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Research Question: How and why does Lewis Carrol set the events in the novel *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* around a strategy game such as chess?

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Abstract

This extended essay analysis the reasons and ways Lewis Carrol used chess, in order to describe the events of growing up and nonsense in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* more effectively. It includes the explanations of the chess moves in the novel, similar characteristics of the figures with chess pieces, the similarities of the landscape with a chess board with references to this piece of literature and many quotations for further understanding and explanation. Also the theme of growing up and other references of chess in the novel are explained with examples. Growing up is also examined with the theme of chess, as well as chess being a metaphor to life and faith. Furthermore, the relationship of Lewis Carrol with math is briefly explained and many other references of math are explored. The purpose of this study is to understand Lewis Carrol in using chess and explore how the storyline is built around a chess game.

In the conclusion, it is validated that chess, in the novel, represents life itself with all opportunities and bad calls. Theme of nonsense is depicted in the story to strengthen the references to growing up, by symbolizing the understanding of logic of children, which has no sense within.

Word Count: 208

Introduction

Lewis Carroll's "Alice" stories are one of the most well-known literary pieces ever written. In *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, which is the second book of the series, Carroll explains the events happening to Alice as she is growing up, using vivid imaginary objects and unusual methods such as mathematics and games. The reasons and courses of actions of setting up the events in *Through the Looking Glass* around a strategy game, such as chess, can best be examined through the storyline in which many references to a game of chess is found. Furthermore, it is possible to analyze Carroll's reasons of using chess, by looking at chess as a metaphor. Also math and logic –therefore chess- are no distant subjects to Carroll in his personal life as well. There are many reasons for the series of *Alice in Wonderland* to become such a successful piece of literature especially in the literary nonsense genre. Even though they were written in a time when very strict religious rules existed, the books included massive amount of imagination and nonsense, which people weren't used to seeing in literature books. Moreover, the daily events such as drinking tea, taking a train, having a birthday cake and many others are being told in an unusually colorful way to grab the reader's attention. The books contain a very general and common subject: the process of growing up and transforming from a child to a teenager. However, the subject is being told in a way that is different from every other novel that had been written before.

Storyline Built Around a Chess Game

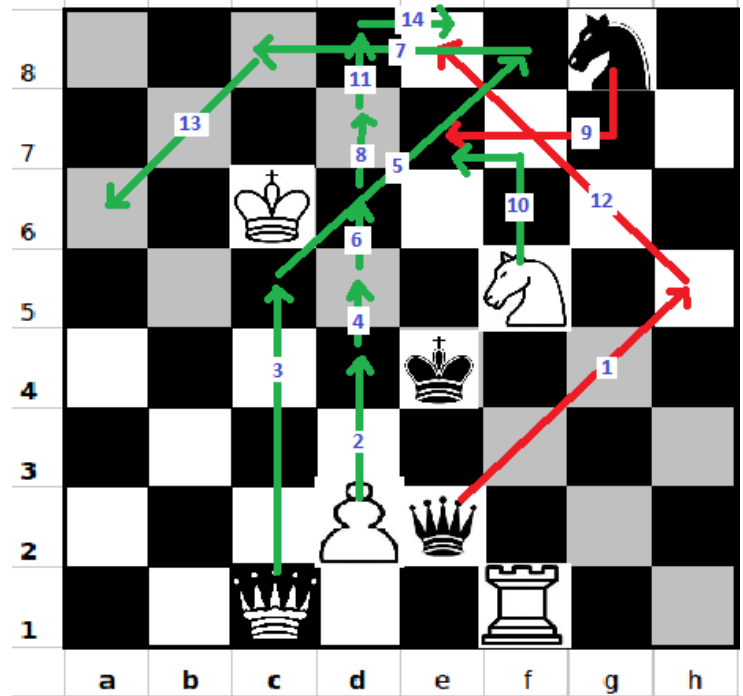
In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the main character Alice is a 12 year old girl who has great imagination. All the events in the novel represent a chess move. The storyline is built around a chess game and the events, characters and strategies can be identified with real chess rules. In chess, like any other game, there are rules. Most basic ones are that there are sixteen pieces in one team. (32 in total) There are the strong pieces which are the Queen, the King, two Knights, two Rooks and two Bishops. The pawns are weaker pieces, which is why their direction of movement is way more limited. Moreover, the first moves of pawns (which normally move just one square to the front) can be either one or two squares, but when a pawn makes it till the other end of the chess board, it has the ability to be promoted to a Knight, a Bishop, a Queen or a King. Furthermore, the main aim of a chess game is to checkmate the other player, which means to surround the King so that it has no way out to escape from being beaten. Another rule of chess is that before a player makes a move of checkmate, he/she has to say 'check' in the previous move, or else the checkmate doesn't count.

