DOI: 10.13114/MJH.2017.337

Geliş Tarihi: 06.12.2016
Kabul Tarihi: 04.05.2017

Mediterranean Journal of Humanities
mjh.akdeniz.edu.tr
VII/1 (2017) 299-307

'Off With Their Heads!': Violence and Aggression in the Worlds of Wonderland and The Looking-Glass

'Kesin Kafalarını!': Harikalar Diyarı ve Aynanın Arkasındaki Dünyada Şiddet ve Saldırganlık

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Abstract: In Lewis Carroll's books about Alice and her adventures in two unlikely and fantastic worlds, the writer draws a lively picture of a young girl's dreamland. Yet when she enters the worlds of Wonderland and the Looking-glass, she accidentally becomes a threatening figure who herself presents possible dangers for the inhabitants of these places. The violence and aggression directed to the occupants of these lands manifest themselves in different forms within cultural interactions such as greetings, introductions, court gatherings, and garden parties. However, she expresses counter aggression on certain occasions. This aggression appears to be not only a defensive attitude against Alice, but also towards the other inhabitants of the same society. For both parties, the violence is usually hidden behind polite manners or established cultural values that are unquestionable for the given societies. Therefore, these examples of aggression are somehow tolerated in a humorous and fanciful way since the novels were written for young bourgeois children. This work scrutinizes the examples of cultural violence and aggression in the books *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.

***Keywords*:** Violence, Aggression, Culture, Western Culture, Identity

Öz: Lewis Carroll, Alice'in iki farklı hayali diyarda geçen maceralarını anlattığı kitaplarında küçük bir kızın rüyalarında gördüğü dünyaları betimler. Ne var ki Alice, Harikalar Diyarı ve Aynalar Ülkesine gittiğinde istemeden de olsa bir tehdit unsuruna dönüşür ve buraların yerlileri için bir şekilde tehlike teşkil eder. Bu diyarlarda yaşayanlara yönelen bu saldırgan ve şiddet içerikli davranışlar kendilerini genelde kültürel etkileşimlerin gerçekleştiği tanışma, karşılaşma, partiler, toplantılar gibi durumlarda gösterir. Fakat bazı durumlarda, Alice bir tür karşı saldırıya da maruz kalır. Bu saldırgan tavırlar, sadece Alice'e karşı gösterilen bir savunma hareketi değil, o diyarların sakinlerinin kendilerinden olanlara da gösterdikleri bir tür davranış biçimidir. Her iki taraf için de şiddet, genelde kibar tavırların ya da yerleşik ve hiç sorgulanmayan kültürel değerlerin arkasına gizlenmiştir. Bu sebeple, dönemin burjuva sınıfı çocukları için yazılmış olan bu eserlerde, saldırganlık ve şiddet örnekleri bir şekilde komik, eğlenceli ve fantastik yollarla hem gizlenir hem de hoş görülür. Bu eserde, bahsi geçen *Alice Harikalar Diyarında* ve *Aynanın İçinden* adlı romanlardaki kültürel şiddet ve saldırganlık örneklerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Şiddet, Saldırganlık, Kültür, Batı kültürü, Kimlik

Introduction

In the world of hostility, one has become a prisoner of one's own speech. The violent action of language can be directed both against the reader and against the characters in a narrative. As Jeanette R. Malkin puts, "*In either case language is on trial: it stands accused of usurping and*

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molding reality, of replacing critical thought with fossilized and automatic verbiage, of violating man's autonomy, of destroying his individuality" (Malkin 1992, 1). After such an account, one would immediately question the cultural connections between violence and language. As is known, verbal violence benefits from the culture in which it was born; and the cultural perspectives determine the attitude of those who practice this violence. In this sense, one remembers Stephen Greenblatt who posits violence as a necessary outcome of the advance of Western culture. As individuals are ideological products of the cultures, violence becomes one of the shaping forces of the individual. Especially in Western culture which has been nourished by imperialism and its colonial sources is accustomed to contend with violence. In order to clarify the issue, this paper will examine the use of verbal and cultural violence and aggression in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872).

