

**MATURATION AND LOSING CHILDLIKE NATURE IN THE NOVELS *ALICE'S  
ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND* (1865) AND *PETER PAN* (1911)**

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**MATURATION AND LOSING CHILDLIKE NATURE IN THE NOVELS**  
***ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND (1865) AND PETER PAN (1911)***

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**ABSTRACT**

Maturation and losing childlike nature are presented within children's literature, specifically in the novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. This study has two objectives: (1) to identify and describe the issue of maturation and losing childlike nature depicted through the protagonists from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*; (2) to analyse and compare the issue of maturation and losing childlike nature in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. This research will tackle the issue of maturation and losing childlike nature by using an extrinsic and intrinsic approach. The utilisation of psychological developmental theories by Miller (2011) discusses the reasoning behind certain actions, thoughts and emotions conveyed in the respective novels whilst the application of comparative literary theories by Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998) will focus on the distinctive and similar comparisons made between the two novels. The method used for this study is the qualitative descriptive method, where the implementation of quotes from the respective novels are used to support written statements. This study's results state that Alice Liddell displays a better reaction towards the issue of maturing and losing her childlike nature at the end of her story. Wendy Darling, however, has already been described to have accepted her fate since the beginning, yet she slightly yearns to travel back to Neverland at the end of the story. Both Carroll and Barrie use the conventions of fantasy elements and their settings distinctly yet are applied to reach the same aim.

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Keywords: Maturation, Losing Childlike Nature, Alice, Wendy, Wonderland, Neverland

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## Background

The term “literature” is “etymologically derived from the Latin word “*litteratura*” (which means letter)” (Klarer, 1999: 1). It is also explained by Roberts (2007: 1) that literature is a “composition that tell[s] stories, dramatize situations, express emotions, and analyze and advocate ideas”. In literature itself, there are four different types of literary categories/genres, namely: prose fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction prose.

**“Prose fiction, or narrative fiction, includes myths, parables, romances, novels, and short stories.** Fictional works usually focus on one or a few major characters who change and grow (in their ability to make decisions, their awareness or insight, their attitude toward others, their sensitivity, and their moral capacity) as a result of how they deal with other characters and how they attempt to solve their problems.” (Roberts, 2007: 2)

To elaborate on Roberts’ explanation above, the term “novel”, according to Merriam-Webster (2022), is “an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals with human experience through a connected sequence of events”. It is a collection of words and sentences written into pages that tell a story; a story that may vary from one genre to another with the option to write in various perspectives. Authors have the freedom to craft a storyline that depicts or portrays topics by utilising a variety of poetic mediums such as metaphors to engage the audience and pique their interest in the narrative of the novels.

The stories of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* begins with the protagonists situated in different settings and environments; and unravels how these characters deal with the problems and consequences that growing up entails – with the result of each character varying. The selected novels that were chosen to be discussed are both considered as a part of children’s classics whose genres fall into the ‘fantasy’ category. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) written by Lewis Carroll, follows the story of a young girl named Alice Liddell and her journey in Wonderland. The foreshadowing of maturing and losing childlike nature evidently presents itself throughout the novel seen through Carroll’s descriptive writing, along with illustrations to display the array of emotions and actions of the characters. The use of descriptive writing and illustrations also present themselves in J.M. Barrie’s novel, *Peter Pan*.

*Peter Pan* (1911) written by J.M. Barrie, talks about a girl named Wendy Darling who embarks on a journey to Neverland with her brothers. To get there, she and her brothers travel

with a boy named Peter Pan, a long-time resident of Neverland who teaches them how to fly. Neverland is famously known as a place where whoever stays there, never really grows up. Like Wonderland, Neverland is a place where time moves differently with the real world. The time gaps act as an element to distinguish the fictional world and the real world, however, the idea of approach maturation and losing childlike nature presents itself as the main focus of the two stories.

### **Statement of Problems**

The problems in this research are:

1. How is the issue of maturation and losing childlike nature depicted through the protagonists of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Peter Pan* (1911)?
2. How is the comparison of maturation and losing childlike nature in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Peter Pan* (1911)?