As it is mentioned, there are pieces that represent every character in the book. As arranged before commencement of the game, White pieces are these; Tweedledee, Unicorn, Sheep, White Queen, White King, Aged Man, White Knight, Tweedledum. White pawns are these; Daisy, Haigha, Oyster, Lily, Fawn, Oyster, Hatta, Daisy. At the same time, red pawns are these; Daisy, Messenger, Oyster, Tiger-lily, Rose, Oyster, Frog, Daisy. Lastly, red pieces are these; Humpty Dumpty, Carpenter, Walrus, Red Queen, Red King, Crow, Red Knight and Lion.

Generally, moves that Alice make in the chess game are: she meets the Red Queen in the garden –which is the start of the game and she moves two squares. After this, Red Queen goes to

K.R.'s 4th and leaves Alice. Then Alice moves through the Q's 3rd to Q's 4th –she travels by railway and meets with Tweedledum and Tweedledee. At the same time, White Queen goes to

Q.B.'s 4th after her shawl. In Alice's 3rd move, she meets the White Queen and helps her with her shawl. Afterwards, she moves through Q's 5th –she goes to the shop of a sheep. At the same time, White Queen goes to Q.B.'s 5th and becomes a sheep in the novel. In the next move, Alice goes to Q's 6th and meets with Humpty Dumpty. Then, White Queen moves to K.B.'s 8th by flying from Red



Knight. Alice goes to Q's 7th –which represents the forest. Afterwards, Red Knight goes to K's 2nd and meets Alice. He 'check's Alice but then White Knight takes the Red Knight and rescues her. Then, White Knight goes to K.B's 5th and leaves Alice. In her next move, Alice goes to the Q's 8th and becomes a queen –she has a coronation in the novel. Red Queen goes to K's sq. which represents the examination of Alice. Alice castles –has a feast– after Queen castles. Then, White Queen goes to Q.R's 6th and Alice takes Red Queen and wins the game –at the party of Alice.

Chess as a Metaphor to Life Itself

At the beginning of the book, Alice is stated as playing with her two kittens, Kitty and Dinah. Out of loneliness and boredom, she starts talking to Kitty. She talks to Kitty about chess and starts imagining as if they were pieces in chess and there is another world on the other side of the mirror:

'Kitty can you play chess? Now, don't smile, my dear, I'm asking it seriously. Because when we were playing just now, you watched just as if you understood it: and when I said 'Check!' you purred! Well, it was a nice check, Kitty and really I might have won, if it hadn't been for that nasty Knight, that came wriggling down among my piece. Kitty, dear, let's pretend-.... Let's pretend that you're Red Queen, Kitty! Do you know, I think if you sat up and folded your arms, you'd look exactly like her now do you try, there's a dear!' and Alice got Red Queen off the table, and set it up before the kitten as a model for it to imitate: however, the thing didn't succeed, principally. (Carroll, 126)

