

A formalism analysis in how Lewis Carroll portrays Alice character in “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”

Asgar Widhasworo Rochmansyah Putra¹, Alifian Kusuma Bakhtiar², Wahyu Indah Mala Rohmanat³,

^{1,2} Islamic State University of Malang
Jalan Gajayana No. 50, Malang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The researcher of this study article presents a formalist analysis of Alice's characterization in the novel "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" from the point of view of the author of the fictional work Lewis Carroll. This research article explores how Alice's actions, dialogues, and interactions contribute to her characterization, emphasizing the traits of curiosity, open-mindedness, empathy, and assertiveness. It also investigates the role of each episode in shaping Alice's journey and highlights the importance of dreams, growth, and her encounter with the Caterpillar. The article concludes by emphasizing the formalist perspective and references various dissertations, conference proceedings, and books related to the analysis of Alice's character in the novel.

Keywords: Formalism, Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, Character

INTRODUCTION

Lewis Carroll, whose real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was an English author, mathematician, and photographer. Lewis Carroll wrote numerous essays, pamphlets, and mathematical treatises. Despite his academic works, he has most notable works such as Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and its sequel Through the Looking-Glass (1871) as Carroll's two best-known children's books (Susina, 2010). Meanwhile, his poems are classified in the genre of literary nonsense such as Jabberwocky (1871) and The Hunting of the Snark (1876).

The novel that will be analyzed in this paper is Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, that is a fictional story written by him that was known as a classic of English literature and one of the most widely recognized works in the world, especially in terms of children's literature. Based on his academic background and the reason why he wrote this novel makes it interesting to read. Because of his academic background significantly influences the novel's language. Carroll's imaginative storytelling, filled with wordplay, fantasy and surrealism reflect the whimsical and fantastical nature of the narrative. Moreover, Carroll's language is rich in inventive and vivid imagery. His ability to create imaginative and descriptive language, makes the readers feel like a

part of the story. Meanwhile, The emergence of this novel is because of the demand of his friend's daughter. Carroll wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was under the influence. The purpose was to entertain and amuse his friend's daughters. Alice Liddell was the inspiration when he wrote this novel. However, Carroll creates literary character Alice, who is more memorable than Alice Liddell, the person on whom she is based (Susina, 2010).

Many researchers have analyzed this novel and most of the research only focuses on the character of Alice. In fact, previous research by Romera (2017) entitled "An Analysis of Alice's Female Subjectivity in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" used feminist lens based on her gender and background as a Victorian woman. This research intends to prove how Alice shows alternative ways to be female and how she can be considered a transgression as far as gender issues are concerned.

In spite of feminist lens, some previous research used deconstructive analysis as the way to explain how Lewis Carroll wrote the novel. As done by Prados (2018) entitled "A Deconstructive Analysis of Lewis Carroll's Novel", The researcher was interested in how Lewis Carroll wrote a novel and focuses on literary nonsense. Therefore, this research inspire to analyze Alice from a formalist lens.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in analyzing Alice's characterization. The novel will be analyzed by formalism as part of a text-oriented approach. This study examines how characters are developed through their actions, dialogue, and interactions. According to Pangestuningtyas et al (2023) character development is a process in which a character's attitude or personality evolves, which affects the story's setting in the film. The analysis focuses on Alice's language and the way she acts, so the researcher will describe how Lewis Carroll portrays Alice as the main character in the novel.

Related to the topic explained above, the writer intends to state the statements of the problem, as follows:

1. How does Alice's talk and actions contribute to her characterization within the novel?
2. What role does each episode play in shaping her journey?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Shklovsky (1927) formalism is concerned with the form of artistic expression. The emphasis is placed on the structure, style, and language choices within the literary work. As Shklovsky argues, form is not just a container for content, but an

active design for engagement with the audience. This idea is consistent with the formalist approach, which seeks to unravel the complexity of literature by scrutinizing its linguistic and structural elements.

As identified by Jakobson (1960) Jakobson's identification of the poetic function as one of the six functions of language is consistent with formalism's emphasis on form. The poetic function is particularly relevant to literature and emphasizes how language is used, structured, and stylized. This emphasis on form aligns with the formalist approach. In the context of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, this formalist perspective allows us to examine how Lewis Carroll uses language to create a fantastical and fantastical world.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to Nazir (2014) states that the descriptive research method is a method with the aim of creating systematic descriptions, images or paintings, factual and accurate regarding the facts, properties and relationships between the phenomena being investigated. The method was chosen because of the analysis data based on the form of the word and sentences in the novel. In this case, the researcher analyzes the formalist aspect in how Lewis Carroll portrays Alice in the novel and uses formalism analysis to describe the data. In addition, Asia, J & Samantik (2018) states that data is an important element to support the writer in doing research. The data in this research is the novel entitled "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Alice's talk and actions contribute to her characterization

In the novel, Alice as the main character is represented as a young woman who embarks on an extraordinary journey of self-discovery. Her journey in Wonderland which is a surreal place within the absurdity of inhabitants makes it interesting to know how she faces it. The beginning of the novel implicitly explained that Alice is a curious person. Her adventures in wonderland happened because of her curiosity, she follows White Rabbit until down the rabbit hole.

