorn seems to have seen a unicorn or a little girl before, respectively. This accommodation is achieved through a simple bargain: “Well, not that we *have* seen each other,” said the Unicorn, “if you’ll believe in me, I’ll believe in you.”¹³⁹ As Alice is a child, this is a simple enough demand with a significant enough incentive; after all, what child does not seek someone to believe in them?

In both Wonderland and the Venusberg, the unicorn is a significant character who embodies the exact purpose of the novel in question: for *Under the Hill*, it is sexual,

¹³⁴ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 199

¹³⁵ “unicorn, n.” *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, March 2014)

¹³⁶ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 199

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 200

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 197

¹³⁹ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 200.

and for *Through the Looking-Glass*, it is delightful. The unicorn represents the expectation behind reading the literature in question, as in both worlds, the unicorn's actions are acceptable. Elsewhere, a talking mythical horse that puts his hands in his pockets, or a supernatural creature given sexual stimulation by a woman would be incredibly bizarre and jarring, yet they fold into the narratives in question with hardly a raised eyebrow. Just as "fantastic worlds directly reflect the worlds in which we live,"¹⁴⁰ the fantastic world we chose to sympathetically participate in directly reflects the escape route that we need or want most. For the Victorian reader, Fantasy offered regression to more pleasant times; whether those pleasant times were the days of psychosexual development before taboo is learned and social conformity instituted, or the days of childhood in which whimsy and the imagination were not restrained was left to the decision of the reader selecting which particular book from the Fantasy genre. The desire to escape the discordant social atmosphere pushed beneath the façade of civil society in 19th century Britain was so prevalent that it birthed a genre so far-reaching it can include both salacious erotica and unsullied tales for children.

Together, these three pieces of literature were born of the conflicted Victorian psyche, a collective that was so tortured by the demands of the real world that it sought any possible escape. Even Dickens, one of the foremost Realist writers, recognized the importance of imaginative literature to Victorians when he said that "In an utilitarian age... it is a matter of grave importance that [imaginary] tales should be respected... Every one who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy...

¹⁴⁰ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 155.

never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.”¹⁴¹ While Dickens’ statement seems more precisely applicable to both *Alice* books (since he was specifically responding to a critique of fairy tales), he was so convinced of the basic human need for imagination and imaginative literature, specifically in his own time period, that he went so far as to write an essay expounding the “importance of imagination to the Victorians”¹⁴². All in all, children’s literature and erotica can both provide regressive escape, albeit with regressions of two very different styles. These regressions were facilitated through literature of the Fantasy genre, with its qualifying parameters, that gave hope to its Victorian readers and would go on to include literary classics as early as J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* in 1911, to J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series in 1997 and Cassandra Clare’s *Mortal Instruments* series in 2008. Founded in combination with the ability to suspend belief and necessity and the possibility to turn to the supernatural for pleasure, the Fantasy genre was the remedy that the literate 19th century Briton needed to survive the mechanization of the Industrial Revolution, the loss of unifying religion, a ravaged countryside, and the social anxiety stirred by the hypocrisies of Victorian society.

¹⁴¹ Charles Dickens. "Frauds on the Fairies." (*Household Words*. 10 Jan 1853) 97.

¹⁴² Pennington, "From Fact to Fantasy in Victorian Fiction", 200.

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