She encounters with many extraordinary events and alive chess pieces. The first thing she realizes about the Looking-Glass World is that there is a live game of chess going on. She appears as an invisible figure. She watches what's going on with the game and starts making small interferences like helping the White King get to the other side. By this, it is possible to correlate Alice with the figure of God. She has control over the actions of the alive chess pieces and though she is invisible in their eyes, she has the ability of watching their actions. " 'I don't think they can hear me,' she went on , as she put her head closer down, 'and I'm nearly sure they ca'n't see me. I feel somehow as if I was getting invisible – ' '(Carroll,130) She feels the power of this God-like-form and doesn't stand back on using it. In another perspective it is possible to

say that chess appears as a metaphor to fate. Since after some time she becomes a pawn herself and joins the game of chess, her actions might be controlled by a bigger force; just as she was doing when she got in the Looking-Glass World at first. With this theory, leading to another outcome is possible as well. At first, Alice was looking over her own life –which appears as a game of chess. Alice becoming a part of the game afterwards verifies that it was her life in the beginning. So chess becomes a simile for life itself, with the tactics as opportunities. In the novel, Alice realizes that a game of chess is being played and becomes a part of it. *“It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played –all over the world –if this is the world at all, you know. Oh, what fun it is!”* (Carroll, 144)

Everything starts when Alice passes through the garden of live flowers and meets the Red Queen. When Alice meets the Red Queen, she tells her that she wants to participate in the game and at the end, become a Queen. *“How I wish I was one of them! I wouldn’t mind being a Pawn, if only I might join-though of course I should like to be a Queen, best.”* (Carroll, 144) Red Queen says that that can be managed but Alice must start as a Pawn and move her way to be a Queen. Since chess represents life itself, it is possible to correlate this event with growing up. In chess, pawns are pieces that are way weaker than Queens; it is similar with adulthood and childhood. Starting as a pawn symbolizes being a child and becoming a Queen means becoming an adult. So the process where Alice works her way to become a Queen actually symbolizes growing up in real life. There are also many references to growing up as well. *“You’re beginning to fade, you know –and then one ca’n’t help one’s petals get untidy.”* (Carroll, 141)

Growing Up

Growing up, in the novel, can be both analyzed as physically growing up and growing up of the mind. As Alice grows up, her mind grows in age with her as well. She starts finding things ridiculous and absurd –things that had made perfect sense to her before. She slowly builds certain walls of reality and logic in her mind. These are the boundaries of Alice which show itself at the end of the novel, where Alice declares the absurdness of the Looking-Glass World. There are also characters that don't want Alice to grow up and aren't very glad about it, which verifies the theory of the game representing growing up. For example, when Alice meets the Gnat, it tells many childish jokes to convince Alice not to grow up. He explains to Alice the childish world –where butterflies are bread-and-butter-flies (and etc.) – and gets upset when she finds his jokes not funny and refuses to get childish. ‘ ‘Well, if she said ‘Miss’ and didn’t say anything more’ the Gnat remarked, ‘of course you’d miss your lessons. That’s a joke. I wish you had made it.’

‘Why do you wish I had made it?’ Alice asked. ‘It’s a very bad one.’

But the Gnat only sighed deeply, while two large tears came rolling down its cheeks. ‘ ‘ (Carroll, 156)

Likewise, nonsense is an undeniable factor in the book. The Looking-Glass World is made of nonsense, all the characters talk in an irrational way and their responses aren't normal. This nonsense can be explained in two ways. First, as the reader understands at the end of the novel, it can be because Alice had been dreaming all the time and dreams are just a reflection of reality. It can also be a reference to childhood as well. Since children have no boundaries of

reality and have a very developed imagination, nonsense in the book can be the reflection of Alice's imagination.

Since Alice is growing up as the chess game continues, there are traces of puberty too. In the novel, emotions are exaggerated between characters. They respond to events with reactions that are twice as strong as normal ones. As over-reactions are very common in puberty, it is possible to link this with growing up as well.

Every chess game has a goal of beating the opponent. There are several questions to be thought, like if Alice is a white pawn, who plays the white pieces in the game and who is she playing against. The reader learns at the end of the novel, that Alice was playing chess with her cats as she fell asleep and dreamt about the Looking Glass World. In addition to this, at the beginning of her dream, as it is mentioned before, Alice appears as a God-like figure. So it is possible to say that Alice is the one who plays the white pieces in the game, as she is playing the white pawn in the game.

So it can be said that Alice (the one who rules the game), ruling herself (the one who is the white pawn) to win a game of growing up, represents that she is the one in power of her own life and takes hold of her life now that she is growing up.

