# PAPER 3, MODULE 23: TEXT

## I. (A) Personal Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Prof. Tutun Mukherjee</td>
<td>University of Hyderabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Coordinator</td>
<td>Dr. Neeru Tandon</td>
<td>Kanpur University, Kanpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Writer/Author</td>
<td>Dr. Jaya Kapoor</td>
<td>Allahabad University, Allahabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Reviewer (CR)</td>
<td>Dr. Neeru Tandon</td>
<td>Kanpur University, Kanpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Editor (LE)</td>
<td>Dr. Ram Prakash Pradhan</td>
<td>VSSD College, CSJMU Kanpur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**23.0 Introduction**

**23.1 Story**

**23.2 Setting**

**23.3 Victorian Age**

**23.4 Theme of Chess**

**23.5 Theme of Coming of Age**

---

### (B) Description of Module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description of module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Name</td>
<td>English literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper name</td>
<td>Nineteenth Century Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module title</td>
<td>Through the Looking Glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module ID</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-requisites</td>
<td>The reader is expected to have familiarity with the main trends of the Victorian age and its literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>To familiarize the reader with the various aspects of the text along with elucidating on the text as children’s literature and nonsense literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Alice, Looking glass, Lewis Carroll, Charles Dodgson, Sir John Tenniel, nonsense literature, children’s literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Through The Looking Glass

23.0 Introduction

When Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), a mathematician, had first written Alice in the Wonderland, he could never have thought that the narrative he had presented to the daughter of a family friend, Alice Liddle, will become one of the famous books of all times. He had the illustrations in both the Alice books Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass done by Sir John Tenniel. Though Carroll was himself a competent artist and had himself drawn the sketches in the book he presented to Alice, but for the final print, took the help of Tenniel, a highly reputed cartoonist with the magazine Punch. Tenniel was also very deeply involved with the work and exhausted so he refused to accept Carroll’s offer to illustrate his next book saying “It is a curious fact that with ‘Looking-Glass’ the faculty of making drawings for book illustrations departed from me, and [...] I have done nothing in that direction since.” (Michael Hancher’s essay,
“Carroll and Tenniel in Collaboration,” The Tenniel Illustrations to the Alice Books, 105) The first edition was sold only in the U.S. because its illustrator was not happy about the production quality. The second edition was a runaway success and found an admirer even in Queen Victoria. He followed it up a few years later with another Alice adventure narrative, this time through a mirror – Through the Looking Glass And What Alice Found There.

The author of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking Glass" is Lewis Carroll. This is an pseudonym; his real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Dodgson first used 'B.B.' to sign his non-professional writings, but in March 1856, when he wanted to publish his poem 'Solitude' in the magazine "The Train", Edmund Yates, a magazine editor, thought that this one was not appropriate. Then Dodgson came up with 'Dares' (from Daresbury in Cheshire, his birthplace), but that one was also rejected. Finally he invented Edgar Cuthwellis (composed from the letters of his name), Edgar U.C. Westhill (idem), Louis Carroll (he translated his name to Latin, and back: Lutwidge = Ludovic = Louis, Charles = Carolus) and Lewis Carroll (idem). Yates chose the last one.

For his learned mathematic books Dodgson used his own name.

23.1 Story
The book opens with Alice sitting with her cat and its kittens on a snowy autumn evening. She is talking to the kitten about playing chess and pretends that the kitten understands the conversation. And then she turns to look at the image of the room in the mirror and speculates how the room in the mirror would be like if she could enter it. Thus starts a fantasy as she imagines stepping into the room seen in the mirror.

