

Character Development Through Conflict: Alice's Struggle for Selfhood in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the character development of Alice through the conflicts she faces in Lewis Carroll's novel Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865). The source of data used in this study is the 10th edition of the novel published by Gramedia. This study focuses on the internal and external conflicts experienced by Alice as the main character in Wonderland. The writer applies a qualitative descriptive method and uses four theories to analyze the conflicts encountered by Alice. The findings show that Alice is a round character who develops throughout the story as a result of the conflicts she experiences. The external conflicts include man versus person and man versus society. These conflicts contribute significantly to Alice's emotional and personal growth. Wonderland becomes a place where Alice learns to leave behind her former self and adapt to unfamiliar situations and rules. Throughout her journey, Alice transforms from a timid child who is afraid to express herself into a brave and confident individual. This study concludes that conflicts in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland function not only as plot elements but also as important factors in shaping Alice's selfhood.

Keywords: Character development; struggle for selfhood; conflict; characterization; Alice

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a collection of written works that generally contain imagination, such as poetry, prose, short stories, novels, and other literary works. It is also a form of human expression through words. Meyer explains the definition of literature in his book *What Is Literature? A Definition Based on Prototypes* by arguing that literature should be understood through prototypes from other texts considered literary works. He states that prototypical literary works are first, texts in written form; second, texts characterized by the use of language, including creative metaphors, well-turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration, and meter; third, texts that belong to literary genres such as poetry, prose, fiction, or drama; fourth, texts that are read aesthetically with a focus on the beauty of language; fifth, texts intended by the author to be read aesthetically; and sixth, texts that contain many weak implicatures and are deliberately open to interpretation (Meyer, 1997:4). Character development refers to changes in a character's personality in response to the plot and events they face (Nurgiyantoro, 1995:188). Character development does not occur suddenly but develops through experiences, and one of the primary factors driving this process is conflict. Conflict not only moves the plot forward but also shapes changes within a character. According to Imron and Farida, the plot functions in a story in such a way that one event leads to another consequence, meaning that every event or character motivation triggers subsequent events (2017:86). This thesis explores the process of character development through internal and external conflicts that force characters to adapt, make decisions, and understand themselves, resulting in gradual changes in their perspectives.

This study focuses on Alice's character development as she searches for her identity in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The conflicts she experiences are not merely part of the storyline but serve as the primary means through which she shapes her identity, questions who she is, and responds to conflicts with other characters. Alice's journey is therefore not only an adventure filled with illogical characters but also a quest for selfhood in an illogical world. Previous studies have largely used psychological approaches to examine Alice's mental state and sense of self, while this study applies an intrinsic approach combined with conflict theory and Martin Heidegger's concept of selfhood.

The story centers on Alice, a clever and obedient seven-year-old girl from England. One afternoon by the riverbank, while sitting with her older sister and reading a book without pictures, she sees a White Rabbit wearing a waistcoat and carrying a watch. Curious, she follows the rabbit into a hole and falls into Wonderland, a fantasy world where logic and social norms no longer apply. There, she experiences strange physical transformations after drinking from a bottle labeled "DRINK ME" and eating a cake labeled "EAT ME." She encounters unusual characters such as the White Rabbit, Cheshire Cat, Queen and King of Hearts, and Caterpillar, all of whom contribute to her journey of self-discovery.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was written by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, who was born on January 27, 1832, and died on January 14, 1898. The story originated on July 4, 1862, during a boat picnic along the River Isis near Godstow, Oxford, when Carroll told a story to the three Liddell sisters: Lorina, Alice, and Edith. Alice Liddell, fascinated by the story, asked him to write it down, which later became the basis of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In 1865, the story was published as a novel with expanded narrative elements.

This study examines how Alice develops through internal and external conflicts and how she struggles to discover her identity in Wonderland. It highlights Alice as an active character who resists existential emptiness and responds to chaos. The research addresses three questions: how Alice deals with the conflicts she faces in Wonderland, how her character develops through those conflicts, and how she struggles to find her selfhood. The objectives of this study are to describe Alice's character development

through conflict, explain her transformation from a timid child who accepts Wonderland's illogical rules into a courageous character who challenges them, and highlight how physical transformations, illogical rules, and interactions with other characters reflect her struggle to construct her identity.