"In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (p. 3)

It demonstrates her willingness to explore the unknown and it reflects her adventurous spirit and curiosity. Moreover, when Alice encounters the mouse in the pool of tears. Besides her curiosity, it demonstrates her open-mindedness by attempting to communicate with it.

“she began: 'O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O Mouse!' The Mouse looked at her rather inquisitively, and seemed to her to wink with one of its little eyes, but it said nothing.” (p. 24)

Another portrayal of Alice is a person who wants to try new things, when she talks with the mouse in both English and French, showing her willingness to adapt even in a strange and surreal situation.

“'Perhaps it doesn't understand English,' thought Alice; 'I daresay it's a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror.' So she began again: 'Ou est ma chatte?’” (p. 25)

Although in a strange situation Alice is still emphatic. For instance, when the mouse is initially reluctant to get involved, Alice shows concern and empathy for his feelings and tries to reassure him.

“'I quite forgot you didn't like cats.' 'Not like cats!' cried the Mouse, in a shrill, passionate voice. 'Would YOU like cats if you were me?' 'Well, perhaps not,' said Alice in a soothing tone: 'don't be angry about it. And yet I wish I could show you our cat Dinah: I think you'd take a fancy to cats if you could only see her.’” (p. 25)

Furthermore, another portrayal about open mindedness of Alice represents when encounters Dodo and participates in strange activities such as accepting the thimble and eating the comfits. In this case, Alice shows that in spite of finding the situation absurd, she still shows open-mindedness and adaptability.

“Then they all crowded round her once more, while the Dodo solemnly presented the thimble, saying 'We beg your acceptance of this elegant thimble'; and, when it had finished this short speech, they all cheered.” (p. 35)

Another portrayal is when Alice encounters the Caterpillar and engages in a conversation that highlights her adaptability. She expresses her confusion about her changing size and the challenges it presents, demonstrating her willingness to adapt to the unpredictable nature of Wonderland. Furthermore, based on the conversation with the Caterpillar demonstrates her curiosity and willingness to engage in philosophical discussions. Despite the Caterpillar's dismissive and condescending attitude, Alice

persists in trying to understand her own changing identity and the nature of transformation. This interaction highlights Alice's inquisitive nature and her determination to seek understanding.

“The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.” (p. 59)

In the novel, Lewis Carroll explicitly portrays Alice. For instance, when Alice does interactions with the Pigeon reveal her assertiveness and truthfulness. When the Pigeon accuses her of being a serpent, Alice confidently defends herself, stating that she has indeed tasted eggs and that little girls eat eggs just like serpents do. This interaction showcases Alice's assertiveness and her willingness to stand up for herself, even in the face of skepticism and criticism.

“A likely story indeed!” said the Pigeon in a tone of the deepest contempt. ‘I’ve seen a good many little girls in my time, but never ONE with such a neck as that! No, no! You’re a serpent; and there’s no use denying it. I suppose you’ll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!’

‘I HAVE tasted eggs, certainly,’ said Alice, who was a very truthful child; ‘but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.’ ‘I don’t believe it,’ said the Pigeon;” (p.73)

Alice's assertiveness is also portrayed when she questions the Footman about how to get into the house, despite his dismissive attitude. It demonstrates her assertiveness and determination to find answers.

“How am I to get in?” asked Alice again, in a louder tone.

‘ARE you to get in at all?’ said the Footman. ‘That’s the first question, you know.’

It was, no doubt: only Alice did not like to be told so. ‘It’s really dreadful,’ she muttered to herself, ‘the way all the creatures argue. It’s enough to drive one crazy!’

The Footman seemed to think this a good opportunity for repeating his remark, with variations. ‘I shall sit here,’ he said, ‘on and off, for days and days.’

‘But what am I to do?’ said Alice.

‘Anything you like,’ said the Footman, and began whistling.” (p. 80)

In Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," the portrayal of Alice as a curious, open-minded, empathetic, and assertive character adds depth to her journey of self-discovery in the whimsical and surreal Wonderland. Alice's willingness to

explore the unknown, adapt to unusual situations, and engage with the peculiar inhabitants of Wonderland showcases her adventurous spirit and inquisitive nature.