The room is exactly the same only the chessmen are moving about in pairs. She gets to meet the White King and the white Queen and then reads the poem *Jabberwocky* – one of the many poems scattered across the book and an enigma for the critics for its innovative use of portmanteaus – toves, brillig, slithy to give a few examples. She is fascinated by the poem but cannot make much meaning out of it. She then slides into the garden and meets the flowers who talk to her. The overbearing Tiger lily, the snobbish rose, the chattering daisies do not make a very friendly reception party but do lead her to the Red queen. The red Queen takes her to the hill top and she gets to view the land which to her delight and surprise is laid out like a chess board and a game is in progress. She wishes to join the game and the Red queen send her off into it. She finds herself in railway carriage which is supposed to take her to the next move but is moving in the wrong direction. She meets strange people as co-passengers – a man in white paper, a goat, a beetle, a hoarse voice. They carry huge tickets and she is reprimanded by the Guard for not having one. The train then jumps in the air to move into the next square. Here Alice finds herself in a jungle talking to a Gnat “about the size of a chicken” and becomes melancholy and sheds tears when he cracks jokes. She sees other strange insects like rocking-horse-fly, bread-and-butter-fly, snap-dragon-fly. The Gnat talks to her about a place where people would lose their names and in a blink Alice moves into the next square which is such a place. She met a fawn there who came very close to her and walked through the forest with her. But as soon as
they had left the forest, it remembers that she was a human and ran away from her. She now reaches the road with two finger posts pointing in the same direction and leading to the house of Tweedledee and Tweedledum. She remembers them from another nursery rhyme where they quarrel and are eventually frightened away by a crow. She dances with them to the music of a fiddle played out by the twigs and branches of a tree. They then recite “The Walrus and the Carpenter” – a poem that has been much analyzed for its socio-religio-political symbolism. As they discuss who is a more likable character in the song, she sees the Red King snoring like a steam engine. They tell her that the King is dreaming and Alice might just be his dream and if he woke up, she might disappear. This is a very interesting point in the story since actually the entire sequence is a dream of Alice and the King would disappear if she woke up. But the two men frighten her before they begin a dance with their umbrellas they create a terrible ruckus and fight over a lost rattle before they hear a crow coming and disappear like a dream. The crow turns out to be the shawl of the White Queen who is a ruffled and messily dressed up person. Alice tucks her dress and hair in place. The queen offers to make her a maid for “jam tomorrow and jam yesterday - but never jam today”. Alice is baffled by the offer and even more so when the Queen tells her that her memory works backwards as well as forward. She cries out for a pin prick she has not yet got and her cry is like a steam engine whistling. Then she gets the prick and does not cry because she has already done the crying for this prick. As Alice begins to cry, she consoles her and asks her to believe impossible things and tells her that she used to believe “as many as six impossible things before breakfast”. The queen transforms into sheep knitting with fourteen pairs of pins at the same time. In one of the best examples of a dream sequence, she finds the shop turned into a boat and she is rowing with the sheep in a boa. After some rowing and plucking of scented rushes, the water and the boat disappear and she is again in the
shop where two eggs are sold cheaper than one if she eats both. The shop disappears when she moves into it and she finds herself with the egg she wanted – only the egg has grown huge and turned into Humpty Dumpty. He is a haughty character who scoffs at Alice. He interprets the ‘Jabberwoky’ piece for Alice explaining the portmanteaus. He tells her about the birthday present of the cravat the King gave him and that the king has promised to send all his kinsmen if he ever fell. Suddenly while they are talking, there is a very loud crash. The wood was suddenly filled with hundreds of soldiers who stumbled and fell down from their horses constantly. Alice rushes out and meets the White King who is busy taking down notes in his memorandum book like always. The King introduces her to his two messengers Hatta and Haiga – Hatter and Hare from the Wonderland book. They report that the Lion and the Unicorn are having a fight again. Another poem that tells about the fight of the Lion and the Unicorn is recited as Alice and the King proceed to the venue. The fight is so big that the two creatures are covered in a cloud of dust and cannot be made out from each other. Suddenly they stop fighting and start discussing what to eat. They are served cake which Alice is to pass round before she can cut it. As soon as the cake is finished, they create a huge din and begin to fight again. Their fight does not seem to be very violent as none is out of breath and none injured in any way. As soon as the din dies down, Alice meets the Red Knight who declares her to be a prisoner. He is constantly falling from his horse on his head. Just then comes in the White Knight who also keeps falling from his horse on his head. He challenges the Red Knight. They have a duel of a strange kind in which both constantly fall from the horses on their heads and begin again unhurt till the White Knight declares a check and the Red Knight leaves. The White Knight is discovered to be an inventor of strange things and seems to hoard even stranger things in the bags like bee hives and mouse traps. He sings a song for Alice and takes her to the last square where she becomes the queen.
She discovers that she has a golden crown on her head. She meets the two Queens who go off to sleep while talking with her. She then enters a room where there is a celebration of her becoming the queen going on. The rule of the celebration is that you are introduced to every dish and you don’t cut what you are introduced to. So Alice is left without any food. Suddenly she discovers that all the guests have turned to dishes and the entire cutlery and the crockery is beginning to occupy places on the table. She shakes the Red Queen and discovers that she is sitting in her room and shaking up her kitten and continues talking to the cats.

