**Application of Lacanian Psychoanalysis to the Analysis of Literary Texts:**

**The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real in Lewis Caroll’s *Alice’s Adventures of Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass***

We are going to examine Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and their relation with the Symbolic, Imaginary, and the Real, the three Lacanian concepts of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real as subjects of the unconscious in the works of literature.

Firstly, the Imaginary register of subjectivity can be found in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice is defined by the others in terms of her appearance and image but they constantly mistake her for something different. Also, her body is constantly changing (growing or shrinking) or fragmented, in such a way that she cannot identify her own body or herself. It is what she tries to repair by building an ideal image of herself as a good, educated girl. There is strong evidence to suggest that in Wonderland one returns to an early imaginary order of subjectivity that Lacan described, a mirror world that is best represented by the narcissistic rivalries of twin pairs in *Through the Looking Glass*.

In Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, the journey through the mirror directs readers to consider what lies beyond the mirror frame. With Lacan as a guide, the Looking-Glass world is the Imaginary. By going through the Looking-Glass, Alice enters into a world that is essentially other than her own reality even though some aspects are recognizable, for example the chess set, or the flowers. This is a preverbal state, an Imaginary state where the world must function in images and appearances because Alice does not know the rules of this world either socially or linguistically. Thus, she finds herself constantly blundering and confused as to her role within it. Though Alice is an adolescent girl, like an infant in Lacan’s Mirror Stage she must recreate an identity in order to function successfully within the Looking-Glass world.

Secondly, the aspects of the subjective structure present in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* have been discussed in terms of the Symbolic. We have seen how the people of Wonderland always make use of puns (homophonic, homonymic, compound, recursive) and portmanteau-words. When Alice hears them, meaning is always changing and elusive. Also, the presence of Alice’s inability to express herself and of her lack of communication with the others is constant. Every logical explanation given by Alice is dismissed and this causes her lack of identity. In Lacanian terms, Wonderland’s world of nonsense is ruled by the signifier and miscommunication is an effect of the lack of correspondence between signifier and signified. As in the big Other of the unconscious, every attempt to find meaning in Wonderland is frustrated.

All throughout *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll uses language-games to create Alice’s dream worlds. For instance, nonsense is created through the use of puns. In the Mouse Tale, we find the famous pun on “tail”/“tale.” When Alice begs the Mouse to explain his aversion towards cats and dogs, the Mouse tells the story: “‘Mine is a long and sad *tale*!’ said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing. ‘It is a long *tail*, certainly,’ said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse’s tail; ‘but why do you call it sad?’” This example exemplifies the prevalence of the signifier over the signified in Wonderland. It is clear that the acoustic image of the signifier commands Alice’s answer, since “tail” and “tale” are both homophones. Alice assigns the word she hears a different meaning from what is intended, referring to the body of the mouse and not to the story. This is reinforced by the way Alice associates the signifier “tale” to the signifier “mouse” creating in her unconscious a sign which in this case is the story in the image of a mouse tail. Hence, Alice’s mistake reveals that Alice depends on language both to interpret the world and to express herself, but that because the signifier and the signified are as Lacan defends unrelated, miscommunication is frequent.

Lastly, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, one may find in Alice the experience of anguish produced by all those body transformations, misidentifications, and nonsensical words that have created and abyss of meaning and identity around her. This corresponds to the Lacanian Real. It all begins by falling down a rabbit hole into the world of the unconscious, where time and space lose their referents and liberation from anxiety only comes by waking up.

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, by following a rabbit down a hole, Alice enters the dream world of Wonderland. In this place underground qualities such as time and space become completely relative as Alice points out: “Either the well was very deep, or [I] fell very slowly.” The effects of time and space cause Alice a general sense of uncertainty. Out of curiosity, Alice “tried to look down and make out what she was coming to, but it was too dark to see anything.” Perhaps the darkness of the bottom represents that Alice is venturing into the dream’s navel, what Lacan named the Real.

That kind of dimensional distortion is even more noticeable in *Through the Looking-Glass*. There space is completely distorted, as if in a mirrored world. The impossibility of moving forward and always returning to the same place naturally creates anxiety in Alice. This happens when the Queen and Alice start running: “the trees and the other things round them never changed their places at all: however fast they went, they never seemed to pass anything.” The Real may be sensed in this emphasis on repetition of immovability and returning to the origin, the impossibility of breaking with this endless loop.

In conclusion, it may be said with Lacan that Wonderland represents the world of the unconscious in which the main registers of the human subjective experience can be found: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. Alice’s experience is not different from ours. Usually, our attempts to find meaning through what we know or have learnt are useless, we do not feel that the others recognize us and have to defend from anguish. By sublimating his own impulses in writing *Alice*, Carroll integrated all aspects of the subjective structure in his work. Thanks to it, we can learn about its complexity.