

Through the Looking-Glass: The Absence of God in the Looking-Glass World**Battula Sneha**Pursuing an M. A. in English
Bhairab Ganguly College
West Bengal State University
India**Abstract**

The society is an amalgamation of various elements taken together. Since ages these elements or aspects in the form of faith, culture, religion, beliefs etc are an inseparable part of the society. But times have arrived when these aspects have been challenged. Such disturbance was witnessed in Victorian England when religion was under a major risk of eradication. Lewis Carroll through his work *Through the Looking-Glass* seems to provide us with the picture of a Godless world. As he totally eradicates the existence of God from this novel. This makes us think about the various possibilities regarding faith and religion that Carroll might have thought while writing this novel which forced him to almost eradicate the existence of God. The main aim of this paper is to explore the different aspects in the novel which makes us wonder about the dangers of faithlessness that Victorian England was heading towards.

Keywords: Religion, God, Science, Power, Victorian age, England**Introduction**

The life of human beings is anchored by several factors. These factors decide how we are going to function in our life. These factors are mostly the society, culture, geographical location, language etc. These aspects play a vital role in deciding our being. One such vital aspect anchoring our life is religion. Religion plays a massive role in forming our being. The relation between individuals and religion is something that has remained constant but still a changing one. The dynamics between an individual and the religion he follows is largely anchored by the geographical location. Based on the geographical location this dynamics keeps changing. One such geographical location which acquaints us with a huge disparity between the individuals and the religion is the nineteenth century England.

The nineteenth century or Victorian England had always been a topic of discussion ranging from the classrooms to the scholars and the critics. None seem to properly understand what England as a nation actually aspired for during that time. On one hand England was emerging as the great hub of power forcing the majority of countries to bow in front of it. On the other hand there was a wave of high morals which people were expected to follow, especially the women. Along with all these issues there was one more issue that widely catches the attention of the readers to this

day, which is the tussle between science and religion. As Bernard Lightman rightly points out how

The Anglican Church, central to British society in the early nineteenth century, was subjected to intense criticism and stripped of much of its power by the end of the century. It was common for thoughtful individuals during this time to experience a devastating loss of faith in traditional religious institutions and ideas. A new term, “agnosticism,” had to be invented by Huxley to describe the unusual position some intellectuals found themselves in after this crisis had run its course. If there is any period in the post-Newtonian age that deserves to be seen as an arena of warfare between science and religion, surely the Victorian period is a strong candidate. (Lightman 344)

The entire England seemed to take an active part in this tussle giving it a larger dimension of relevance and significance. Not only the masses but even the literary texts seemed to take an active part in this tussle. Some texts advocated religion whereas some texts stood with science that was growing rapidly in the name of advancement. Along with that the hunger for power in people is also something which becomes highly evident.

One such text where the disparity between science and religion becomes a main point of discussion is Lewis Carroll’s work *Through the Looking-Glass* published in the year 1871. The reason for the discussion of religion versus science in this work doesn’t arise because Carroll himself spoke about it. But it arises because unfortunately we find no mention of religion in this work, and science plays a significant part which forces us to analyze why Carroll took such a decision. Along with science, power too seems to play a major part in this work.

Lewis Carroll and *Through the Looking-Glass*

In order to understand Lewis Carroll’s work *Through the Looking-Glass* we first need to have a bit of idea about Carroll as an individual. He was a mathematician. This information about him proves as something of significant importance as it also makes it clear that science played a major role in his life. Also it becomes clear that he wasn’t a writer by profession. Still his work *Through the Looking-Glass* is believed to be one of the major nineteenth century works ever written. The reason for its importance is the work's critical point of view regarding the Victorian age.