23.2 Setting

The book is set in an evening in autumn when it is snowing outside and Alice sits with her cat and Kittens by the fireside. The setting is different from the Wonderland book which was set in a warm sunny afternoon in a garden. The setting can be seen as a growth from the earlier book and also as being a more mature in treatment with humour that gets darker than the earlier book. Within the narrative, the setting is of a massive chessboard spread over the world where all the people seem to be participants in a massive game of chess. Once again, the idea of maturity comes in, but it could also be looked from the perspective of the fast developing political situation across the world where colonial powers were expanding their bases and getting involved in struggle for influence ownership of resources.

23.3 Victorian Age
The influence of the Victorian age is very visible on both the Alice books. The most remarkable features include the Victorian obsessive class consciousness, the obsession with food and most of all the logical and scientific temperament of the age. The writer is aware of the fast changing society and the discrepancies in its structure. He could not have been unaware of the debate around Disraeli’s idea that the Victorian society is split into two parts – the haves and the have-nots - and the divide between the two is increasing. *Through The Looking Glass* touches upon these ideas time and again. But the tone and the treatment are lighthearted. The growing spirit of realism and the disillusionment with the romantic ideals that marked the Victorian literature could be seen reflected the way the two crusader Knights are portrayed as caricatures of their original selves and constantly roll down their horses. It could also be seen as a critique of the class consciousness prevailing in the Victorian society since the symbol of the best of elite is turned over its head and quite literally so when the White Knight suggests a new way of crossing the gate “first I put my head on the top of the gate – then I stand on my head – then the feet are high enough, you see – then I’m over, you see.” Again the Victorian love for logic and science is seen when Alice seems to be the only one with a normal sensibility and yet the book is littered with puzzles, riddles and mathematical calculations and also closely follows the rules of Chess in its movement.

### 23.4 Theme of Chess

Both the Alice books are based on popular games of the age – cards and chess. When he wrote the book, the children he wrote them for were grown up and able to understand the relatively more complex of the two games. The game was also better suited to the theme of growing up.
The world of the adults with its mind-boggling etiquettes and dimensions the growing up child is introduced to be felt when Alice exclaims “It’s a huge game of chess that’s being played – all over the world.” The action of the book is built around a game of chess in which Alice begins as a pawn and after getting over various stages in which after encounters with the varied and delightful characters, she finally becomes the Queen. But the denouement comes with the party in her honour disrupted and the characters disappearing as Alice wakes up from her sleep and her dream breaks. Underlying the madness drawn by Carroll the writer is the sharp calculating mind of Dodgson the mathematician. Though he closely follows the rules of the game in the movement of the story, still the reader who is not familiar with the game can enjoy the book as much as he who knows how the game is played. By being involved with a more strategic game of chess, Carroll could relate the events in the book to the world outside. So while *Wonderland* had a greater element of fantasy where the innocent juvenile perception is used to look at the events, in *Looking Glass* the reality of the world is allowed to sneak in, even though in very oblique ways, all the time maintaining the dominant flavor of nonsensical fantasy and humour.