The significance of this study lies in examining Alice's responses to conflict, her character development, and her interactions with other characters within Wonderland. This research focuses on intrinsic elements found in dialogue, narration, and internal monologues involving Alice and other influential characters. Cultural context is discussed only as a supporting element. The study is limited to conflicts involving man vs self, man vs society, and man vs person, and does not discuss man vs nature.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter I presents the introduction, including the background of the study, research questions, objectives, significance, limitations, and organization of the study. Chapter II discusses the literature review, including Jim Meyer's theory of characterization, E.M. Forster's theory of flat and round characters, William Patrick Kenney's conflict theory, Martin Heidegger's concept of selfhood, and previous related studies. Chapter III explains the research methodology, including research design, data sources, data collection, and analysis techniques. Chapter IV presents findings and discussions related to character development through conflict in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Chapter V provides conclusions and suggestions based on the findings of the study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis approach to examine character and conflict in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The qualitative method is used to analyze intrinsic elements of the literary text, particularly character, characterization, conflict, and selfhood, based on literary theories proposed by Michael Meyer, E.M. Forster, William Patrick Kenney, and Martin Heidegger. This approach explores how Alice's journey through the irrational and illogical world of Wonderland reflects existential themes related to identity, meaning, and her inner rebellion against the chaos she experiences. According to Steven Tenny, Janelle M. Brannan, and Grace D. Brannan, "Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. Instead of collecting numerical data points or intervening or introducing treatments, just like in quantitative research, qualitative research helps generate hypotheses to further investigate and understand quantitative data." This study applies a qualitative literary approach because it aims to interpret meaning, conflict processes, and Alice's character changes throughout her adventure rather than measuring statistical relationships. The writer uses close reading to analyze how narrative, dialogue, and characterization shape Alice's identity and her struggle toward selfhood.

The research procedure begins with a thorough reading of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to identify sections related to Alice's internal and external conflicts, her interactions with other characters, and her responses to various events. Relevant quotations are then selected as primary data and recorded completely, including chapter and page numbers, to facilitate analysis. The writer focuses on scenes involving questions of self-identity, particularly interactions between Alice and the Caterpillar, events showing uncontrollable physical transformations, and scenes that depict Alice confronting conflicts with other characters. These sections are selected because they represent both internal and external conflicts experienced by Alice during her journey. The collected data are then categorized based on E.M. Forster's character theory, Meyer's characterization theory, William Patrick Kenney's conflict theory, and Martin Heidegger's theory of selfhood.

The primary data source of this study is Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), specifically the 10th edition published by Gramedia. The primary data consist of dialogues and narrative descriptions that explicitly show Alice's responses, interactions, and reactions to irrational situations throughout the story. Secondary data include journal articles, previous studies, academic theses, and critical essays related to character, characterization, conflict, and selfhood in literary works. Theoretical references such as *Aspects of the Novel* by E.M. Forster, *Literature to Go* by Michael Meyer, *How to Analyze Fiction* by William Kenney, and *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger function as analytical frameworks. Secondary sources were collected through academic websites and Google Scholar and selected based on their relevance to this research.

The data collection process uses close reading to organize both primary and secondary sources. The writer first reads the novel to understand its overall structure, then conducts focused reading by marking scenes that describe Alice's encounters with conflict and her reactions to absurd situations. These selected data are recorded and categorized according to their relevance to character development and conflict. In analyzing the data, the writer first identifies the conflicts faced by Alice in Wonderland, then explains her character development through those conflicts and examines how internal and external conflicts reflect her struggle to find her true self. Finally, this study analyzes the relationship between character, conflict, and plot development in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The findings are presented qualitatively, descriptively, and interpretatively to answer the research questions of this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter answers the research questions of this thesis by presenting findings and analysis from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, published by Gramedia, 10th edition. The analysis is conducted through narration, dialogue, and Alice's internal monologue. This chapter examines the internal and external conflicts that influence Alice's character development and her search for self-identity by applying Meyer's theory of characterization, E.M. Forster's theory of flat and round characters, William Patrick Kenney's theory of conflict, and Martin Heidegger's theory of struggle. The discussion is divided into three main sections: the conflicts Alice encounters, Alice's character development through conflict, and Alice's struggle to find her identity.

The Conflicts Alice Encounters

This section discusses the conflicts experienced by Alice in Wonderland through narration, dialogue, and internal monologue. Based on William Patrick Kenney's conflict theory, the conflicts are categorized into external conflict and internal conflict.