Carroll's books are genuine examples which delineate the manners and etiquette of the Victorian England by displaying the imaginary adventures of a young child. Alice as a girl of "*seven years and six months*" appears to be a well-bred child and a correct representative of her time and culture in the world of Wonderland, which is a reflection of Victorian England only populated with unlikely inhabitants in unlikely situations. The Looking-Glass world in the second book is, on the other hand, a reverse version of Alice's familiar environment in which she tries to be a Queen and finds her way following the paths of a pawn on a chess board. In these worlds, Alice represents the powerful figure who interrupts the usual state of affairs with her unintentional antagonism; and she becomes in return a target of counter antagonism.

The Problem of Identity

Although sometimes she questions "*who*" she is, rather than "*where*" she is in a world of ambiguity, uncertainty, and confusion, Alice's great confidence in her identity, based upon her name, her education, and her social class guides her throughout the novels. As a Victorian child, she has certain conceptions about the things around her; and the children who are the main readers of these books know these things very well. Nevertheless, even though these novels have been accepted as the best examples of canonical children's books, they contain a distinctive usage of language as a form of aggression. Moreover, they illuminate a connection between a refined, polite language and the hidden violence within it. The presence of an uncontrolled aggression in these books makes them an interesting field of work, having a great complexity of tone and point of view.

Carroll's books are generally about growing up, leaving the unawareness of childhood behind, and entering a phase of awareness. It is certain that the journeys of Alice suggest a child's slow growth from innocence to maturity, as it is seen at the end of the first book, when Alice's elder sister imagines Alice as a grown-up woman remembering her adventures, and "*how she would gather about her other little children, and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long-ago: and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days*" (Carroll: 130). It is also significant that all the accepted qualities of childhood are ready to be transferred to the next generation in traditional story telling as it is pointed at the end of the novel. Therefore, the cultural values of Victorian childhood, including the aggressive and selfish declarations are maintained through the narratives. They eventually become a legitimate part of the culture, ready to be inherited from one generation to subsequent ones.

Innocent Violence, Aggressive Adulthood

Besides, as James R. Kincaid notes in his article "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland", the theme of the book is also about the "*loss of Eden and the child's rude and tragic haste to leave its innocence*" (Kincaid 1973, 93). It should be remembered that the cruel selfishness of innocent childhood creates a conflict with the cheerless corruption of adulthood. As Kincaid indicates, sometimes this innocence becomes both cute and dangerous. Uncontrollable energy together with the situation of anomy in childhood creates a form of violence such as Alice's playful account of her offer to her Nurse: "*Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena, and you're a bone!*" (Carroll: 143). While Alice reflects such a cheerfully aggressive attitude at home, she unintentionally threatens the inhabitants of Wonderland. Since she is considered as an intruder or invader of a new found realm, she unintentionally becomes a figure of menace, even reluctantly. In the third chapter of *Alice in Wonderland*, she talks about her cat Dinah, and frightens the poor mouse she has recently met by her instinctive aggressiveness. With the intention of finding a common language in order to create a conversation, she utters the first sentence of her French grammar book "*Oùest ma chatte*? [Where is my cat?]" (18), and then tries to apologize thinking "*that she had hurt the poor animal's feelings. 'I quite forgot you didn't like cats'*" (18). Her additional attempts to save the situation only make it even worse:

> "*I think you'd take a fancy to cats if you could only see her. She is such a dear quiet thing . . . and she's such a capital one for catching mice – Oh, I beg your pardon!*" . . . "*Are you fond of dogs?*" . . . "*There is such a nice little dog near our house I should like to show you! . . . it belongs to a farmer you know, and he says it's so useful it's worth a hundred pounds! He says it kills all the rats and – Oh, dear!*"(18)

Especially in her first moments in Wonderland, all subjects that she suggests lead to aggression together with, eventually, death for the inhabitants of this underground world. As Kincaid remarks, "[her] *good intentions reveal her dark instincts, and the Caucus Race stands as a contrast and a rebuke to her and her world*" (Kincaid 1973, 7). Besides, as Nina Auerbach additionally indicates, gentle Alice introduces a more sinister and Darwinian aspect of animal nature into Wonderland "*in part through projections of her hunger on to Dinah and the 'nice little dog'* (she meets a 'dear little puppy' after she has grown small and is afraid he will eat her up) *and in part through the semi-cannibalistic appetite her songs express*" (Auerbach 1973, 37). It should be remembered that although these accounts are a vital part of the humorous quality of the novels, almost all of the humour comes from violent threats and aggression, as well as the antagonism between the characters of the books.