23.5 Theme of Coming of Age

And Alice with her Victorian age grooming wants to be the queen ultimately even if she begins as a pawn. Time and again throughout the text, Carroll makes a critique of the shallow and stern values of the age. Like so many other novelists of his age, his use the child protagonist’s coming of age theme is, as Leach puts it, “an emanation of the strange Victorian obsession with childhood innocence, that identified immaturity with inviolability”. The Red queen tells her that a white knight will make her the queen at the end of the game reinforcing the myth with its
crusader-colonial implications. Alice has to learn to conduct herself in a way she can achieve her goal of becoming the queen. The red queen with her strict behavior and stern manners is drawn from the typical image of the governess. Alice has to not only to learn how to conduct herself “properly” – as the Red Queen tells her constantly throughout the book, but she has also to understand the social structures and their workings. In the world of a child, the adult world has a simplistic structure but once you are ready to enter the chess like complex world of adult and aspire to a Queen like status, it is necessary to learn the nuances and finer points. The flowers, the queen, the goat, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, Haiga and Hatta, Lion and Unicorn are all out there to teach her a lesson. It is only the Knight who does not try to teach her a lesson. And we know that this could be because when she has reached that stage, she is ready to become the queen. So when the party scene comes, Alice tries to put her foot down and commands the pudding to be brought back, asserting her authority.

23.6 Victorian spirit of Innovation and Industrial Revolution

The train is a recurring motif in the book and can be closely identified with its rapid growth as a means of transportation during the time. It was a major achievement of the Victorian scientific spirit and innovative drive. It had made transportation and commercial activities easier and faster, becoming one of the driving forces of the industrial revolution. The train journey is also a lot of fantasy attached to it with its capacity to connect people to remotest places never seen before. So both the journey and the steam engine appear in the book. The train takes Alice through her first experience of the Mirror world where she encounters some strange people. And then when she meets Tweedledee and Tweedledum, she finds that the Red King is snoring like a
steam engine. At another point in the book, Alice notes how the White queen sounds like a steam engine whistle when she cries. The spirit of innovation is again celebrated in the character of the White Knight who is constantly making new innovations and creating things which could be of use or which even he knows will never be used.

23.7 Theme of a Dream and idea of time

The journey that begins as a dream has all the makings of a dream. In fact the sequences have been found by critics to resemble the nature of dreams where people and events of real life often get transformed into strange things without an iota of doubt coming about their existence in such a form. The train’s jumping in the air, the queen’s transforming into a goat, the shop’s turning into a boat in a river and back into a shop, and finally the in the part, the people becoming dishes and vice versa are a few instances. Some critics relate this preoccupation with dreams to Carroll’s problem of insomnia. Time in this mirror world moves in a strange way. All the songs about the characters, about Humpty Dumpty, The Lion and the Unicorn, Tweedledee and Tweedledum are about what happens to them eventually and they have a fore-knowledge of the poem and their fate which they discuss with Alice. This foreknowledge is even more pronounced in the White Queen who says she has memories of the past as well as the future. The train that is to take Alice into the next stage is moving in the wrong direction and still she manages to reach her destination while just a little earlier, the Red Queen had told Alice that they run very hard if they are to stay in the same place and twice as hard if they are to reach anywhere. The ambiguity of the required speed is also the ambiguity of time.
23.8 Class Consciousness and Social Etiquettes