### **Review of Related Literature**

It is imperative that this research applies the usage of other sources such as journal articles and theses' that are related to the study to support the observations and arguments. This allows a better comprehension for readers who are curious regarding maturation and losing childlike nature. Several journal articles and theses' in relation to the topic are as such:

1. "Alice's Adventures in Adaptation: The Evolution of Power in Children's and Young Adult Literature" is a thesis written by Hibdon (2020). The objective of Hibdon's thesis is to "analyze and identify the development of power in various adaptations of Lewis Carroll's children's novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)". She uses David Rudd's definition of power to elaborate her "distinction in children's literature and young adult literature". By using the qualitative descriptive method to support her arguments, Hibdon's results state that "the ways in which the protagonists react to the happenings of Wonderland reflect their age, maturity, and growth in their search for power" (91). She also mentions that despite children's literature being a pivotal aspect in the area of study, "young adult literature [...] is just as relevant and important to study" even though the two categories are to "be separated".
2. "Leaving Neverland for Narnia: Childhood and Gender in Peter Pan, The Secret Garden, and The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe" (2018) is a thesis written by Calabria Turner. The objective of Turner's thesis is to discuss "the prevalence of adult nostalgia present in

children's novels" to a further depth regarding the "ideas [that] form a child in the literature era" (4–5). She theorizes that by discovering the "application of societal gender roles onto children, [...] the potential confinement or freedom is given new realization within the novels" (5). By using the qualitative method, Turner states that as a result, "children's novels generate discussion on the definition of childhood and adulthood [...] [as] childhood serves a purpose even in adulthood and should not be forgotten" (68).

3. "Peter Pan's Denial to Grow Old as Seen in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*" is a thesis written by Puspita (2018). The objective of Puspita's thesis is to "describe the characteristic of the main character" and to "analyze Peter Pan's characteristics that reveal his denial to grow old". She uses the psychoanalytic theory, the theory of character and characterization, theory of personality development, and theory of self-realization. By using the qualitative method, Puspita reaches two conclusive results: the first regarding the description of Peter Pan's characteristics whom she describes as "nescient, self-proclaimed, impolite, and hateful". Her second result mentions that "the main character does not undergo stages of development [therefore] not [achieving] his self-realization". She continues to elaborate the results of her study by stating that Peter Pan "is the example of a character that denies to grow old, and as a result he did not achieve his self-realization" (xi).
4. "The Flight from Neverland: Coming of Age Through a Century of Peter Pan" is a thesis written by McMahan (2015). The objective of McMahan's study is to "track the progression of the social expectations placed on children and adults through J.M. Barrie's play, *Peter Pan*, and various subsequent adaptations of that work". She begins her thesis by explaining Gilead's article regarding "the importance of the adult within children's literature" and theorises that "[s]elf-awareness becomes the gateway to adulthood within the narrative of *Peter Pan* and without this self-awareness, one is not able to fully become integrated into society" (6). By using the qualitative descriptive method to support McMahan's findings, her results state that "Barrie's first production of *Peter Pan* was to [...] highlight the important of transitioning from a child into an adult" (94).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilises two theories to describe maturation and losing childlike nature through an extrinsic and intrinsic perspective. To elaborate in brief, the extrinsic approach "concern[s] themselves with its setting, its environment, [and] its external causes" whilst the

intrinsic approach studies elements within literary works such as imagery, metaphors, symbols, etc. as well as “the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves (Wellek & Warren, 1949: 65, 139). *Theories of Developmental Psychology*, written by Miller (2011), elaborates the different environmental factors that affect psychological development on children’s behaviour by discussing the various types of psychological theories from herself and other psychologists. To do this, the definition of psychology in literature will first be elaborated for a general comprehension. Stated by Wellek & Warren (1949: 75), “psychology of literature” refers to the:

1. Psychological study of the writer, as type and as individual
2. Study of the creative process
3. Study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature
4. Effects of literature upon its readers (audience psychology)

Despite Wendy and Alice’s age being undisclosed in the books, it is highly likely that they are roughly around the same age through the illustrations that have been provided. Miller’s work will be used to focus on the extrinsic elements found within the two novels and their effects on the protagonists whilst Tötösy de Zepetnek’s work will be used to assist the comparative viewpoints and intrinsic elements found between the protagonists. The characters that are being compared are Alice Liddell from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and Wendy Darling from J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911) – both of whom are protagonists in their own respective stories. Based on the two theories, we focus on comparing how Alice and Wendy perceive the world, people, and how they handle situations.

## **Methodology**

This research analyses its data through a qualitative descriptive perspective by applying Bogdan & Biklen’s concept of qualitative research. The terminology of qualitative research, as stated by Bogdan & Biklen (1998) is that it is “descriptive” and “takes the form of words or pictures rather than numbers”. This type of method signifies its vitality towards researchers who chose to implement “quotations from [their] data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation [...] as description succeeds as a method of data gathering” (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998: 5–6).

