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A Journey into Imagination in Maurice Sendak’s Where the Wild Things Are and Lewis Carroll’s Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass

B.A Essay

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Summary
This B.A. essay explores the adventures of Alice in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), and Max in *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963). The protagonists’ journeys into their imaginations and what they learn while away in fantastical, imaginary worlds are amongst the topics; a deeper analysis of what these journeys may represent to a child or an adult reader. The theme of alienation in children’s literature is examined and several iconic children’s books are used in comparison to Carroll’s and Sendak’s novels. The common motif in children’s literature, the anthropomorphic animal, is explored as well as the symbolism of animals and in particular, the wolf and the rabbit. Max’s wolfsuit is an indication of Max’s longing to behave like an animal and to simulate a wolf is a peculiar choice as it is an unruly, undomesticated animal and frightening to most children. A rabbit dressed in a waistcoat piques Alice’s curiosity and she follows the anthropomorphic rabbit into its hole and there she embarks on her journey into Wonderland. The rabbit is a popular subject in children’s literature and this essay touches on the subject of rabbits dressed in clothes and speculates on the importance of animals in children’s literature.

This essay also examines the backgrounds of the authors, Lewis Carroll and Maurice Sendak, and the effect their societies had on their work. Lewis Carroll’s Victorian background, filled with strict rules and etiquettes, was the exact opposite of Wonderland’s chaos while Maurice Sendak’s background was the postwar United States, a nation determined to hide the bloody past of the World Wars to the upcoming generations. The radical changes of the 1960s focused on empowerment and enlightenment in all sectors of society and Sendak jumped aboard the ship of changes with his debut children’s book *Where the Wild Things Are.*
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Introduction

And though the shadow of a sigh
May tremble through the story
For ‘happy summer days’ gone by,
And vanish’d summer glory –
It shall not touch with breath of bale
The pleasance of our fairy-tale.

(Carroll 154)

This final stanza in Lewis Carroll’s poem is a part of the preface of Through The Looking-Glass (1871) and it alludes to the darkness that the protagonist, Alice, may encounter in her adventures in Wonderland. The narrator emphasises that the darkness will not harm the good nature of the story, a message that reassures the reader to read the fairy-tale and participate in the experience of the imaginary world.

The endless boundaries of imagination are a source of creativity but unfortunately, the ability to explore this vast imagination often dwindles with age. Artists pine for the imagination of their youth while they struggle to create beauty in a world that can seem so grim, dark and ordinary. Often in children’s literature the protagonists try to escape the overwhelming banality of life by seeking solace in extraordinary worlds or places where they can experience adventures and take risks that are not permitted within the confines of real life.

Lewis Carroll’s novels Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and Through the Looking-Glass (1871) are focused on a journey to an unsafe and obscure place, called Wonderland. Alice encounters many hindrances and she must find her own way without any help from others. Alice’s journey takes place in an unfair world but in her case both worlds are unfair; the real and the imaginary. The creatures and inhabitants she meets in
Wonderland are often wild and unruly but Alice’s wit and common sense help her to continue her journey.

Max, the protagonist of Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), is an ordinary American boy who is punished for throwing a tantrum by being sent to his room with no supper – a seemingly strict yet plausible punishment for the time period. Max is a regular boy of his age and typical of many children around the world, but his resourcefulness charms the reader and his eventful journey into his own imagination is what amazes the reader and evokes the feeling of empowerment. Max proves that he is brave as he faces his fears with innocence and he learns a valuable lesson through the course of his adventures. Sendak’s mesmerizing illustrations fuel the sense of who Max is and his place and purpose in a seemingly unfair world of adults and unruly wild things. The stark contrast of transplanting an ordinary child in a seemingly ordinary context into an extraordinary, fantastical and vividly illustrated world, makes Max’s journey more real and exhilarating for the reader.

This essay will explore the various cultural and symbolic aspects of *Where the Wild Things Are* and compare some of these aspects to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. It will focus on the purpose of the protagonists’ journeys into imagination and finally, it will take a closer look at both authors, and their backgrounds and influences and how these elements may have affected these works that are treasured by children and adults around the world.
1. The Cultural and Social Relevance of *Where the Wild Things Are*

In a radio interview in 2005 the host asked Sendak what he was working on at the time and Sendak replied, “The story line is scaring children, my favorite subject” (Ludden). True to his word, Sendak caused quite a stir when *Where the Wild Things Are* was published in 1963. The story revolves around the disobedient boy, Max, who defies his mother and is punished by being sent to his room without having supper. From there he embarks on a journey to the imaginary world of the wild things. At the time the book was published this type of child rearing was considered cruel and unjust to deny a child the most sacred thing in postwar country: food. A mother’s role as caretaker involved nurturing her child in every way and to deny a child its rightful supper was commonly considered to be sacrilege.

Prior to the publication of *Where the Wild Things Are* most children’s books were in generally intended to be pleasant, sentimental and to impart educational and moral values. They often depicted a beautiful friendship between children and animals such as in *Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson (1956), *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B White (1952), family ties such as in *Miracles on Maple Hill* by Virginia Sorenson (1956) or children living in nature like in *My Side of the Mountain* (1959) by Jean Craighead George. These novels all have a common theme of discovering values of family, friendship or the community and therefore proved highly useful for educating tomorrow’s citizens and to strengthening the sense of social values and community. However, there was a shift in focus in the 1960s in terms of values and morals in American society; the civil rights and feminist movements were pushing forward in a stale postwar society and consequently children’s literature was radically reformed by this change of mentality. Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) was provocative in imparting the value of moral decency and criticizing the injustice of racism in America; Lee made the sensitive issue of racism relatable and relevant to children through the sincere experience of the protagonist, Scout, who solely relies on her
own courage and innocence. This moral awakening also occurred in other literary and cultural circles: writers like Gwendolyn Brooks and Maya Angelou wrote about the conflicts of race and gender, Gloria Steinem wrote several essays, articles and books on women’s rights and Sylvia Plath wrote her semi-autobiographical book, *The Bell Jar* (1963), that touched on the subject of mental illness and the pressures of being a woman. Jean Rhys wrote a “prequel” to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which was considered a bold postmodern approach to the classic itself but Jean Rhys focused on the enslavement of women in marriage and in the patriarchal world of the 19th century, a predicament that sadly still corresponded to the women of the sixties.