What/Who she is playing against is the life –all the troubles and the bad consequences. She tries surviving the era of growing up as she tries to win the game.

There is also another theory of who Alice is playing the chess game against. In the novel, in the 5th chapter, Tweedledum and Tweedledee show Alice the Red King who is sleeping. They tell Alice that the Looking Glass World is just the outcome of the Red King's imagination and that they all belong in his dream. So if Red King is the one who dreams all of this, he is also the

one who rules it, so he can be who Alice is playing against too. It can also be pointed out that in the game (since Alice is a 'white' pawn) Red King is the opponent of Alice. This verifies that life is what Alice is playing against, but also in the end it is said that all this was a dream of Alice and she was sleeping. She questions the owner of this dream –if it was actually hers or Red King's. This, too, represents Alice's search of the power which rules her life. She can be the one in power or people around her can. This is another explanation of her growing up and taking control of her life as well.

Since Alice's world becomes a great chess game winning the game is what gets Alice out of this world of nonsense. As in the novel, when Alice becomes a Queen and takes down Red Queen, she wakes up in the real world. This move of Alice is described in the novel as in the tea party, when everything gets all messed up and crazy, she grabs Red Queen and starts scolding her. This can be explained by, now that Alice grew up, all the nonsense in the Looking Glass World seems absurd to her. This causes the world to lose its unique balance. Furthermore, Alice getting mad at the Red Queen and winning the game by that, represents admitting that she is now in power and is now a Queen not a pawn in this game. She had been acting nice to Red Queen but now that she realized she isn't a small child anymore, she bursts out her emotions and acts out to Red Queen.

Likewise, since the chess game becomes a real world for Alice, and chess represents faith itself, everything happens according to what Alice says, even though Alice isn't aware of this. It can be seen that before something happens, Alice always has a sudden epiphany of a poem that tells a story. After she reads the poem at loud, events that had been told in the poem start happening. For example, she starts reading a poem about how Tweedledum and Tweedledee fight over a broken rattle, suddenly Tweedledee breaks his new rattle and they start having a

battle. There is also a chapter where clues of this occasion are given. It's where the White Queen tells Alice about the memories that work both ways –which is also to remember the things that are going to happen in the future. When Alice tells her that her memory only works backwards, White Queen feels sorry for her. So Alice is the one who decides what will happen, like she is in control of the game and her life. So White Queen's appearance here represents that being able to control one's life is important. This also verifies the theory of Alice being the one who rules the white pieces in the game.

Characters and Landscapes

Chess isn't only embedded into the storyline abstractly, but also perceptively. Events in the novel occur inside a chess board. The landscape of the novel is also very similar to a chess board. Squares in a chess board are represented as brooks in the storyline. Alice passes over brooks when she is moving squares in the chess board:

There were a number of tiny little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground between was divided up into squares by a number of tiny little hedges, that reached from brook to brook.

'I declare it's marked out just like a large chess board!' Alice said at last.
(Carroll, 144)

Alice wants to be a Queen when she enters the game. Since Alice starts as a pawn, the only way she can become a Queen is to reach to the other end of the chess board. But she can only travel one square at a time. (Except in the first move she chooses to travel two squares) This explains why she travels so slowly in the novel. Alice needs eleven moves to finish this game. All the moves correspond to regular events in the book. The game board is like a real world for Alice, so when she travels through squares, it's like she is actually walking to somewhere and passing real places. For example, Alice's move of going through Q's 3rd to Q's 4th is represented as meeting the Tweedledum and Tweedledee by railway. Since Tweedledum and Tweedledee are also real pieces in the game, Alice meets them at Q's 4th because they actually do stand next to the Q's 4th as two pieces. According to that, if she wants to become a Queen, she actually has to get to the opponent's side without getting beaten in the chess game.