## **1. Preparation:**

Prior to conducting this research, the two novels, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* were first to be read to help grasp the perception of the storyline, its characters and their behaviour. After reading the two novels, several topics regarding them were loosely formulated and contemplated before settling on an interest. Once the topic of interest has been decided, the correlating journal articles and theses in relation to this study have been chosen to support personal statements, assumptions, and observations.

## **2. Data Collection:**

This research primarily collects its data from two novels, of which includes characters who are shown to have different reactions towards maturation and losing their childlike nature. Novels of such are: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* written by Lewis Carroll (1865) and *Peter Pan* written by J.M. Barrie (1911). To collect the data, several techniques have been used by utilising both digital and physical resources to take notes.

## **3. Data Analysis:**

In analysing the data, the utilisation of Miller's *Theories of Developmental Psychology* (2011) and Tötösy de Zepetnek's *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* (1998) theories were used to support written statements; assumptions; and to reflect the behavioural approach displayed by the characters regarding maturation and losing their childlike nature – comparatively and psychologically. The consideration of cultural factors was regarded to elaborate on the distinctions found between the two periodical eras the stories were set in and how this issue is currently dealt with in today's society.

### **The Issue of Maturation and Losing Childlike Nature Depicted Through the Protagonists from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* (1911)**

#### **Maturation and Losing Childlike Nature in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)**

This section aims to unpack how the issue of maturation and losing childlike nature is depicted through Carroll's writing regarding the main character of his story by identifying and describing the types of maturation Alice experiences.

##### **2.1.1 Alice Liddell**

Throughout this story, Alice undergoes physical; mental; and behavioural maturation that is highlighted in various chapters and displays how it affects Alice.

### 2.1.1.1 Physical Maturation

Freud and Erikson mention that physical changes are a part of the process of child development, and that the changes that happen are in relation to physical structure and how an individual adapts to them as they grow older. The first encounter of physical maturation is when Alice is looking for a solution to fit through a small door behind a curtain by swallowing the liquid content found inside a bottle. During her equational search for answers, she finds a bottle with a tag that says, “DRINK ME”, which allows her to shrink to just the right size.

*There seemed to be no use in waiting by the little door, so she went back to the table, half hoping she might find another key on it, or at any rate a book or rules for shutting people up like telescopes: this time she found a bottle on it, (which certainly was not here before, said Alice), and round the neck of the bottle was a paper label with the words “DRINK ME” beautifully printed on it in large letters.*

*“What a curious feeling!” said Alice; “I must be shutting up like a telescope.” And so it was indeed: she was now only ten inches high, and her face brightened up at the thought that she was now the right size for going through the little door into that lovely garden. (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865: 11)*

Based on the passage above, we can see that Alice emits surprise. She later spots a cake that says, “EAT ME” – allowing her to grow larger than the average person.

*“Well, I’ll eat it,” said Alice, “and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door; so either way I’ll get into the garden, and I don’t care which happens!” (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865: 13).*

Experiencing different reactions towards the sudden increase and decrease in height, she is shown to be in disbelief, opposed to the severity of the changes to her body; first excited and then regretful, further questioning what is currently happening to her. This aspect of physical maturation is experienced by Alice throughout the rest of the book in eight chapters as she fluctuates in height frequently to achieve a certain goal whilst navigating through Wonderland.

### 2.1.1.2 Behavioural and Brain Maturation

Brain maturation refers to how an individual processes information, whereas behavioural maturation focuses on characteristic growth. The two maturational developments will be merged to make a conclusion regarding Alice’s psychological conductivity. Alice’s behaviour begins as though she were very eloquent, prim and proper; tolerating no regard for such silly matters. However, once she enters Wonderland, her ‘proper’ manners matter no more



– and neither does her train of thought. Throughout the novel, she displays the tendencies that a regular child goes through in life – behaving and thinking in a way that a child does.