Playwrights Arthur Miller and Edward Albee wrote plays that criticized American society harshly such as *The Crucible* (1953) and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) while musicians like Bob Dylan criticized society and played a pivotal role in the civil rights fight by bringing the attention of the youth to the injustice that African-Americans had endured.

In light of all the radical changes that were emerging in America in terms of gender, race and civil rights, it is safe to assume that Sendak contributed to the radical change in the approach towards children’s literature. At that time, children were not meant to be exposed to the dark side of the human nature. The aftermath of the horror of the World Wars was still tangible and people were keen to protect their children from the atrocities they had endured; light and pleasant reading material was preferable for the young minds. The radical change in children’s literature in the 1960s took the form of empowering tales that replaced those steeped in moral allegory with its imposing message of socially approved conduct. The children’s book historian and critic Leonard S. Marcus said in an interview in 2002: “The 1960s were a turning point for children's literature. For one thing, it was then that most editors and librarians finally realized that most children’s
books were about the life of the white middle class… There was a new psychological realism in children’s books, too” (Selznick and Selrin). The shift in focus in children’s literature steered the emphasis away from children’s environment and society to their psychological state. Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* centers on Max’s own psychological world where he takes charge of everything and everyone but even with all the power in the world he still yearns for love, in particular his mother’s love.

Nevertheless, when the book was published it struck people as a tale of the horrific torture of a disobedient child, denied of nurture and surrounded by monsters. The fact that Max is deprived of food was considered an unmotherly gesture and for Max to throw a tantrum and to yell at his own mother was considered an act of an intolerable behavior. Max was not an ideal literary role model for young children according to many child-rearing adults as Max’s behavior was considered unacceptable and the wild things were considered too scary for the young, impressionable readers. Acclaimed child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim raised particular concern about Max and his imaginary world.

1.2. Bruno Bettelheim and *Where the Wild Things Are*
Leonard S. Marcus points out in an interview that “Bruno Bettelheim condemned *Where the Wild Things Are* in his column in *Ladies’ Home Journal* (1969) as being too violent for children. He said that children of three and four would be too upset to be given a story in which another child was deprived of food. He thought it was a damaging story” (Selznick and Serlin). Bettelheim was an Austrian who after he got released from Dachau concentration camp emigrated to the United States where he became an acclaimed psychologist, especially for his work with children. Bettelheim was the director of the Orthogenic School at the University of Chicago where he worked with emotionally disturbed children and wrote several books on children’s psyche and behavior. He was also interested in improving children’s education and particularly favored improving teaching
methods. He was heavily influenced by his fellow Austrian, Sigmund Freud but also by other philosophers and psychoanalysts such as John Dewey and August Aichhorn (Zelan 85). In 1976 Bettelheim wrote the book *The Uses of Enchantment* in which he stressed the importance of fairy tales in children’s upbringing as summarized by Karen Zelan:

Bettelheim poignantly described how the child’s imagination is served by romantic stories, especially those told to the child and, in the telling, elaborated by the child’s freely created variations. Again, Bettelheim emphasized the collaboration of parent and child in sharing fairy tales to enhance the child’s developing sensibilities… but also, Bettelheim wrote, a moral education communicated not through abstract (ethical) concepts but through fairy tales that deal with what is tangibly right and therefore meaningful. (Zelan 89)

Bruno Bettelheim seems to be contradicting himself in *The Uses of Enchantment* as he opposed *Where the Wild Things Are* so profusely a decade earlier as being too scary for children. Bruno Bettelheim had stated that children would be afraid of *Where the Wild Things Are* because Max was deprived of food and the story was too violent. However, according to him, the Grimm Fairy Tales were ideal for enhancing a child’s moral education. Grimm Fairy Tales include *Hansel and Gretel*, about the two siblings left alone in the woods with a loaf of bread and they must defend for themselves against a child-cooking witch who lives in a gingerbread house, or *Little Red Riding Hood*, about the little girl who must save herself from a hungry wolf that has already eaten her own grandmother. Both these stories are examples of fairy tales that are deemed acceptable to enhance moral education according to Bettelheim. It seems as though Bruno Bettelheim had forgotten all about *Where the Wild Things Are* when he wrote *The Uses of Enchantment*. Sendak, on the other hand, had not forgotten Bruno Bettelheim’s scathing remarks on his debut book. In a radio interview, Sendak confessed the impact that Bettelheim had had on *Where the Wild Things Are*: “Otherwise known by me personally as ‘Beno Brutalheim’, because he wrote a
long article on “Wild Things” which completely destroyed the book” (Ludden). The longevity of the popularity of *Where the Wild Things Are* is a testament of Bruno Bettelheim’s unwise comments. Max’s story has been immortalized through other mediums such as on the silver screen and as an opera with great success. Max is still loved by young readers and the wild things are still as exciting as they were when they emerged on the literary scene in 1963.

The idea of what makes a good and healthy children’s book has perplexed many parents and editors throughout the last century. In a compilation of interviews collected by filmmaker Michael O’Reilly, Sendak confesses that he has a very simple notion about children’s literature: “…the misconception of what is a children’s book and what it should contain and what should not contain and what the subject matter should or should not be. And primarily it is to be healthy and funny and clever and upbeat and not show the little tattered edges of what life is like” (O’Reilly).

**1.3 Values and the Silent Adults**

Dr. Seuss said in an interview with *Life Magazine* in 1959 that “kids…can see a moral coming a mile off and they gag at it. But there is an inherent moral in any story” (Bunzel 113). This does not mean that children do not like any morals in their stories but rather that they do not like to be imposed upon by adults in their creative world as they are in the real world. Children’s literature often has its own set of rules and values to which children themselves can relate, and therein, the imaginary world becomes a safe haven or retreat for the young readers. Sendak did the seemingly unthinkable thing when he wrote and illustrated *Where the Wild Things Are* by accepting and reflecting the unruly nature of children and making the protagonist defy his mother’s rules and therefore challenging the adult world. Nevertheless, as Sendak said in an interview with Bill Moyers in 2004, he himself was often unruly as a child, often made his mother angry and was sent to his room
as mark of his punishment (Moyers). Sendak bases Max on his own childhood behaviour and the frustration of Max is what every child experiences with when dealing with adults and the plight of being forced to obey adults without putting up a struggle. Max is a boy who is confused by the values that his mother imposes upon him and who has yet to understand that he has the same responsibility as everyone else to participate in society.