Moreover, the narrator's voice is important in contributing to the playful mood of the frightening story (Rother 1984, 91). The violence and aggression in the above examples are a form of joyful attitude in which the real intention is hidden in politeness and apology convenient to conventional Victorian manners. Alice does not hesitate to carry on the same joyful/ aggressive attitude in the following conversation with the birds she has met during the Caucus Race. "*Dinah's our cat. And she's such a capital one for catching mice, you can't think! And, oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!*" (Carroll: 27). Culturally shaped as a lover of domestic animals such as cats and dogs, Alice does not realize what a dangerous picture she draws for the inhabitants of Wonderland while she talks about her friendly pets, because Dinah and the dog are the symbols of loyalty and friendship in her culture. Quite the opposite, they appear to be monstrous and threatening figures in Wonderland; and her careless talk about them becomes an incautious cruelty and

menace in this world.

The aggression and violence in Carroll's books are generally in the form of a threat to life: cutting off the head, eating or devouring, turning people into prey, or beating them to death. Most of the animals Alice encounters in Wonderland are in danger of being eaten or victimized. The books produce an atmosphere of a jungle in which predators chase their prey: cats and dogs hunt mice and birds, Walrus and the Carpenter eat oysters, or Alice attempts to eat Mutton which was formally introduced to her by the Red Queen. Except for the motiveless penalizing of the Queen of Hearts, none of these attacks intend to punish anyone for any reason. The aggression seems to be a natural one, just in order to manifest strength and power over the weak. Yet, as Johan Galtung posits in his article "*Cultural Violence*", threats of violence are also violence (Galtung 1990, 292). Furthermore, Donald Rackin characterizes *Alice in Wonderland* as an example which "*embodies a comic horror-vision of the chaotic land beneath the man-made groundwork of Western thought and convention*" (Rackin 1966, 313). Confined between her world and a bizarre world where things work in unusual ways, Alice wants to escape from the anarchy of Wonderland to the secure "*above-ground certainties of social formalities and ordinary logic*" (314). Her only weapons to defend herself in this world are her language which works within the boundaries of reason, her upbringing in a middle class environment in Victorian England, and her childlike sense of wonder and curiosity which leads her to discover the borders of Wonderland.

In Alice's world of fantasy, beside Alice herself, the adults are also mean, irresponsible, impulsive, and self-indulgent. In Book I Chapter 6 entitled "*Pig and Pepper*", not only the Duchess as an authority figure is violent to the child she carries, but also the cook is aggressive and brutal to everyone in the kitchen in which she works. Without any apparent reason, the cook hurls saucepans, dishes, and plates aggressively without noticing whether she would hurt anybody. On the other hand, the Duchess shouts at her child, "*Pig!*" "*with such sudden violence that Alice quite jump*[s]" (Carroll: 58). While the Duchess is singing a lullaby, she gives the baby "*a violent shake at the end of every line*" (59). She treats Alice impolitely, even brutally. Upon mistaking the word "*axis*" for "*axes*", the Duchess orders Alice's head to be chopped off. This command is familiar both to the reader and to Alice, since the Queen of Hearts uses this phrase to demonstrate her authority. Therefore, an extremely hostile atmosphere is generated in the kitchen in which the air is full of pepper. Even the pepper in the soup is used as a threatening element to create an oppressive environment in the kitchen unlike the fresh air of outside. When Alice enters the kitchen as an uninvited visitor, it is apparent that she enters another territory which is utterly aggressive and especially unfriendly. The kitchen becomes a symbol of resistance to both Alice's invasion of Wonderland and to the supremacy of the Queen of Hearts, since the Duchess and the Queen are heated enemies and rivals.