We first see a glimpse of her behaviour through her first encounter with the Caterpillar:

*“You!” said the Caterpillar contemptuously. “Who are you?” Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation. Alice felt a little irritated at the Caterpillar’s making such very short remarks, and she drew herself up and said, very gravely, “I think you ought to tell me who you are, first.”*

*“Why?” said the Caterpillar.*

*Here was another puzzling question; and, as Alice could not think of any good reason, and the Caterpillar seemed to be in a very unpleasant state of mind, she turned away.*

*“Come back!” the Caterpillar called after her. “I’ve something important to say!”*

*This sounded promising, certainly. Alice turned and came back again.*

*“Keep your temper,” said the Caterpillar.*

*“Is that all?” said Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could.*

*“No,” said the Caterpillar. (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865: 37–38)*

The displays of her journey in behavioural maturation continues throughout the upcoming chapters in conversations held between her and her peers. In the final chapter, *Chapter XII. Alice’s Evidence*, we can see Alice’s brain and behavioural maturation when she challenges the Queen regarding the procedure of punishment that should be given to the guilty party.

*“Let the jury consider their verdict,” the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.*

*“No, no!” said the Queen. “Sentence first – verdict afterwards.”*

*“Stuff and nonsense!” said Alice loudly. “The idea of having the sentence first!”*

*“Hold your tongue!” said the Queen, turning purple.*

*“I won’t!” said Alice. (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865: 103)*

The conversation quoted above displays Alice’s rational thinking compared to her hasty decision-makings in the previous chapters. It shows that growing up means making wise decisions and planning things out in a careful and thorough manner rather than jumping to conclusions and making absurd assumptions. Despite her behaviour remaining somewhat questionable at the end of the story, she does however, decide to take matters into her own hands as things grew out of control in the courtroom. Her display of brain maturation as she becomes more level-headed prior to her first entrance into Wonderland is evident as she can now make decisions for herself.

## **Maturation and Losing Childlike Nature in *Peter Pan* (1911)**

This section will unravel how the issue of maturation and losing childlike nature is depicted by Wendy Darling, one of the protagonists of J.M. Barrie's novel, *Peter Pan* (1911).

### **2.2.1 Wendy Darling**

Wendy is described to be a girl who grew up in a loving home with a father, mother, her two younger siblings named John and Michael, as well as their house nanny – their dog, Nana. Barrie introduces her story to his readers by talking about the situation taking place at Wendy's house.

#### **2.2.1.1 Physical Maturation**

The aspect of physical maturation is only highlighted at the end of the novel in *Chapter Seventeen When Wendy Grew Up*. This takes place after Wendy and her brothers have returned from Neverland to the real world. The indication that Wendy has supposedly begun to enter her adolescent years is foreshadowed when Barrie writes that Peter didn't come back for her the year after he'd last picked her up.

*Next year he did not come for her. She waited in a new frock because the old one simply would not meet; but he never came. (Peter Pan, 1911: 171)*

It has been priorly mentioned in the novel that Peter used to linger outside of the Darlings' window to hear Wendy tell stories to her younger brothers. By lingering, not only could he hear Wendy, but could also see her. The possibility that he did come back for her only to find her growing taller than his small childlike frame frightens him.

As children, body growth is a given and inevitable. With Wendy having had to change her frock because it would "simply not meet", it means that either her frock has gotten shorter or that she has begun to develop an adolescent body structure. And if Peter saw this on his way to pick her up for "spring cleaning", he could be appalled at the revelation; hence why "he never came" back for her until her daughter Jane is old enough to go to Neverland.

#### **2.2.1.2 Behavioural and Brain Maturation**

Wendy's behaviour and comprehension towards ideas, situations, and people can be seen from the first chapter of the novel up until the end. Indications of Wendy's perception growing up can be seen in the passage below:

*All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. (Peter Pan, 1911: 9)*

Indications of brain and behavioural maturation can also be shown when her instinctive motherly nature is displayed after Peter's sobs awaken her. Her actions of empathy and maturity in approaching both Peter and the situation before her presents themselves as she tends to Peter in helping sew on his shadow back to him.

*His sobs woke Wendy, and she sat up in bed. She was not alarmed to see a stranger crying on the nursery floor; she was only pleasantly interested. (Peter Pan, 1911: 30)*

Regardless of displaying patience most of the time, she does get rather snappy in her behaviour when tested past her limits.

A conversation at the end of the novel is held between Wendy and her daughter, Jane.