Alice in Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* confronts same problem as Max in that she must understand the fact she is growing up and must partake in the adult world. Sendak and Carroll have very different approaches to educate their readers on the difficult road towards maturity but both authors manage to share their ideas on childhood, which they celebrate as fantastic and fascinating and neither of them burden their readers with moral allegories. Sendak uses Max’s tantrum as a threshold or a trial into adulthood as Max realizes his bad behavior and starts to take responsibility for his actions, knowing that he would rather be with his mother than in a fantastical place with the wild things, and in order to do that he must behave better.

On the face of it, Max lives in a postwar situation where people have suffered hunger and desperation and where a mother nurturing her child is the ultimate testament of love. The hot supper at the end the story symbolizes Max’s newfound awareness of his mother’s love. Alice is a product of the Victorian era where the etiquette was exalted and education was the metaphor of adulthood. Both Alice and Max are creations of their time periods, both of which were filled with oppressing rules and strict morals, especially for children; therefore it can be assumed that both Max and Alice are groundbreaking literary figures in terms of reshaping the ideology of children’s morals and obedience.

Both Alice and Max question authority and are driven by their own curiosity to discover different worlds that challenges their values. Max is initially challenged by the wild things that threaten him but ultimately revere him because he emerges superior
through his prior social knowledge; Max becomes the adult in the group of the wild things. Alice is faced with the same situation as Max of becoming the adult of the group in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. She is repeatedly challenged by the inhabitants of Wonderland and painstakingly must find her own way in that confusing world. Alice must endure her stay in Wonderland without any tangible rules she can follow, and in order to reason with her surreal situation she uses her knowledge from her own real world that is influenced by grownups. Therefore Alice, just like Max in his imaginary world, becomes the grownup in Wonderland as she finds answers within herself and can take mature decisions whereas the inhabitants of Wonderland continue to contradict themselves repeatedly.

So where do the values come from and how do Max and Alice come to understand them and recognize them? Both Max and Alice recognize that they always had their values installed by their family and by society but only when they find themselves in an isolated place filled with unruliness and chaos, do they come to appreciate their background or what they have been taught by their loved ones. This profound realization is a step towards the inevitable progression to adulthood. The adults in both novels recognize the protagonists’ childish behavior and allow them to continue escaping into their imaginations without interference. Max’s mother scolds him and punishes him by sending him to his room but she is still available throughout his imaginary journey and he smells her dinner across the imaginary border, although she is never visible. Alice’s sister watches her sleep and envies the active imagination within which Alice has found a haven of retreat from reality.

Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; 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 143-144)

In the beginning of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Alice is sitting next to her older
sister, watching her reading a book. Alice is not impressed by her sister’s book because it
contains no pictures in it and therefore, Alice’s mind wanders into the beginning of her
journey into Wonderland. Alice’s older sister envies her and her ability to escape the
mundane everyday life by entering imaginary worlds that are filled with such excitement
and adventures. Max’s mother is not as clearly portrayed as Alice’s older sister but her
actions could be considered more important as they signify the turning point for Max and
fuel his escape into the imaginary world. The adults in both novels are mostly silent and
invisible but a sense of their existence is what propels both Max and Alice forward in their
process of maturing. What’s more, the adults’ presence at the end of both novels renders
them a symbol of home and comfort. The security of the adult world brings both novels to
a close as it contrasts so markedly with the unstable imaginary worlds. In Where the Wild
Things Are and in Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland the notion of the eternity of a child’s
world clashes with the finite nature of the adult world.
2. Alienation

The theme of alienation is prevalent in children’s literature. The protagonist, usually a child, is pitted against a powerful opponent: the adult world, which is filled with insincerity and even cruelty. The alienation is somewhat necessary in order for the child to mature and to, finally, enter the world of adults; thus alienation becomes a symbol of entering adulthood. However, this progression into adulthood is often described as sinister and the sincerity of the innocent child is often compromised. A good example of this is Carlo Callodi’s *Pinocchio* that was published in 1883 in Italy. The story depicts the puppet boy who wants to become a real human boy but must endure incredible hardship and faces several obstacles in order to become a human. The man-made puppet boy whose feelings are as real as in a human emotions, is conned by a sly fox, then sold to a circus and finally, is hanged by the cruel creatures that deceive him by making him think they were his real friends. The hardship that Pinocchio has to endure would today be considered unsuitable material for children’s literature but the theme and the structure meets the requirements of children’s literature. Pinocchio is alienated by his own peers as he is a wooden boy and not a real human boy but he is also alienated by the world, as he is only a child motivated by his own innocence and sincerity. By the end of the novel, Pinocchio is transformed into a real human boy by a fairy godmother and enters his own process into adulthood. The alienation strengthens the protagonist as he must win his battles through his own strength, bravery and innocence while overcoming the obstacles on his way.

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* has an unusual setting for a children’s novel: the protagonist is a girl who chases a rabbit through unknown lands filled with mischievous creatures such as the Cheshire Cat, strange characters like the Mad Hatter and finally the nemesis – the rude, head-chopping Queen of Hearts. Alice is faced with all types of struggles while roaming Wonderland, and yet remains driven by her own curiosity to chase a time-obsessed white rabbit. The white
rabbit is running around Wonderland, exclaiming to be late without revealing what he is late for. This is presumably a pun towards adult behaviour since the white rabbit’s running is somewhat pointless, which can be interpreted as children’s perception of how grownups rush around in their hectic mundane lives. Alice’s curiosity gets the better of her as she follows the white rabbit to its rabbit hole into which she falls and enters the strange Wonderland. Wonderland becomes an in-between state of childhood and adulthood, and Alice is being treated as an adult by the strange inhabitants of Wonderland, but she responds with a childish behaviour. For instance, when the white rabbit mistakes Alice for a grown up, his housemaid Mary Ann, and sends her to his house to fetch his gloves. Alice comes across an unlabeled bottle in the house and drinks it out of childish curiosity. The drink in the bottle makes Alice grow instantly and she wrecks the white rabbit’s house as her body is too big for it. This metaphor of a child trapped in a too large a body could easily refer to puberty, the awkward phase of teenage years. Alice comments on her situation between the worlds of childhood and adulthood and this passage depicts that struggle, but the conclusion echoes the childlike Alice as opposed to a mature grown-up Alice.