One of the most important characters of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts. She is the sovereign of Wonderland world with absolute power and authority. The Queen is also an apparent representative of the Victorian morality and manners of the time. As a remarkable source of fear and terror who even dominates her husband, the King of Hearts, she is free to use violence and aggression against whomsoever she dislikes. As the playwright Edward Bond asserts in the "*Author's Note*" at the beginning of the first volume of his plays: "*If men are necessarily violent they will always endanger one another, so there must be a strong authority that will use violence to control violence. This authority is the ruling class. It maintains its existence by using violence and being able to organize it politically*" (Bond 1990, 11). Thus, being the head of the ruling class, the Queen of Hearts appears to be the representative of political

violence in the realm of Wonderland as well. Although none of her attempts results in any harm or injury and all her efforts remain as ineffectual threats, she uses a large amount of verbal violence to control her subjects. In addition, she immediately becomes the opponent of Alice.

In their first encounter, the Queen of Hearts frightens Alice but Alice reminds herself, "*Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!*" (Carroll: 81). The major motive underlying this approach comes from the culture in which Alice was raised. Occupying a land and disparaging its inhabitants is a culturally based approach of the colonizer to the "other" colonized culture; and naturally enough, by degrading the other culture one can justify one's vision. Mary Liston argues that Alice cannot be evaluated as a proper member of a group, in other words "*a pack of cards*", since she is an outsider, a foreigner, "*even a kind of outlaw in Wonderland*" (Liston 2009, 52). As a reaction of the Queen's question about the unidentified soldiers, "'*How should I know?' said Alice, surprised at her own courage. 'It's no business of mine'*" (Carroll: 81). Then, "*The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, began screaming, 'Off with her head! Off --'. 'Nonsense!' said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent*" (Carroll: 81). With her newly acquired bravery through realising the difference between the self and the other, Alice opposes the supreme ruler of Wonderland and makes her speechless. Additionally, she releases the accused soldiers, and therefore breaks the law. Alice intends to be helpful and save the soldiers but she sees herself as an exceptional person to whom the rules and laws somehow do not apply; for that reason she audaciously challenges the authority. As Bond specifies, "*Violence can't be contained by an equal or even greater force of counter-violence; it can't be sublimated in games; it can't be controlled by a drug in the water supply. . . Class society must be violent, but it must also create the frustration, stimulation, aggression and – if necessary – physical violence that are the means by which it can change into a classless society*" (Bond 1990, 13-14). While the world of Wonderland is a perfect reflection of Victorian class society, the regulations in this world illustrate the embodiment of the legitimacy of political violence with the figure of the Queen of Hearts. Then, Alice appears to be both an intruder and a resister who uses counter violence.

In the final chapter of *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice enters a courthouse to attend the trial of the stolen tarts. Here all the figures of Wonderland in Alice's story come into view together for one last time. This scene is accepted as the climax of the story when Alice takes command of the situation. In this chapter, Alice grows in size and in strength; then her perception changes considerably after she challenges the King's rule of "*All persons more than a mile high to leave the court*" by indicating that it is "*not a regular rule: you invented it just now*" (Carroll: 122). Afterwards, she challenges the Queen's order, "*Sentence first – verdict afterward*" (127), by saying "*Stuff and nonsense!*" (128). When the Queen tells her to hold her tongue, she answers directly "*I won't!*" for she knows that power has passed to herself. She courageously dismisses her oppressors by saying "*Who cares for you? . . . You're nothing but a pack of cards!*" (128). Upon acting like a colonizer who has overrun an unknown land and thinks she has the right to do so, she discriminates between them and defines her class and position amongst them. Then, she finds herself about to receive a counter attack, and the "*whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her; she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off*" (128). The instant they attack Alice, her journey comes to an end, and she wakes up from this "*curious dream*".

