

Q. 3. *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll tells us, is strictly structured with the laws of the chess game. Elaborate.

Or

The game of chess helps Alice in becoming a mature, self-confident individual in *Through the Looking-Glass* from the insecure and timid girl in *Wonderland*. Do you agree? Substantiate your answer.

Ans. *Through the Looking-Glass* is structured, as Lewis Carroll claimed in the preface to the 1895 edition, "strictly in accordance with the laws of the game [of chess]." It is in many ways linear, progressive, and goal-oriented, based as it is on the straight lines and squares of an actual chessboard and (loosely) on the predictable linear movement of the chess pieces, particularly the movements of one little determined pawn as it marches straight across its five squares to its queening. And the heroine of this sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, now aware of the significance of living in space and time (regardless of their ultimate relativity), is decidedly active, logical, and self-directed, making her efficient moves deliberately, advancing on her own impending queenhood, and chess victory swiftly and surely.

No More Confused and Timid

Even in the *Looking-Glass* scene that comes, closest to the epistemological anxiety of Alice's life-threatening adventures underground, the brief episode in the wood where things have no names (Chapter III), Alice reveals a determination to move forward characteristic of a heroine much more mature and sophisticated than the confused little Alice of *Wonderland*. Despite her timidity over entering such a dark wood, "she made up her mind to go on: 'for I certainly won't go back', she thought to herself." For "this was the only way to the Eighth Square" and her queening. The developmental advantages of playing the game, in spite of Dodgson's deep doubts about the (constructed) nature of reality and in spite of his distaste for the Rugby school of his youth and its emphasis on violent, but character-building games, are here made evident. As Kathleen Blake observes in her discussion of Alice's game playing in *Looking-Glass*: "By asserting her own will she at the same time acts in accordance with the rules of

actual chess, which are unconfused, stable, and hence fair enough to make victory possible." For, as Blake says, "the main thing [in games] is to fix the perimeter and the internal relationship structure, the terms and rules, of a game system, and make these stick. Then the universe will be secure (what Carroll calls certain), and one will enjoy the freedom of that security."

Struggle for Identity

Similarly, Alice's response to forgetting her own name in the dark wood of no names sounds a keynote of her growing-up determination throughout *Looking-Glass*: "And now who am I?" she asks, as if suddenly regressing to Wonderland where this insistent underground question never gets answered. Alice's added, "And now," however, deftly marks the difference between her utter childishness in *Wonderland* and her relativistic, businesslike maturity behind the looking-glass: For one thing, "And now" here seems to allude to the fact that identity is time-specific, contingent—who one depends on when, as well as where, one is.

Furthermore, Alice here valiantly struggles to answer the question herself, and to answer it in terms of her past: "I will remember, if I can! I'm determined to do it!" A far cry—in substance, voice and expression—from Alice's comparatively passive and helpless reactions to similar setbacks in the completely timeless, spaceless underground of *Wasteland*.

Becoming a Queen

Thus advanced to a new developmental stage, the Alice of *Looking-Glass* is ready for the final moves ahead that will, by what Carroll calls "the laws of the game", enable her to assume the freedom and strength of a queen, the chessboard's most powerful, mobile, self-sufficient piece. Her matured understanding can reach into fields far beyond those available to the primal consciousness—indeed, can engage the whole world. When, from example, from a "little hill" she first looks down upon the new dream realm neatly and logically laid out for those old enough to master the rules of chess, she declares "in a tone of delight ... 'It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—all over the world'".

Based on the strict linearity and arbitrary, unchanging rules of chess, on the progressive motions of a knowledgeable player advancing consciously through a timed series of well-defined moves to limited but attainable power and self-sufficiency, these last dream adventures trace Alice's final eager steps toward the victory of competent selfhood in the worldly games waking grown-ups play above the grounds of their infantile (if often valid) fears, as well as beyond the stultifying, deceptive mirrors of their static, childish self-love. Teaching his little girl-friends the moves and rules of chess apparently marked for Dodgson a noteworthy stage in their maturation: even the youngest of his friends could play cards and simple word games, but chess was clearly an adult game that could put his cleverest young protégées on something like an equal footing with their grown-up opponents.

Immediately after realising the game nature of the world in which she finds herself behind the mirror, Alice says to the Red Queen, "How I wish I could be one of the [chess pieces]. I wouldn't mind being a Pawn ... though of course I should like to be a Queen best." The Queen replies, "That's easily managed." Almost a mirror reversal of the generally useless, often exasperating advice Alice received from the maddening creatures of Wonderland, this preliminary advice from the Red Queen is accurate and eminently useful: it will serve Alice well behind the looking-glass.

Alice can indeed "manage" now—first, because she is mature and competent enough to play and win in an adult game like chess (contrast here the infantile, ruleless, and winless games of her adventures underground; contrast also the *Wonderland* playing-card motif that represents chance in a one-dimensional field rather than skill in the more or less two-dimensional field of the *Looking-Glass* pieces); second, and more significant, because she begins her new journey with a self-conception so firm and stable, she is no longer in danger of losing her way for long, for becoming ensnared, whether it be in the unprogressive circularity of early infancy or in the later circularity of childish self-worship.