‘It was much pleasanter at home,’ thought poor Alice, ‘when one wasn’t always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn’t gone down that rabbit-hole – and yet – it’s rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what can have happened to me! When I used to read fairy-tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I’ll write one – but I’m grown up now,’ she added in a sorrowful tone; ‘at least there’s no room to grow up any more here.’

‘But then, ‘ thought Alice, ‘shall I never get any older than I am now? That’ll be a comfort, one way – never to be an old woman – but
then – always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn’t like that!’ (Carroll 61-62)

The inhabitants of Wonderland do not recognize Alice and repeatedly ask what she is and often mistake her for a predator and treating her as an outsider. Alice’s alienation can therefore be traced to the setting, Wonderland, and also to most of the characters in the novel. This alienation brings out an identity crisis in Alice as she cannot reason her physical changes in a logical way that represents adulthood nor can she fathom the surreal side of her situation that alludes to the creativity of a child. Alice starts to mature psychologically during the novel in a psychological manner. When taking care of the Duchess’s baby she contemplates taking the child and saving it from being murdered by the Duchess, but unfortunately the logical and responsible side of Alice only lasts for a moment as the child turns out to be a piglet. “‘If it had grown up,’ she said to herself, ‘it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig, I think’” (Carroll 86). The feelings of responsibility and logic are real within Alice and mark her first step towards adulthood, later surreally concurred by the Cheshire Cat when he asks her what happened to the child and she tells him that it turned into a pig and he replies: “‘I thought it would’” (Carroll 88). The second indication of Alice’s transgression towards adulthood is her use of etiquettes and how she is offended by the lack of manners demonstrated by the inhabitants of Wonderland. “‘Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. ‘I don’t see any wine,’ she remarked. ‘There isn’t any,’ said the March Hare. ‘Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it,’ said Alice angrily’” (Carroll 91).

The only thing that ties Alice with Wonderland is the ticking clock. The theme of a ticking clock is also recognized in J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan where the antagonist Captain Hook is terrified of a specific crocodile that can be identified by its ticking clock. The clock represents adulthood or maturity in Peter Pan just like in Alice’s Adventures in
Wonderland. Alice chases the time-obsessed white rabbit with a watch, the Hatter reveals that Time is in fact a he: “‘If you knew Time as well as I do,’ said the Hatter, ‘you wouldn’t talk about wasting it. It’s him’” (Carroll 93). The dormouse is in exile because while singing for the Queen of Hearts she exclaimed that he was murdering time and demanded that his head was chopped off. Time is the main thread in the novel that refers to the age and maturity of the characters. Finally, while Alice is talking to the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle she comes to terms with the fact that she has matured and changed during the course of her adventures and she will never again be the same: she has entered adulthood. “‘I could tell you my adventures – beginning from this morning,’ said Alice a little timidly: ‘but it’s no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then’” (Carroll 122 -123). Just like Alice and her dream of Wonderland are metaphors for the gruelling change of maturity and growing up, poor Max is faced with the same problem, and just like Alice he seeks his escape in a dream that projects his inner psychological conflicts to seem real. The historian and legal theorist Desmond Manderson points this out in his article about myth of law in children’s literature:

Max’s dream represents a child’s growing up in terms that are embedded in the myths of the history of the West; its multiple layers echo, resonate, and parallel the emergence of civilization from savagery and the emergence of modernity from feudalism….The wild things, like medieval knights in some chanson de geste, go from hostility to love, and from violence to dancing, with a speed that appears perplexing. (Manderson 113)

The notion of time is somewhat irrelevant to children and timelessness is a characteristic in children’s literature. The sense of presence is what drives the protagonists in children’s literature and what the reader embraces, forming a key element in the story.

and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max

and he sailed off through night and day
and in and out of weeks
and almost over a year
to where the wild things are.

(Sendak 13-15)

A year has passed in Max’s mind by the time he encounters the wild things and he has sailed across the world in his own private boat. The fact that the boat is private is an indication of Max’s yearning to be independent and to act on his own free will. The boat belongs only to him and therefore he can do what he pleases with it. His own boat is his transportation between the worlds of imagination and reality but the boat also represents Max himself, and the illustrations show that the boat is named after him. The time evaporates during Max’s stay on where the wild things are and while he manages to tame the wild things, start the wild rumpus and feel homesick, the hot supper on his table indicates that he has not been alone in his room for long. Time and imagination have no interaction and they blur the boundaries.

Maurice Sendak revealed in an interview with The Guardian that he based the wild things on his Polish relatives that used to visit his family in his youth. The relatives spoke no English but would show their affection for him by grabbing and twisting his face which he mistook for a cruel gesture. Maurice Sendak also states that his mother’s cooking was so terrible that he and his sibling thought:

“there was every possibility that they [the relatives] would eat me, or my sister or my brother … So that’s who the Wild Things are. They’re foreigners, lost in America, without a language. And children are petrified of them, and don’t understand that these gestures these twisting of flesh, are meant to be affectionate” (Flood).

This revelation about the origin of the wild things strengthens the notion of alienation in the novel as the wild things, like Sendak’s Polish relatives, are stranded in a foreign place.
However, Max is also alienated from society just like the wilds things as he does not behave according to the standard rules and norms. He dresses like a wolf and he behaves uncivilly as he chases and scares the family dog with a fork, hangs his own teddy bear by his arm and puts a nail through the wall. He is alienated from his family and disobeys and defies his mother and finally he is alienated from civilization and he retreats to nature. The difference between Max and the wild things is that while Max has a choice about his alienation, the wild things have no alternative.