Aggressive Poetry

Throughout her journey, Alice or the characters she encounters recite several poems or nursery

rhymes which were famous among the Victorians. Yet, each reading unintentionally distorts the original poem and transforms it into nonsense or parody of it. While the poems are altered, a considerable amount of violence and aggression are included, unlike in the original innocent forms of these poems. For instance, while Alice recites the old poem "*How Doth the Little Busy Bee*" she changes it completely:

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spread his claws,
And welcome little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws! (14)

Through the imagery of a hungry crocodile with intimidating jaws, the poem becomes a frightening picture behind a merry and joyous tone. The other poem "You're Old Father William" is again changed by Alice with a final and threatening line: "*Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff? / Be off, or I'll kick you downstairs!*" (47). Another song that the Duchess sings to her pig-child reveals hostility directed to a little boy concealed beneath the tone of a lullaby. In order to sing the original form; "*Speak gently to the little child!/Its love be sure to gain; / Teach it in accents soft and mild;/It may not long remain*", the Duchess sings another song:

Speak roughly to your little boy,
And beat him when he sneezes:
He only does it to annoy,
Because he knows it teases.

I speak severely to my boy,
I beat him when he sneezes;
For he can thoroughly enjoy
The pepper when he pleases! (59-60)

In Chapter 10 entitled "*The Lobster Quadrille*", the poem about the owl and the panther provides an obvious example of how to approach violence from the safety of a word game.

I passed by his garden, and marked with one eye,
How the Owl and Panther were sharing a pie:
The Panther took pie-crust, and gravy and meat,
While the Owl had the dish as its share of the treat.
When the pie was all finished, the Owl as a boon,
Was kindly permitted to pocket the spoon:
While the Panther received knife and fork with a growl,
And concluded the banquet by— (109)

The final words, "*eating the Owl*", are deliberately omitted, but the reader can easily finish the line by following the rhyme. The concealed violence is suddenly revealed not by the writer but supplied by the reader of the novel; thus, it creates a comic effect. Yet this omission of the last three words makes the poem even more gruesome.

Violence in the Mirror

Use of violence and aggression continues in the second book of Alice, *Through the Looking-*

Glass. However, the second book is totally different from the first one in the sense of using the progress of a chess game instead of a card game. The chess game is more orderly and systematic than a card game; thus, it proceeds in a linear movement unlike the circular and chaotic movement of the former book. For this reason, the stages in the second book appear to be more explicit; and it is much more carefully structured and apparently self-conscious. On the other hand, Alice's approach directed against the inhabitants of the Looking-Glass World is no different from those of Wonderland. Also the aggression and the menace are again mutual between the two parties. In this second book, Alice tries to be a Queen, a co-sovereign of the world. However, in a world where the rules or the laws are unpredictable and ungraspable she has no chance of being someone who can rule. She cannot even realize what the rules are. Yet she encounters many occasions or learns stories in which violence and aggression threaten lives.

As soon as she steps into the world behind the looking glass, Alice as usual interferes with the mechanism in this new land; and she tries to control the characters' decisions or behaviour from the very beginning. Yet, after having a clear goal of being Queen, she goes her own way. The poems and songs in the book still offer a kind of violence or danger of death just as in the famous poem "Jabberwocky". After reading the poem, Alice comments on it and says, "*Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don't exactly know what they are! However, somebody killed something; that's clear*" (Carroll: 154). At the end of the poem entitled "The Walrus and the Carpenter", two characters, the Walrus and the Carpenter eat the oysters that had accompanied them as friends which creates a menacing and highly insecure environment. However, after hearing the verse, Alice ignores the victims of the poem, the oysters, and instantly searches for one of the power figures to identify herself: "*I like the Walrus best . . . because he was a little sorry for the poor oysters*" (Carroll: 189). Tweedledee skilfully blocks this reaction: "*He ate more than the Carpenter. . . You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took*" (189). Alice switches sides right away: "*That was mean! Then I like the Carpenter best*", yet the twins tell her, "*But he ate as many as he could get*" (189).