Alice is now almost nineteen years and so she has to begin to understand the nuances of the adult world. The first time she comes across the social stratification in the mirror house is when she enters the garden and finds the Tiger lily the most exclusive and also the most domineering of the flowers. It shouts at everybody else and assumes a sense of class based on its exclusivity. The rose on the other hand is stiff and stern and does not socialize a lot. The common classes are represented here by the daisies that speak together and create a noise without making much sense. The Red queen constantly remarks on the manners of Alice and Alice not yet being the queen, listens with polite attention. Another way in which the privileges of the powerful are pointed out is when the Kings, the Queens and the Knights are allowed to return through various episodes while the lesser characters do not reappear. The narrow Victorian social norms are gently made fun of by Carroll without being satirical or provocative. In the Wonderland Alice was a small girl so it was easy to let her carry the childlike perception of social relationships, but in Through The Looking Glass she learns to negotiate herself in the social milieu. It is remarkable that like a Queen in the making, she is not to be overpowered by any character except the Red Queen though several do reprimand her especially Humpty Dumpty.

23.9 Language

The most fascinating aspect of the book and still the most frustrating is the way Carroll uses words. Humpty Dumpty says that he can make the words mean exactly what he wants them to mean can open the debate to various ideas. How does one establish a meaning independent from
the meaning of the word? - the question is answered by the fact that Humpty Dumpty can interpret the dense meaning of ‘Jabberwoky’. Sometimes the words are only used to create a sound effect. Many words that Carroll used in this poem have found their way into the dictionary owing to their common usage. Gardiner mentions words like “galumph” from ‘gallop and triumphant’ and “shortle” from ‘chuckle and snort’. The sequence that follows with the King is an example of punning of words. The King is inquiring if Alice could see the two messengers and Alice replies she can see nobody on the road. “I only wish I had such eyes,” the King remarked in a fretful tone. “to be able to see nobody! And at that distance too! Why its as much as I can do to see real people by this light!” Time and again Alice remarks that the conversation around her is very strange, very nonsense, very improbable but there does not look anything of the kind to the characters who think it is Alice who needs to correct herself. The Tiger Lily tells Alice that flowers in Alice’s world do not talk because “… they make the beds too soft – so that the flowers are always asleep.” The puns on the words ‘nobody’ and ‘beds’ are just two examples of the way Carroll plays with words. The Queen, in fact, advices Alice that she must train to believe in improbable thing –“…Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Among the games he devised outside of logic there were a number of word games, including an early version of what today is known as Scrabble. He also appears to have invented, or at least certainly popularised, the "doublet" (see word ladder), a form of brain-teaser that is still popular today: the game of changing one word into another by altering one letter at a time, each successive change always resulting in a genuine word. For instance, CAT is transformed into DOG by the following steps: CAT, COT, DOT, DOG. (Martin Gardner, Annotated Alice, 2009)
23.10 Food motif

This brings us to a very humorous aspect of the book – food. The strangest things are happening around food throughout the book, sometimes leading to very humorous situations, and at other times also pointing to the society. When Alice gets thirsty after running hard with the Red Queen, she is offered such a dry biscuit that she all but chokes and then the Queen Inquires “Thirst quenched?” things get more and more strange when we find that the Rocking-Horse-fly feeds on sap and saw dust, the bread-and-butter-fly has wings of bread slices, and head of a lump of sugar and feeds on weak tea and cream. The Queen offers Alice a remuneration of jam every other day but that day is never today, the egg in the Goat’s shop turns into Humpty Dumpty, the cake offered to the Lion and the Unicorn is to be passed before it could be cut and then it cuts by itself, the pudding that the White Knight invents is made from blotting paper, sealing wax and gun powder among other things. The strangest is the party in honour of Alice becoming the Queen where the rule is to be introduced to every dish and then never to eat what you are introduced to. The soup, the mutton leg, the pudding and many other dishes laid out on the table are ultimately uneaten as an argument breaks out and the party breaks up. Alice, therefore comes back without getting anything proper to eat or drink. The tables in the Victorian dinners were similarly overflowing with food while another part of society subsisted on the barest minimum and women in the higher sections of society were encouraged to eat less for cosmetic reasons.
23.11 Appearances