2.1 The Anthropomorphic Animals and The Real Animals
Animals are often used in children’s literature to indicate the contrast between civilization and nature. Anthropomorphic animals frequently appear in Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and seem to be a mixture of both civilization and nature; civilized animals that can only live in a fantasy world with no boundaries and nor limitations. Still, these anthropomorphic animals also present a series of problems for the protagonist as they are perhaps not authoritative figures or are at least, hard to relate to. The white rabbit in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland for example is presented as a time-obsessed creature that seems to have no interest in anything but time and could be described as a careless creature in failing to notice the intruder, Alice. Most of Wonderland’s inhabitants are simple, not terribly intelligent creatures, much like the wild things in Where the Wild Things Are. The wild things seem at first to be beastly and monstrous creatures but they turn out to be simple minded and easily tamed by Max. The wild things are like the rabbit in Wonderland, talking animals that are civilized to a degree but could hardly be considered intelligent creatures as they never defy Max nor question his authority. As professor Maria Lassén-Seger states in her thesis Adventures Into Otherness: Child Metamorphs in Late Twentieth-Century Children’s Literature: “These hybrid forms of talking animals tend to trouble rather than reinforce binary distinctions
between human and animal, adult and child (Lassén-Seger 33). Talking animals can be confusing for the reader but they are important to strengthen the authority of the protagonists. Max becomes the leader of the wild things because he is superior to them; even though they are much larger and more intimidating than him they surrender to his courage. Interestingly, Max fantasizes about being a talking animal; dresses up in a wolf suit and his behaviour towards his mother and the wild things resembles of a wild animal.

Max’s wolf suit indicates his desire to behave like a wild animal and alienate himself from the human adult world. Manderson points out in his article about the constitution of law and emergence of law in children’s literature, how the myth behind the wolf has been interpreted throughout the ages: “Now the image of the wolf has for a long time been synonymous in human society with ideas of alienation from human society, and abundant with connotations of uncontrollable animal fury” (Manderson 104). The wolf has the connotation of a wild and untamed animal that does not obey to any law or rules. Wolves also have a social hierarchy within their pack and are ruled by a leader that the rest must follow and obey. This analogy could be applied to Max’s relationship with his mother in which he defies his leader and he finds a new group where he can become the leader. The social hierarchy of the wolves is also parallel to human family hierarchy or even human social hierarchy in some regards. “The ‘lone wolf’ has long been a symbol not just for an outsider to the social order, but precisely for an outlaw. An outlaw is a grave threat to community” (Manderson 104). For centuries the notion of outlaws has fascinated children who often seek to role-play outlaws in their games, such as Cowboys and Indians. The lone wolf making mischief, is mirrored in Max’s youthful behaviour, as he intentionally displays disobedience towards to his mother and his society. Being disobedient and alienating himself from the world initially forms a part of Max’s game yet, when he is caught in his act of disobedience the tables are turned and he finds himself sent
to his room and alienated against his will which he finds less appealing. The wolf suit could also be Sendak’s own way of playing with the notion of “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” in an inverted sense when it comes to Max. Sendak could be alluding to the fact that children are not as pure and perfect as many seem to believe and that they can be quite cruel and malicious. Max behaves horribly towards those he loves; he threatens to eat his mother and assuming he cares for the family dog, he still terrorizes it by chasing it with a dinner fork. This repeated notion of eating the ones you love is a reference towards animal and barbaric behaviour. Max’s behaviour is not pure and innocent but cruel and vicious which seems contradicts and challenges the popular notion that children, or at least protagonists in children’s literature, are always innocent and sweet. Lewis Carroll also makes Alice reveal her barbaric nature in *Through The Looking-Glass* when she wants to chew her own nurse, “‘Nurse! Do let’s pretend that I am a hungry hyena, and you’re a bone!’” (Carroll 159). Once again, the conflict of civilization and nature emerges. Max dresses up as a wolf and chases the family dog; domestic dogs and wolves are of the same origin but while dogs are tame, wolves are wild. The difference is that Max pretends to be a wild, undomesticated animal in a world he knows is filled with rules. Max is fully aware of his mischief and retreats into his imaginary wilderness as a further act of defiance.

The rabbit appears in several children’s books, as it has been a popular pet amongst children. The rabbit symbolizes warmth and kindness but also has a teasing and playful nature. Beatrix Potter’s *Peter Rabbit* (1902) is mischievous, disobedient and dresses as a human, who defies his own mother and goes straight into Mr. McGregor’s garden to steal lettuce. There is a striking resemblance between Peter Rabbit and Max, but Peter Rabbit returns home sick after his adventures and must have chamomile tea, while his rabbit siblings get hot supper. In A.A Milne’s children’s novel *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) the Rabbit is one of few characters in the story that is a real animal unlike the protagonist Winnie-the-
Pooh who is a teddy bear and their friends Eeyore and Piglet are both toys, and probably the most famous rabbit of all time is the cartoon character, Bugs Bunny, who has entertained children for the past half a century. All these rabbits share the same characteristic of being entertaining, cheeky and somewhat unruly. The time-obsessed, anthropomorphic white rabbit in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland makes ideal bait for Alice, who to satisfy her own curiosity she chases the waistcoat-clad rabbit into the hole. The anthropomorphic rabbit lures Alice into the fantasy world of Wonderland but upon her arrival there, the rabbit does not supply any answers and Alice is left to fend for herself and to find her own way through Wonderland. Max encounters the wild things once he has sailed for “almost over a year” (Sendak 15), and when he meets the wild things, he takes charge of them by staring at them which leads them to proclaim Max “the most wild thing of all” (Sendak 20). Max refuses to obey the wild things, or to be intimidated by them and stands up to the monsters. Neither the white rabbit nor the wild things can control Alice or Max and despite the animals’ and monsters’ anthropomorphic features they ultimately succumb to the children’s superiority. Still, the anthropomorphic animals have a significant purpose in the stories; the rabbit represents childish curiosity and the wolf represents childish disobedience. Through role-play the protagonists, Max and Alice, venture into the vastness of their own imaginations.