Nevertheless, the most significant threat for Alice is the idea of her being a part of the Red King's dream. When Tweedledee asks excitedly, "*If he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?*", Tweedledum answers triumphantly, "*If that there King was to wake, you'd go out – bang! – just like a candle!*" (190). If the idea is true, then Alice becomes only one of the things in his dream: "*You know very well you're not real*" (190). This statement makes Alice cry, but the menace does not end; they scold her roughly: "*You won't make yourself a bit realer by crying*" (191). The insecurity created by the unknown dream-world threatens all cultural, physical, and mental evidence of Alice's existence. It becomes the worst means of aggression, employing no visible weapon, but the devastating idea of being just a creation in the imagination of someone else.

Throughout the book, Alice comes across many fights or combats, fortunately without ending in any bloodshed or physical damage, as in the situation of the twins Tweedledee and Tweedledum, the Lion and the Unicorn, or the Red Knight and the White Knight. All these fights, even though they are mostly parodies, being neither real nor fatal, describe an unsettled world with a hostile conduct. Certainly the manners and traditions of both Wonderland and the Looking-Glass World are reflections of Victorian culture with its imperialistic viewpoint where challenge and competition, in one respect, are supported as heroism. Perhaps the only peaceful moment of the book is the scene in the wood "*where things have no names*". As soon as Alice enters the dark wood, she forgets her name, her identity, and her class. At that moment she

encounters a Fawn, a baby deer. Since they do not remember their names and/or species Alice walks with it "*with her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field*" (Carroll: 178). However, when they get out of the wood (of forgetting) the Fawn remembers its name and nature, then it "[gives] *a sudden bound into the air, and* [shakes] *itself free from Alice's arms. 'I'm a Fawn!' it* [cries] *out in a voice of delight. 'And, dear me! you're a human child!'*" (178). Knowing their names, classes, namely their identities, provide them with a cultural standpoint to judge their opponent, therefore the threat could be addressed to the enemy.

Furthermore, nonsense as a linguistic and structural device used in the Alice books is also a type of violence practiced on semantics. However, the very reason for the presence of nonsense is to attract the reader and to call attention to language. The best example of nonsense verse is the poem "Jabberwocky": "*'Twasbrillig, and the slithytoves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe: / All mimsy were the borogoves, / And the momerathsoutgrabe*". The poem, in which there are portmanteau words which have more than one semantic source, illustrates a surreal image by shattering the conventional mental picture of a garden. Moreover, the violation of the sensible, reasonable language, and the violation of meaning in the spoken language make us understand that the language is not something that we know or comprehend, but something in a process and most importantly something to be discovered (Holquist 1990, 114). Especially in Carroll's books, the use of nonsense becomes another medium of menace or resistance against the invasion which confuses the protagonist Alice and makes her vulnerable. Without the meaning of anything she hears or sees, she encounters dangers and threat in these unfamiliar countries and could not any longer be a threatening force.

Conclusion

Johan Galtung defines cultural violence as an invariant and permanence which remains the same for long periods since the culture itself teaches and preaches people into acknowledging repression and exploitation as natural. It even leads people into not seeing them at all (Galtung 1990, 295). So cultural violence is invisible but is everywhere. The violent and aggressive behaviour towards the inhabitants or the guests of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass worlds is designated normal and ordinary as in the natural world, like an inevitable part of the confrontations of different species for their survival. As common as they are, all the interactions and conflicts experienced by the members of these fantasy worlds appear to be habitual and orderly without any objection. All the fights are ceremonial and official, even in some cases, with enthusiastic audiences. The lullabies, songs or poems alter their tone and include extensive quantities of hostility. In consequence the violence and aggression in these books seem to become culturally tolerated and abiding. Thereby the violence and aggression become an ingrained and tolerated part of the lives of the people.

According to the view which posits the *Wonderland* and the *Looking-Glass* worlds as the representatives of the culture to which Alice belongs, she appears to be the intruder or the invader who not only observes the violence around her, but also practices violence against the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants have the right to defend themselves against the invader by employing counter violence. Alice, as the protagonist in these books, uses a polite aggression appropriate to Victorian values but she receives a similar attitude in return. This is a continuous process which has two sides. A never-ending practice of violence reveals the permanent cultural violence where each party perform their roles; and it only ends when Alice awakes up from her curious dream.

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