Many critics have believed that Carroll often led a dual life in the same body. Actually his real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Lewis Carroll was his pen name which became more famous than his original name. Critics have opined that he seemed to spend two different lives in the same body which somewhere overlapped. As Warren Weaver writes how Carroll “created this double personality, one a rather dull mathematician and logician named the Reverend Dodgson, who lectured on mathematics seven hours a day” and the other personality being that of “a gay and delicious spirit named Lewis Carroll, who wandered about in the realms of the illogical and discovered Wonderland” (Weaver 377). Weaver further adds how these two personalities or

These two men lived in two very different worlds. One personality was, in his world, a painfully proper bachelor mathematician who shunned adult society. But the other, in his world, was a wild and free adventurer, roaming with his child companions through a wonderland constructed out of the wit and fantasy of his own imagination. But so intimately intertwined was the sense and the nonsense, that the two worlds heavily overlapped, and were in fact not as distinct as were the two personalities. All of us are familiar with the role which logic played in Wonderland. Today I want to tell you how non-sense kept twinkling through the mathematics. (Weaver 377)

Thus, the fact that these two worlds overlapped and that the non-sense kept lurking in the world of mathematics forces us to believe how the element of sense could also have played a part in the literature as clarified by Weaver who writes “all of us are familiar with the role logic played in Wonderland.” It seems he was trying to add in the element of sense to literature of the Victorian age. He was trying to provide a structure to the logicless Victorian world of literature. His thought of removing the God completely from *Through the Looking-Glass* might be seen as his attempt to add order to the orderless world of the Victorian age. It could be seen as his attempt to make people think about what they were heading towards. Thus, adding a layer of sense in this world full of senselessness.

Alice and the God

Children at the time of their birth are unaware about how the world functions. Everything is new to them and they can be seen asking multiple questions in order to understand things around them. This makes the adults almost irritated. But few things which adults themselves try to imbibe since a very little age in children are the ideas of faith and religion. The beliefs regarding God and the divine are rooted in the minds of children so that it remains with them till the time they breathe on earth. But this seems to be lacking in the case of Alice, a child belonging to the Victorian age.

Alice and her being since the very beginning of the novel could be seen as a proper representation of Victorian England. The novel begins with the confinement of Alice in a room, who is seen playing with her cats. Her confinement is the proper representation of every woman in Victorian England as they were always in the clutches of several rules, norms and restrictions which they were bound to follow. She could be labeled as the proper product of Victorian society. It is this confinement which she seems to be rid of and thus ends up uttering “Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through” (Carroll 21).

Alice seems to be unaware of the concept of God whereas the concepts of power and authority are properly introduced to her as she makes it quite clear in the very initial pages of the work that she would “like to be a Queen” (Carroll 39). The things worsen when the Red Queen too supports Alice. She almost guides Alice as she says “That’s easily managed. You can be the White Queen’s Pawn, if you like, as Lily’s too young to play; and you’re in the Second Square to begin with: when you get to the Eighth Square you’ll be a Queen—” (Carroll 39).

These instances give us an idea about how the adults in the Victorian Age were more after power which made them almost forget the things like religion and faith. Children are the product of society. They learn things from whatever they see and observe around them. Alice sees so many power hungry people around her that soon she too becomes one craving for it. The fact that Alice doesn't for once mention things like religion reflects ideas and ideologies of the adults of the Victorian Age.

Alice and the various difficulties

After Alice embarks on the journey to become a queen, she could be seen encountering multiple difficulties. These difficulties once again help us to analyze Alice as an individual. Also these brutal circumstances in her life and her reciprocation to them reflect the influence of the Victorian age adults on the children. We can see how Alice often feels trapped among the unknown creatures of the Looking-Glass World, who come up with an altogether new set of rules that are difficult for her to understand.

When Alice meets the Faun she is alone and no one is there to help her. Despite being all alone in the situation of complete crisis, she doesn't take the name of God even once and embarks ahead on the journey with the Faun. When they cross the forest both part ways getting afraid of each other. Once again Alice is all alone without any human support but this doesn't bother her. She doesn't seek any help from the almighty. She continues on her journey and the passion to become Queen remains strong in her heart.