*'Does it fly,' asks the artful child, 'the way you flew when you were a little girl?'*

*'The way I flew! Do you know, Jane, I sometimes wonder whether I ever did really fly.'*

*'Yes, you did.'*

*'The dear old days when I could fly!'*

*'Why can't you fly now, mother?'*

*'Because I am grown up, dearest. When people grow up they forget the way.' (Peter Pan, 1911: 172 – 173)*

The conversation takes place in Wendy and her brothers' old bedroom, and displays the difference in terms of imaginative comprehension. Jane, who is assumed to be around Wendy's age when she first travels to Neverland, expresses and maintains her childlike nature through the way she questions her mother regarding the reason as to why grownups 'forget how to fly'. Wendy explains the reasoning to Jane, displaying the difference in comprehending reality and fiction. Later, when Peter comes to visit, Wendy converses with him.

*'Peter,' she said, faltering, 'are you expecting me to fly away with you?'*  
*'Of course; that is why I have come.'* He added a little sternly, *'have you forgotten that this is spring cleaning time?'*

*She knew it was useless to say that he had let many spring cleaning times pass.*

*'I can't come,' she said apologetically, 'I have forgotten how to fly.'*  
*'I'll soon teach you again.'*

*'O Peter, don't waste the fairy dust on me.' (Peter Pan, 1911: 175)*

When Wendy states that she has forgotten how to fly, we can assume that this is because she has diminished her childlike nature and has instead matured into becoming an adult. Albeit

not very much to analyse regarding Wendy's outlook due to having already displayed certain amounts of behavioural and brain maturation at her age, we can still acknowledge that she does experience the process of maturation during her time in Neverland.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of maturation and losing childlike nature that is depicted through the protagonists are described to vary. The issue presents itself within the two protagonists in a contrasting situation that concludes with the same aim: to grow up. Alice Liddell, the main character of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is shown to display a better reaction towards the issue of maturing and losing her childlike nature at the end of her story. Wendy however, has already been described to have accepted her fate since the beginning. After comparatively analysing the two novels through a literary perspective, it can be concluded that each character and their plot is pivotal to their journey in growing up and venturing into adulthood.

The characters the protagonists surround themselves with each have their own significance and metaphorical usages from the respective authors. The supporting characters and situations that are faced by Alice and Wendy during their time in their fantasy residence requires a certain amount of brain and behavioural maturation to process things as opposed to a physical sense of maturation. Despite physical maturation being discussed by both authors, more-so with Carroll, it does not necessarily act as an essential aspect of their stories. There are differences regarding the date of publication, storyline, and even characters. For instance, rather than writing about Alice being a grownup at the end of the story, Carroll uses Alice's dream as a foreshadowing element to indicate the fluctuations of the physical changes that will happen to her body as she grows older. Meanwhile, Barrie writes about a time-ship Wendy who grows up to be a married woman who has a family of her own.

Despite the differences that occurred during the two novels in terms of social setting, era, and character usages, there are also many similarities. Both Alice and Wendy undergo physical, brain, and behavioural maturation throughout their respective novels and lose their childlike nature in different ways. For Alice, rather than writing about her being a literal grown-up at the end of the story, Carroll uses Alice's dream as a foreshadowing element to indicate the fluctuations of the physical changes that will happen to her body as she becomes older. Her way of perceiving questions, people and situations along with her responses to them are splayed

out through the various conversations and events that take place within the novel to display brain and behavioural maturation. Much like Carroll, Barrie writes Wendy's interpretation of growing up through how she handles situations; showcasing her empathy, and in how she thinks things through before jumping to conclusions.

Through the descriptive writings and metaphorical usages provided within the two novels to indicate actions, appearances, and emotions, we can assume that the illustrations done by John Tenniel (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) and Francis Donkin Bedford (*Peter Pan*) for the novels reflect the representation of the various trials and experiences one must endure upon entering adulthood. The two authors use their stories and their protagonists to portray the complications of venturing into adulthood; allowing the audience to individually depict its meaning.

### **Suggestions**

This research hopes to expand the mindsets of many students to further explore and comprehend the topic of maturation found within children's novels and why it came to be. The writer suggests that this issue be elaborated through characters who are more aged-up and explain how it affects them due to not necessarily being considered an adult or a child. Often times, this issue is perceived by young adolescents who endures reality's harsh life trials and temptations – longing for just a moment's reprieve of childhood in between the hectic nature of the world. Through this study, the writer hopes that people can realise the several different types of maturation and the situational influences that affect this matter. The writer also urges both parental figures/guardians as well as society to not place unwanted pressure on children and allow for them to enjoy their childhood without enforcing norms that they do not comprehend in detail yet. By doing this, it will allow children to grow up healthily and prevent them from feeling as if they are incapable in doing or achieving something.

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