

## **Sex and Food: Alice's Sexual Development through Consumption**

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Lewis Carroll, having an unconventional relationship with the young Alice Liddell, wrote *Alice in Wonderland* out of motivation and fear. Carroll's motivation was the hope that someday Alice would be able to be his love; his fear was that if she did not reach womanhood successfully, she would end up like the many women of the Victorian era that he loathed. Lewis Carroll therefore decided to guide Alice through her adolescence so he could control her decisions and teach her what he believed was necessary in order to grow up into a normal, sexual, adult being. In order to do this, Carroll uses consumption as a continuous metaphor for Alice's growth and development as she travels through Wonderland, eventually leading to sexual awakening.

From the beginning of *Wonderland*, Carroll uses his authorial power to manipulate and control Alice's sexual journey and development. When Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he believed that if he personally guided Alice through Wonderland, he would ensure that she would develop into a functional, sexual woman. If Carroll did not guide and control Alice's journey to womanhood, he feared that she could end up like the women of society that he despised. So, Carroll decided to teach her in a way that he thought was appropriate. Most prevalent throughout the novel is the control and presence of food and consumption, which Carroll controls, especially when it comes to Alice's own intake. Carina Garland, author of *Curious Appetites: Food, Desire, Gender and Subjectivity in Lewis Carroll's Alice Texts*, explores Carroll's control over Alice's ingestion in relation to her level of sexuality and growth. Carina Garland

claims that, to Carroll, "...hunger, which is a representative of desire, expressed by young girls made them impure and undesirable from his perspective;" he often refrained from eating much in public himself, and did not like to see his childhood friends eat, or eat a large quantity at once, and Carroll illustrates his distaste for public eating in the tea party scene (Garland 28). A tea party would be a normal setting for an individual to drink tea or snack on hors d'oeuvres, but Carroll instead bombards Alice with questions, riddles, and lessons in communication. In turn, Carroll does not even let Alice admit her hunger in the beginning of her journey and only lets her consume items that he himself labels "Eat Me" and "Drink Me." In the beginning of her journey, by consuming what Carroll sets before her, only then is she able to transform, either growing smaller or larger. Metaphorically, Alice's constant size change functions as a means to demonstrate her struggles with her development from childhood to womanhood. He is able to control her growth at this stage, and lets her experience change at his discretion, but by the end of the novel, Alice reaches the stage in which she grows on her own, without the taking in of Carroll's designated food or drink.

Carroll uses the Duchess and the Queen of Hearts to show what could happen to Alice if he does not help her consume in moderation. Both women, who have completed their journey to their sexualized womanhood, demonstrate the ugliness that Carroll found in females, and therefore does not want his beloved Alice to follow in their footsteps. Garland references Barbara Creed, a specialist in feminist theory, and her theory of *vagina dentata*, claiming that this theory, which describes "... bestial, aggressive, destructive female sexuality..." was something that Carroll feared, and instilled in the Duchess and the Queen (Garland 25). Both women, being gluttonous and large, are

described in unflattering detail. The Duchess is described as a careless mother, “tossing the baby violently,” and the Queen is described as talking “severely” and using a “shrill loud voice” (Carroll 71, 93). At the same time, both women are associated with food, the Duchess being in the kitchen with pepper, and using food in her morals, and the Queen holds a trial over a tray of tarts. Carroll did not want Alice to grow up to be a despicable mother, nor did he want her to grow up to be a fierce and feared woman, so by allowing Alice to consume miniscule amounts of food and drink, in theory, Alice should grow up to be a desirable, good-natured woman.

Through her whole journey, up until the court trial, Carroll controlled and directed Alice’s growth spurts by presenting her with opportunities to eat or drink. While Alice goes through Wonderland, she grows more mature and sure of herself, allowing herself to soon reach a mature level of sexuality. When faced with one of the most offensive characters, the Queen, Alice is even “surprised by her own courage,” and is able to speak “very loudly and decidedly” (Carroll 93). Carroll uses the Queen as Alice’s final test; by successfully standing up for herself, and not falling to the Queen’s abrasive personality, Alice can be a successful, sexual woman. In the end, Carroll allows Alice to grow on her own during the tart trial; without controlling her through food and drink, Carroll allows Alice to grow to an alarming size in the courtroom, of her own accord. Her considerable growth, independent of Carroll’s influence, shows that at this point in the novel, Carroll is ready to admit that Alice is a mature, sexual being. So, when she awakens from Wonderland, the first thing she does is go to her tea. This is the first time Alice has been able to consume any food or drink without being commanded to do so by Carroll and his labels reading “Eat Me” or “Drink Me.” Carroll finally gives Alice the freedom to control

herself now that he believes she has successfully made it to womanhood.

After Carroll first published *Alice*, there were some criticisms of his motives for writing his story, and his peers questioned his feelings and relations towards the little girl. Carroll then wanted to convince the Victorian readers and critics of the time that the tests he put Alice through were in fact appropriate and necessary; in order to do this, Carroll edits the ending of his original story and uses Alice's older sister to have the final thought. Jennifer Geer, a children's literature professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, points out in her essay "All Sorts of Pitfalls and Surprises: Competing Views of Idealized Girlhood in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Books," that Carroll had actually gone back and edited the ending as a "...deliberate attempt to appeal to the public by associating Alice's adventures with conventional ideas about femininity..." (Geer 4). The sister dreamed about Alice being "... a grown woman..." being a mother and sharing her journey through Wonderland with her children, and "...remembering her own child-life, and happy summer days" (Carroll 144). By ending his whole novel in this manner, Carroll wants to not only justify his reasoning behind controlling and manipulating Alice in unconditional manners, he also wants to assure the readers that Alice really will reach adulthood. Carroll reassures his audience of peers and critics that by sending Alice through Wonderland and by controlling her sexual development, she will in fact grow up into a respectable, caring female, unlike the Duchess and the Queen, and she will want to guide her future children through the same journey she encountered in Wonderland. He wants it to be clear that he believes that he helped Alice grow and develop, so successfully that she will pass along what she learned.

Influenced by his fear of strong women and his uncanny displeasure for eating,  
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Lewis Carroll uses food consumption as a metaphor for Alice's sexual awakening. Throughout *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, from Alice's beginning in childhood and no sexual development, Carroll sends Alice through Wonderland and manages her food and drink intake, leading to her sexual awakening and successful entrance into womanhood. With the Queen and the Duchess as a comparison of how offensive women can be, Carroll does not allow Alice to splurge at her own discretion. He proves his manipulation necessary when Alice is pictured as the embodiment of femininity by her sister at the end of the novel.

### **Works Cited**

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