Alice being unaware of God is not the problem here. But the age in which she is unaware of God is the major problem, as the influence of Victorian England is directly visible on her. She is merely seven and half years old. Children during this age are the reflection of the adults who play an active role in their life. The fact that Alice seems to be totally unaware of the concept of God puts a major question mark on the adults in her life. This indirectly questions the mentality and mindset of the people who were part of the Victorian age. Matthew Arnold too seemed to be concerned about the same when in the poem "Dover Beach" he writes

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world. (Arnold)

Here Arnold makes it quite evident about how faith had started to retard in England. Alice somewhere proves what Arnold wrote. She as a child seems to lean more towards the aspects like authority, power and science, rejecting God (whose existence she seems to be totally unaware of) which once again highlights Victorian mentality getting reflected in her behavior.

The rapid innovations

The innovations are a constant presence throughout the entire Victorian age. Science remains almost an inseparable part of this age. Many writers and critics largely criticized the excess of science. As seen in Jonathan Swift's one of the most celebrated work *Gulliver's Travels*

The first man I saw was of a meagre aspect, with sooty hands and face, his hair and beard long, ragged and singed in several places. His clothes, shirt, and skin were all of the same colour. He had been eight years upon a project for extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers, which were to be put in vials hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the air in raw inclement summers. He told me, he did not doubt in eight years more, that he should be able to supply the Governor's gardens with sunshine at a reasonable rate; but he complained that his stock was low, and entreated me to give him something as an encouragement to ingenuity, especially since this had been a very dear season for cucumbers. (Swift 223 - 224)

This is one of the most famous instances of absurdity related to science that we often come across. We can see Carroll coming forth with some similar absurdity related to science in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Especially in the chapter called "It's My Own Invention." The White Knight reaches different levels of absurdity in order to showcase his inventions. One such invention of the Knight is an almost useless little box which is described by the Knight to Alice in the following way:

‘I see you're admiring my little box.’ the Knight said in a friendly tone. ‘It's my own invention—to keep clothes and sandwiches in. You see I carry it upside-down, so that the rain can't get in.’

‘But the things can get out,’ Alice gently remarked. ‘Do you know the lid's open?’

‘I didn't know it,’ the Knight said, a shade of vexation passing over his face. ‘Then all the things must have fallen out! And the box is no use without them.’ (Carroll 116)

The following conversation acquaints us with how aimlessly the masses were going on inventing various things which were almost useless. This highlights how the masses of the Victorian age were leaning towards unnecessary science.

Victorian age and God

The masses of the Victorian society had almost started to worship science as the new deity forgetting the ancient Christian values. On one hand where some people were leaning towards science. On the other hand there were some people who were trying to restore faith amongst the masses. This is seen in the case of poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins who tried to restore faith in humanity. As in his poem “God’s Grandeur” he writes:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod? (Hopkins)

Carroll by totally removing God out of his novel too seems to serve the same purpose. By bringing forth a child totally unaware of the concept of God he tries to draw the attention of the readers towards the mindset of the people in Victorian age. As the work was written and published in Victorian age, it might also be seen as an effort of Carroll to make people aware of the severe dangers of the age they were living in.

Conclusion

Literature is believed to be the reflection of society. It is the perfect output of society. The novel *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll proves this. The character of Alice comes forth as the proper projection of the morals and manners of the Victorian age on an individual. The childhood is considered to be the purest and the truest state that an individual ever has. Thus, the fact that Carroll presents the entire story from the perspective of a child makes the work even more important. Throughout the Victorian age, many writers have satirized the way faith was handled by the masses. However, the approach taken by Carroll stands as a unique one. As he totally eradicates the presence of God indicating how the ideas of science and power have overpowered the minds of people in such a way that the people are no longer invested in things such as religion, faith or the divine. Thus, reflecting the faithlessness that England would have undergone if things had continued in the same way.

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