2.2 Monsters and their Roles in Children’s Lives
Both Max and Alice find their way into a magical place in wild nature. Max’s deserted land of the wild things resembles a tropical island but is inhabited by monsters with beastly appearances. Alice’s Wonderland is filled with absurd animals and inhabitants, just as highly unorthodox: “I’ve been in many gardens before, but none of the flowers could talk.” ‘Put your hand down, and feel the ground,’ said the Tiger-lily. ‘Then you’ll know why’” (Carroll 173). The question remains as to why children seek the wilderness when
attempting defiance and why unknown, beastly or surreal creatures make such good material for children’s literature? Both Max and Alice seek their magic worlds in their sleep and their perception of nature and a fantastical and entertaining world is revealed. Max’s deserted tropical island represents his hope for his own kingdom and to lead his own life without constrictions. The wild things are monsters that serve as a barometer of Max’s courage as he overcomes them. Nature is a realm where children can gain the upper hand, as there are no rules that must be adhered to like those Max and Alice must obey in society. Wonderland is the product of Alice’s overactive imagination but she is still dumbfounded that it has become real. Wonderland is not a sinister place but the inhabitants do not treat Alice kindly as they repeatedly point out that she is strange looking, not terribly bright and has bad manners. A good example is Alice’s conversation with the Rose:

‘It isn’t manners for us to begin, you know,’ said the Rose, ‘and I really was wondering when you’d speak! Said I to myself, “ Her face has got some sense in it, though it is not a clever one! Still, you’re the right colour, and that goes a long way.’ (Carroll 172)

Nature offers an endless playground where space has no limitations and rules do not apply and therefore becomes a perfect setting for children with never-ending imaginations. However, the downside is that nature not nurturing, not kind and with no rules it can become chaotic. For these reasons, the children retreat back into the arms of their loved ones and leave the magical kingdoms behind. Max goes back to a hot supper that represents his mother’s love and Alice wakes up in the arms of her sister who tells her it is time for tea, which also represents nurture and care. However, the unfamiliar setting of nature is vital in generating the awakenings experienced by the protagonists after several psychological hindrances, projected by the foreign creatures invented by their own creative minds.
If wild nature is the setting for Max and Alice then the inhabitants of nature catalyse and drive the events in the story. But where do the inhabitants come from? Just like Athena sprung out of Zeus’ head, the wild things come out of Max’s subconscious and Wonderland out of Alice’s imagination. This theme of dead objects coming to life or fantastical creatures becoming real is persistent in children’s literature. The German author E.T.A Hoffman wrote the tale of *The Nutcracker and The Mouse King* (1816), about a nutcracker who comes to life, later immortalized by the Russian composer P.I. Tchaikovsky who turned the tale of *The Nutcracker* into a ballet and also, as mentioned earlier, *Pinocchio* the wooden puppet who becomes a human boy at the end of the story. *Where the Wild Things Are* opens with a drawing on the wall of a monster that resembles the monsters Max later encounters in the land of the wild things; Sendak is insinuating that the wild things are Max’s creation.

The wild things greet Max with “their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws” (Sendak 17-18), which, while unpleasant, emulates the illustration of Max that appears earlier in the book where Max is jumping down the stairs in his wolf suit with his claws out, rolling his eyes, roaring at the poor family dog. These situations are identical but in the latter Max takes control and the wild things become tame things and dependant on him. Max dominates the wild things with his stare and decides when they sleep and sends them to bed without supper, just like his mother controls him in reality. When the wild things become tamed and obedient, Max grows lonely and homesick. Max’s loneliness marks his alienation of being in control when he still does not have the maturity to control the situation; Max misses his mother’s authority and nurture, so he goes back to his room where his supper awaits him, still hot. The wild things spring out of Max’s subconscious to remind him of the importance and
consequences of good behaviour, or at the very least, a correct behaviour serve as a reminder of values.

Alice’s world seems to be a creation of distorted ideas of etiquette and values from the time period. Wonderland is maze-like and its inhabitants are not relatable and do not generate immediate empathy as they are talking animals, and their attitudes do not align with human manners and mannerism of the Victorian era. Wonderland’s nature is filled with deep forests and talking plants and is as uncultivated and unpredictable as nature itself. Alice is merely passing through as both guest and intruder while doing so, she reflects the contrast between the nature of Wonderland and that, which she knows in her own world. The comparison of dual natures is what makes Alice understand and appreciate the familiarity of her background. The Victorian era was constricted and cultivated; whereas Wonderland is the exact opposite, and is therefore exciting as it satisfies Alice’s curiosity.

However, Wonderland is a wonderful lesson for Alice to understand that while she seeks freedom from the adults she ultimately requires boundaries and limitations in order to feel safe or understood. A good example of this is revealed at the end of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland where Alice must participate in a trial.

Alice had never been in a court of justice before, but she had read about them in books, and she was quite pleased to find that she knew the name of nearly everything there. ‘That’s the judge,’ she said to herself, ‘because of his great wig’. (Carroll 127)

Alice is familiar with the law and order system in her own background and she is relieved to finally recognize something from her own background in this strange Wonderland. However, like everything else in Wonderland the trial does not make sense. The “jurymen” must write down their own names in order not to forget them, the witnesses are told to give evidence or they will be decapitated and the main evidence has no true witnesses. Alice grows tired of the absurdity of the trial as no conclusion is reached and the trial seems to be
have been held for no reason. In a moment of frustration Alice reveals the true nature of the inhabitants of Wonderland and her imagination. “‘Who cares for you?’ said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time.) ‘You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’ (Carroll 141). The inhabitants of Wonderland are reduced to a pack of cards “flying down upon her” (Carroll 141) and Alice screams, “half of fright and half of anger” (Carroll 141) before she wakes up lying in her sister’s lap. Alice is no longer afraid once she awakens and she wants to tell her sister about her curious dream but is sent inside to have her tea. Meanwhile, when Alice’s sister dreams of Alice in her Wonderland with all its wonderful inhabitants, she resists her eyes as “all would change to dull reality” (Carroll 143). Still, she wishes that Alice would one day share her stories with other little children “…and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale,” (Carroll 144). Alice’s sister clearly hopes that Alice will preserve her innocence and creativity in a world filled with glum reality and darkness.
3. The Power of Childish Sincerity

Adults often envy children for their innocent perception of the world and their ability to turn mundane life into an adventure by simply using their creativity and dwelling in their imaginations. Sendak revealed in an interview with Bill Moyers that Max is in fact a braver version of himself. Sendak had many run-ins with his mother, who would chase him around the house to scold him and punish him. Sendak makes Max his alter-ego through whom he has the courage to fight back and challenge his mother although the consequences are not what Max initially had in mind. Max is like all children; they are not born with social etiquettes and have no sense of manners unless these are taught to them. Sendak makes the point that children can be cruel and mean but not driven by spite and any malicious intent, moreover by their innocence and curiosity, as he explains to Bill Moyers in an interview:

“Oh, yes. We’re animals. We’re violent. We’re criminal. We’re not so far away from the gorillas and the apes, those beautiful creatures. So, of course. And then, we’re supposed to be civilized. We’re supposed to go to work every day. We’re supposed to be nice to our friends and send Christmas cards to our parents.