Role each episode plays in shaping her journey

In every moment and situation Alice faced affect in her journey, for instance, Alice's dream plays a significant role in shaping her journey by introducing her to the fantastical world of Wonderland. It sets the stage for her adventures and the challenges she will face, as well as the whimsical and nonsensical nature of the world she has entered.

In addition, when Alice drinks from the bottle and grows larger, contributes to her journey by highlighting the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of Wonderland. It emphasizes the theme of change and transformation, as well as the challenges and discomfort that come with it. This episode also reflects Alice's struggle to navigate the unfamiliar and ever-changing environment she finds herself in.

Furthermore, when Alice encounters the Caterpillar, serves to deepen her journey by introducing her to the enigmatic and often perplexing characters of Wonderland. It emphasizes the theme of identity and self-discovery, as well as the challenges of communication and understanding in this strange new world. This episode also marks a shift in Alice's interactions, as she begins to engage with the inhabitants of Wonderland in a more direct and personal manner.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research article is Lewis Carroll paints a multifaceted portrait of Alice as a character who embodies qualities such as curiosity, open-mindedness, empathy, and assertiveness. Her journey through Wonderland becomes a metaphorical exploration of self-discovery, where her interactions with the fantastical world and its inhabitants serve as a reflection of her evolving character. The novel not only entertains readers with its whimsy but also invites them to reflect on the complexities of human nature and the importance of embracing curiosity and adaptability in the face of the unknown. A qualitative descriptive method was used by the researcher for the analysis, focusing on how Alice's character is developed through their actions, dialog, and interactions. The research analyzes the role of each episode in shaping Alice's journey and its serve as essential building blocks for Alice's character development and the unfolding narrative. The whimsical and unpredictable nature of Wonderland challenges Alice to adapt, question, and explore her identity in this strange realm. As the journey continues, readers are invited to join Alice in unraveling the mysteries of

Wonderland and, in the process, reflect on the themes of change, self-discovery, and the complexities of communication in a fantastical world. The formalist analysis of the novel provides insight into Carroll's imaginative storytelling and the rich and inventive language used to portray Alice's character. This paper concludes by presenting a formalist analysis of how Lewis Carroll portrays Alice as a complex protagonist in the novel.

REFERENCES

- Avinindyta, A., & Erik Rusmana, S. S. (2018). An Analysis of Protagonist and Antagonist Characters in Carroll's Alice's Adventure in Wonderland. (Doctoral dissertation, Sastra Inggris)
- Asia, J., & Samanik, S. (2018, July). Dissociative Identity Disorder Reflected in Frederick Clegg's Character in The Collectors Novel. In *English Language and Literature International Conference (ELLiC) Proceedings* (Vol. 2, pp. 424-431).
- Carroll, L. (2000). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. BookVirtual.
- DANIATI, C. R. (2008). THE IDEA OF BEING ADOLESCENT ON ALICE'S CHARACTERIZATION IN LEWIS CARROLL'S ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND (Doctoral dissertation, SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY).
- Jakobson, R. (1960). Linguistics and poetics. In *Style in language* (pp. 350-377). MA: MIT Press.
- Johannessen, F. H. (2011). Alice in Wonderland: development of Alice's identity within adaptations (Master's thesis, Universitetet i Tromsø).
- LISKA, D. (2021). AN ANALYSIS THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN LEWIS CARROLL'S ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Raden Intan Lampung).
- O'Toole, P., & Modestino, E. J. (2017). Alice in Wonderland Syndrome: A real life version of Lewis Carroll's novel. *Brain and Development*, 39(6), 470-474.
- Pangestuningtyas, C. N., Hidayat, N., & Ambarini, R. (2023). THE CHARACTERS DEVELOPMENT IN THE FILM ALICE IN WONDERLAND BY LEWIS CARROLL AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO TEACHING DRAMA. *Wawasan Pendidikan*, 3(1), 365-370.
- Prados, L. R. (2018). *Alice's adventures in Wonderland and literary nonsense: A deconstructive analysis of Lewis Carroll's novel* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Romera, S. B. (2017). Revising Alice in Wonderland: An Analysis of Alice's Female Subjectivity in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. *Blue Gum*, 4, 14-22.
- Schilder, P. (1938). Psychoanalytic remarks on Alice in wonderland and Lewis Carroll. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 87(2), 159-168.
- Shklovsky, V. (1917). Art as technique. *Literary theory: An anthology*, 3.
- Susina, J. (2010). Playing around in Lewis Carroll's "Alice" Books. *American Journal of Play*, 2(4), 419-428.

Woolf, J. (2010). *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man Who Created "Alice in Wonderland"*. St. Martin's Press.