The growing materialism of the Victorian society had created an awareness about appearance which was judgemental and narrow. Carrol tries to break through this attitude by highlighting the strange appearances of most of his characters. The strangeness of the food imagery is closely matched by the appearances of the people, the best of whom are the strangest. The White Queen is extremely messy with her hair untidy, a hairbrush entangled in them and her shawl all over the place, the twins Tweedledee and Tweedledum prepare to fight and put on weird things like “Bolsters, blankets, hearth-rugs, Table-cloths, dish-covers and coal-scuttles.” Humpty Dumpty is another strange appearance for he seems to be wearing a very fascinating belt around him which turns out to be a cravat that the White King and the White Queen had presented him. The strangest is the White Knight who is supposed to take Alice to the last square where she would be crowned the Queen. The Knight is initially very romantically described as having shaggy hair, “gentle face and large mild eyes” but it gets wilder and wilder when we discover he wears a “tin armour, which seemed to fit him very badly, and he had a queer little dealbox fastened across his shoulder, upside down, and with the lid hanging open”. The most admirable thing is that he is not the least bit conscious about the strangeness of his appearance and thinks Alice is admiring his box where he stores clothes and sandwiches and keeps it upside down so that the rain does not get in. On his horse he carries a mousetrap and a beehive with no bees in it, while the feet of the horse have anklets to protect against attacks by sharks. There is also a bag filled with candlesticks, while the saddle was loaded with bunches of carrots and fire-irons along with many other things. Reality has here given place to complete fantasy. And the symbol of
crusade and gallantry turns into a romantic image of a dreamy fumbling man who creates strange things and sings beautiful songs as the evening sets.

23.12 Violence – verbal and physical

Like the earlier book, although none of the scenes of confrontation seem to inflict physical damage, still *Through the Looking Glass* is a lot more grim with many such moments of confrontation and hostility. The hostile attitude of the flowers towards Alice is also found in the way Humpty Dumpty treats her. In the very beginning, the White Queen pricks her thumb with a pin and begins to bleed. Another very popular character, Humpty Dumpty, who is engaged in a brilliantly nonsensical conversation with Alice, suddenly falls down and could not be saved even by the King’s army, while the Lion, a very ferocious animal in a child’s perception, and the Unicorn, another creature with immense size and strength, are engaged in a ferocious battle. The battle is so fierce that there is a cloud of dust enveloping the two where one cannot be distinguished from the other. The combat between the two knights also involves violence and can be related in the reader’s mind to some descriptions of brutally fought battles. Though here it is toned down and narrated as more of a caricature of what a combat is supposed to be, to suit the sensitivity of a child. But two of the poems “Jabberwocky” and “Walrus and the Carpenter” are first hand encounters with actual violence. Alice says about “Jabberwocky” that though she cannot understand the full song, she does understand that “somebody kills something.” Even the illustration of the creature is so ferocious that Carroll removed it from being the front page of the book as he had originally intended, after unfavourable response. The killing is not watered down in “Walrus and the Carpenter” as where the suddenly after taking the little oysters with clean
faces and shining shoes for a pleasant stroll down the beach, both of them eat up all the little oysters while shedding crocodile tears of false sympathy. Alice herself feels quite disgusted and starts finding the two characters very offensive but she has learned the lesson to beware of false sympathy.

References

- Karoline Leach, In the Shadow of the Dreamchild, London: Peter Owen Ltd, 1999

There are two possibilities to the symbolism of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" poem. The first is religious in nature by comparing the Carpenter to Jesus Christ, the Walrus to Peter, and the Oysters to the disciples who are willing to follow Jesus to the end. The second (more probable theory) is of a more political nature. The Walrus and the carpenter are supposed to represent England, while the oysters represent all of the small colonies and territories that England conquered during the Age of the British Empire. (source)

J.B. Priestley has interpreted the Walrus and the Carpenter as archetypes of two kinds of politician. (source: Gardner, M., The Annotated Alice, 1998, p.233)