We’re supposed to do all these things which trouble us deeply because it’s so against what we naturally would want to do. And if I’ve done anything, I’ve had kids express themselves as they are, impolitely, lovingly... they don’t mean any harm. They just don’t know what the right way is.” (Moyers)

Sendak embraces the alleged rudeness and impoliteness characteristics of children as an element of their nature, rather than deliberate bad behavior. Society imposes many rules and restrictions upon children, and just like animals in a cage, they respond by breaking rules and disobeying their opponents. Nevertheless, Sendak also points out that the natural sincerity that children possess differentiates them from adults and their lack of sincerity.
Adults often consider sincere honesty to be rude and impolite but as Sendak points out, the brutal honesty can spur further creation.

Sendak embraces his own narrow-minded youth as an inevitable part of being a child but he uses his memories to create a world that every child fantasizes about and yearns to see for itself. The normalcy of Max’s behavior makes the story all the more relatable and believable for young readers as well as for adult readers who can recognize their own behaviour in the past. Max’s mother, who is daunted by Max’s antics, is also made very real through her subtle description as she is tired and presumably sick of Max’s bad behaviour, thereby wanting him out of her sight, a very reasonable position but not a particularly honorable feeling to admit. When Sendak was asked in the interview with Bill Moyers whether Where the Wild Things Are was a story he experienced or a made up story he affirmed that it was a real story:

“Well, that’s what art is. I mean, you don’t make up stories. You live your life. And I was not Max. I did not have the courage that Max had. And I didn’t have the mother that Max had. Who would give you, love you and you know this little scene which is so trivial. It happens at everybody’s house, happens every Tuesday and Thursday.

He has a fit. She has a fit. It’ll go on till he’s about 35, goes into therapy, wonders why he can’t get married, okay? Cause people often say, “What happens to Max?” And it’s such a coy question that I always say, “Well, he’s in therapy forever. He has to wear a straitjacket when he’s with his therapist.” (Moyers)

Sendak makes fun of the fate of Max as there is no fate for Max; Max’s life ends on the last page. The acceptance of human nature marks the critical point of Where the Wild Things Are and portrays errors and flaws as a natural part of human nature. In Where the Wild Things Are Sendak shows that ugliness and evil exist in the world but as a counterpart he creates an optimistic protagonist that learns the value of love and faces his fears. This
theme of projecting beasts or evil is prevalent in some of Sendak’s other books and therefore many parents oppose his work. Sendak could be slated a realist in his work, as he does not try to mask the shameful human behaviour; yet he also manages to create a setting that is unreal and characters that are surreal and even scary. Sendak appreciates that his young readers as being intelligent enough to grasp the notion that there is evil in the world but claims he “implies it”, rather than illustrate it directly.

“But they have to know it’s possible things are bad. But, they are surrounded by people who love them and will protect them but cannot hide the fact that there is something bad…Enormous innocence to really not now how evil the world can be. How can it be so evil?” (Moyers)

Sendak was continuously reminded of the fate of his Polish relatives in the Holocaust and just like other children raised in the 1940s, he was made aware of the existence of evil in the world. The idea of evil grew very prevalent in American society through the cruelty of the World Wars and also the devastating effect of the Depression and consequent change in social hierarchy. A new social hierarchy was formed out of a grieving nation filled with immigrants with a bloody past who clung to the idea of the American dream. The capitalistic ideology flourished and everyone wanted to participate in the prosperous society and forget the painful past. The middle class grew, filling the suburbs and companies and enterprises became big and wealthy and the economy blossomed. Following the American dream was deeply appealing to the immigrants that had fled Europe to the United States in hope of a better life. However, horrific memories haunted the nation, both for the immigrants and the citizens and everyone wanted to shield their children from the horrific past and history.

For children, the weapon against horrific reality is escape into imaginary places such as Max’s land of wild things or Alice’s Wonderland. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was published in 1865 while the Civil War was raging in the United States
and although the war did not take place on British soil it had an impact on Great Britain in terms of business and ties with the former colony. The 19th century was filled with radical changes that had a great impact on the British nation; the Industrial Revolution affected women and children greatly as there was a huge demand for labor at factories across the country. People migrated from the countryside to cities for work and the focus shifted from rural labor to urban labor and consequently, unions were created to safeguard people’s rights. Despite the rapid evolution in Great Britain during the Industrial Revolution the British Empire experienced a great decline during the latter part of the 19th century. Other countries were surpassing Great Britain in terms of technology and Great Britain was no longer a dominating Empire. Carroll must have been affected by the situation in his homeland and his creation of Wonderland could be interpreted in part as a parody of Great Britain. The Queen of Hearts acts like a small child that is constantly throwing a tantrums but unfortunately has all the power and demands her subjects to obey her at all times, even when she is clearly in the wrong. The Queen of Hearts could be interpreted as a personification of the British Empire that yearns for its former power and glory but has lost all respect and instead controls everyone through fear. Railways greatly influenced on Great Britain in terms of transportation and economy during the 19th century and Carroll also touches on the subject in *Through the Looking-Glass* as Alice is taught a lesson by the inhabitants of Wonderland while on the train.

‘Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!’
‘I shall dream about a thousand pounds tonight, I know I shall!’ thought Alice.

All this time the Guard was looking at her, first through a telescope, then through an microscope, and then through an opera-glass. At last he said, ‘You’re travelling the wrong way,’ and shut up the window and went away.

(Carroll 182-83)
Although Alice questions the strange Wonderland and tries to reason with its inhabitants, her own inner experience is very childlike and sincere. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice becomes a queen and is very excited about her crown and her new position.

So she got up and walked about – rather stiffly just at first, as she was afraid that the crown might come off; but she comforted herself with the thought that there was nobody to see her, ‘and if I really am a Queen,’ she said as she sat down again, ‘I shall be able to manage it quite well in time.’ (Carroll 257)

Reigning seems like a role-play game for Alice, as she dresses up as a queen and walks stiffly, just like Max makes believe his wolf suit. Sendak wrote about the wild things based on the appearance of his relatives but Carroll used his own society as the base for Wonderland.