There are many other characters that Alice meets as she clashes with other pieces as a pawn. It is possible to see that the characteristics of these figures are similar to the characteristics of chess pieces itself. For example, there are many references to Queens' speed of moving; *'There is the White Queen running across the country! She came flying out of the wood over yonder – How fast does Queens can run!'* (Carroll, 204) Since Alice was a pawn at the beginning of the game, (and since the pawns have very limited chance of movement which is only one square at a time) she couldn't keep up with other characters, especially Queens. (Since in chess, queens can go to any direction and any distance if only there are no other pieces blocking it) In the novel, Queens have unlimited view over everything, they can see what's going on everywhere in the Looking Glass World. *'The Queen went so fast that it was all she could do to keep up with her: and still the Queen kept crying 'Faster! Faster!' but Alice felt she could not go faster, though she had no breath left to say so.'* (Carroll, 144)

Queens are not the only characters Alice can't keep up with. There are also several references to Alice being not able to keep up with the Kings as well. (Since Kings can go one square at a time but in every direction while the pawns can only go in one direction) They do not have unlimited view and dimension but are faster than pawns. *' 'Would you - be good enough – ' Alice panted out, after running a little further, 'to stop a minute – just to get – one's breath again?'*

'I'm good enough,' the King said, 'only I'm not strong enough.' (Carroll, 202)

Also in chess, there are several limitations to Knights' movements as well. Though they can jump over other pieces, they are only able to move in an L shape. That quality is reflected over the White Knight in the storyline as well. White Knight is described as he is not able to ride

a horse properly, as he always falls sideways. Just like the Knight, Horses also tend to stumble and fall as well:

Whenever the horse stopped (which it did very often), he fell off in front; whenever it went on again (which it generally did rather suddenly), he fell off behind. Otherwise he kept on pretty well, except that he had a habit of now and then falling off sideways; and, as he generally did this on the side on which Alice was walking, she soon found that it was the best plan not to walk quite close to the horse. (Carroll, 214)

Mathematical References

It is not unexpected of Lewis Carroll to use math in his novel. With his real name, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, he was known to be a mathematician, logician. He worked as a mathematician at the Christ Church College, Oxford. He worked in several fields such as geometry, linear and matrix algebra, mathematical logic and recreational mathematics.

It is possible to see some other mathematical references besides chess in *Through the Looking Glass*. All the nonsense in the novel has actually mathematical explanations. For example, the mirror imagery indicates the symmetry. Everything starts as Alice gets through the mirror in the novel. On the other side, she sees that everything is like the reflection of the real world, but with several demolishes of reality; live chess pieces, grinning clocks, vs. Also the chess board can be taken as a mini-version of this imagery. Since a chessboard is symmetric within itself too, and in this symmetry, though the shapes and places of pieces are reflections of each other, they have small differences as well as their colors. Symmetry can also be seen where Alice talks to her cat, Kitty. She tells about the Looking- Glass World on the other side of the mirror, to Kitty, and tells her that their milk can be bad for her. “*I wonder if they’d give you milk there? Perhaps Looking-Glass milk isn’t good to drink –*” (Carroll, 127) Milk has enzymes and amino acids as its subunits, which animals have the capacity to digest, but the mirror image of these subunits can be very harmful for animals and are impossible to digest. Moreover, when Alice meets Red Queen for the first time, and they run for a while, Red Queen tells her that if they want to get to somewhere, they have to run twice as fast as they do now. This event can be explained by the motion of waves. Since in light waves, negative movement is possible as well and part of the waves moves backwards. That can also be examined in the novel where Alice walks backwards to get to the Red Queen in the garden.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, Lewis Carroll expresses the situation of growing up by using unusual metaphors such as chess and logic. Not only he correlates the events with a strategy game, he hides many logical explanations inside events that seem like complete nonsense at first. His intentions of doing such thing can be to explain the true nature of childhood and growing up more effectively and fully. In my opinion, besides being one of the bests in the genre, Lewis Carroll may have had several psychological problems. Creating a storyline that matches completely with a well-thought chess game and hiding extreme math explanations into absurd events in a world that is created with excessive imagination can only be done with a mind that exceeds the boundaries of normality. Combining two events that seem completely different from each other, in a way that points out the overlooked similarities and explains each other with perfect sense of logic (–life and growing up with chess) Carroll’s insisted denial of growing up –which can be seen in most of his books- and stubborn attitude of including math in the most unanticipated parts of the novel can also be another sign of his psychological problems.

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