In U.C. Knoepflmacher’s book, *Ventures into Childland*, a meeting is described between the great American author Mark Twain, the Scottish author George MacDonald and Lewis Carroll at a London theatrical. Twain was less than impressed by Carroll and wrote in his diary:

We met a great many other interesting people, among them Lewis Carroll, author of the immortal *Alice* – but he was only interesting to look at, for he was the stilllest and shyest full-grown man I have ever met except ‘Uncle Remus.’ Doctor MacDonald and several other lively talkers went briskly on for a couple of hours, but Carroll sat still all the while except that now and then he asked a question. His answers were brief. I do not remember any of them. (Knoepflmacher 151)

Lewis Carroll, whose real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, was a mathematician like his father. Carroll came from a large family, and was the third of eleven children, most of whom were girls. He used to write poems, draw sketches and generally entertain his sisters with his wit and active imagination. Carroll had a wonderful childhood but he did experience problems such as a speech impediment and deafness in one ear, which caused
him to become shy and perhaps withdrawn later in life (Irwin 9-13). Carroll always preferred children’s company, perhaps it was his silly and shy attitude which Twain describes that rendered Carroll to be an outsider in the adult world. Still, Carroll was a great storyteller and made up riddles easily, and presumably, children were attracted to him because he was fun and entertaining company. Both Alice books encompass the reluctant theme of Alice growing up and echo an almost grieving tone of the possibility of losing her childish sincerity. As stated above, the end of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland concludes with Alice’s sister voicing the hope that Alice will grow up to tell her stories to other children while still “remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days” (Carroll 144), or in other words, she hopes Alice will maintain her sincerity and will be able share it with other children. Through the Looking-Glass ends with Alice asking her kitten who was dreaming, was it Alice or was it the Red King? Then the narrator asks the reader: “Which do you think it was?” (Carroll 278). The fact that Alice thinks that the dream could have been the that of the Red King’s underlines the fact that Alice is still a child who sincerely believes she could have been a part of a chess piece’s dream. Still, it is the narrator who asks the reader to decide whether Alice was dreaming or not; just like Max’s journey ends with him seeing his hot supper and leaving the reader to decide whether Max was dreaming or if he met the wild things for real.

The greatest playwright of all time William Shakespeare ended the last play he ever wrote, The Tempest, on the same reluctant note as Carroll and Sendak. Shakespeare’s protagonist, Prospero, speaks to his audience and states his purpose in the play:

Prospero: In this bare island by your spell;

But release me from my bands

With the help of your good hands.

Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please.

(Epilogue 8-13)

The perception of what is real and what is imaginary blurs and the audience must decide the fate of the characters. Like Shakespeare, Carroll and Sendak leave it up to the reader to either indulge in fantasy or to accept the grim fate that lies at the end of a novel; mundane reality.

3.1. The Final Rite of Passage
In the 1970s Sendak chose the Rosenbach Museum and the Library of Philadelphia as the home to his artwork. It may not have been a coincidence that Sendak chose this particular museum as it prides itself of owning the first edition of Cervante’s *Don Quixote*, William Blake’s original drawings and Lewis Carroll’s personal copy of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and over 600 of Carroll’s letters, photographs and sketches (Rosenbach Museum). The journalist Ramin Setoodeh states in his article about *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* that Sendak has a photograph of Alice Liddell in his studio; Alice Liddell was the inspiration of Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Sendak seems to have a great admiration for Carroll and his talent to entertain children.

*Where the Wild Things Are*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are still amongst the most popular children’s books in the United States, loved by adults as well as children. Both novels speak a language that children understand while adults interpret the books nostalgically as they remind them of their youth and may even cause them to pine for the simple time of childhood. The honesty and sincerity of *Where the Wild Things Are* appeals to the reader and it makes the journey into fantasy all the more acceptable and pleasant. Alice’s journey is somewhat more frightening as Wonderland is confusing and its inhabitants are hostile towards Alice. Still, like Pinocchio
who endures alienation by his peers and must face several difficult obstacles to fulfil his main ambition and becomes a human boy, Alice is also alienated by the inhabitants of Wonderland and faces several obstacles but is ultimately rewarded by the journey created in her imagination. Alice and Max are not only rewarded with the experience that has been created within their imaginations but also learn lessons and they return to reality with their newfound knowledge. Seth Lerer points this out in his book *Children’s Literature: a reader’s history from Aesop to Harry Potter* that children: “are born without ideas, and what they learn comes to them through their experience” (Lerer 104). The experience of venturing into imagination is the essence of these two novels and the protagonists return to society not as adults but as children stepping towards adulthood; their adventures are rites of passage into society. Joseph Campbell states this in his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*:

> Rites of initiation and installation, then, teach the lesson of the essential oneness of the individual and the group; seasonal festivals open a larger horizon. As the individual is an organ of society, so is the tribe or city – so is humanity entire – only a phase of the mighty organism of the cosmos. (Campbell 384)

The essence of this rite of passage is the fact that both Max and Alice are children and lack the physical stamina and the psychological endurance of an adult, yet manage to conquer their opponents and face danger, therefore, becoming heroes in the eyes of the reader.
Conclusion
Sendak and Carroll have created strange, surreal worlds that are filled with rude and beastly creatures and settings that are a far cry from mundane reality. Through the protagonist’s experiences the reader can also escape into imaginary worlds and is stimulated by its visual attributes and by the obscurity of the language.

Carroll concludes *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* on an optimistic note as Alice’s sister hopes that Alice will continue to tell her stories when she grows up and entertain other children with them. Alice’s ability to preserve this talent that every child possesses – an active imagination – is the entire basis of the novel itself for without an imagination neither Wonderland nor its entertaining inhabitants would have ever existed. Both the journeys that Alice and Max experience in their abyss of imagination and creativity are pivotal in order for them to learn a valuable lessons about their own backgrounds and therefore their own society. Sendak rightly points out in the interview with Moyers that ugliness does exist in our world but that fortunately, we have our loved ones to rely on. For children, parents are the ones to comfort them, and leave hot supper for them on their table, even when they have made a mischief of one kind or another.
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