External Conflict

Man versus society appears when Alice confronts the irrational norms of Wonderland. After shrinking and failing to reach the key, Alice joins a group of animals in a pool of tears. When the Dodo announces that everyone wins a race and Alice must provide prizes, she is forced to follow the absurd social rules of Wonderland: "Everybody has won, and must have prizes..." (Chapter 3:26). Another example occurs at the Mad Tea Party when Alice is rejected by the Mad Hatter and March Hare, who shout "No room! No room!" but Alice resists by sitting down anyway (p. 62). Her strongest conflict with society appears in court when the King of Hearts invents "Rule Forty Two" and orders Alice to leave because of

her size. Alice refuses and challenges the irrational rule: “*Well, I shan't go, at any rate*” (Chapter 12:114). Man versus person occurs through Alice's direct conflicts with individual characters. Her journey begins when she follows the White Rabbit into Wonderland (Chapter 1:8). She later argues with the Mouse after unintentionally offending it by mentioning cats (Chapter 2:21), conflicts with the Lory during an argument about age (Chapter 3:23), and angers the Mouse again when she interrupts its story (Chapter 3:29). The White Rabbit mistakes Alice for his servant and orders her around (Chapter 4:31). The Caterpillar challenges Alice's identity by asking her to explain herself, but Alice responds, “*I can't explain myself... because I'm not myself*” (Chapter 5:41). She is also accused of being a serpent by the Pigeon (Chapter 5:48), belittled by the Duchess (Chapter 6:54), insulted by the Mad Hatter during the tea party (Chapter 7:71), corrected harshly by the Mock Turtle (Chapter 10:97), and finally confronts the Queen of Hearts by declaring, “*You're nothing but a pack of cards!*” (Chapter 12:118).

Internal Conflict

Alice's internal conflict emerges through confusion, fear, loneliness, and self-doubt. After repeatedly failing to reach the key, she cries and scolds herself: “*Come, there's no use in crying like that!*” (Chapter 1:14). She reflects on her habit of pretending to be two people while playing croquet and realizes that this no longer works in Wonderland: “*There's hardly enough of me left to make one respectable person!*” (Chapter 1:14). Her deepest internal struggle appears when she questions her own identity: “*Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!*” (Chapter 2:17). She compares herself to Ada and Mabel to determine whether she has become someone else (Chapter 2:17–18). Alice also regrets following the White Rabbit and longs for home, revealing her fear of growing older and her uncertainty about adulthood (Chapter 3:34). These conflicts show her emotional instability during her journey of self-discovery.

Alice's Character Development Through Conflict

This section examines how Alice develops through internal and external conflicts using Meyer's characterization theory and E.M. Forster's theory of character.

Character Development Through Internal Conflict

At the beginning of the story, Alice is hesitant, confused, and lacks confidence. She frequently questions her identity, asking: “*Who in the world am I?*” (Chapter 2:17). According to Meyer's theory, this inner monologue reveals her internal struggle, while Forster's theory identifies Alice as a round character because she changes throughout the story. She attempts to solve her identity crisis logically by comparing herself to Ada and Mabel, but these efforts fail. Her reflections at the White Rabbit's house show regret, curiosity, and awareness of growth: “*I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit hole...*” (Chapter 4:34). These experiences demonstrate her gradual emotional and psychological development.

The Effects of Other Characters on Alice's Development

Other characters contribute significantly to Alice's development. The Caterpillar forces Alice to confront her uncertainty about identity (Chapter 5:41). The Duchess teaches Alice patience as she responds politely despite being insulted (Chapter 6:54). The Cheshire Cat encourages Alice to make her own decisions by telling her that any path will lead somewhere if she continues walking (Chapter 6:59). Later, Alice reflects on her experiences and admits that she has become a different person: “*I was a different person then*” (Chapter 10:97). Her final confrontation with the Queen of Hearts proves her transformation into a brave and independent individual who can defend herself against authority (Chapter 12:118).

Alice's Struggle to Find Identity

This section discusses Alice's search for selfhood through Martin Heidegger's theory of struggle. Internal conflict serves as the center of her identity formation, while external conflict acts as a catalyst.

Alice's Inner Struggle

Alice's physical transformations symbolize her unstable identity. Before drinking the potion, she carefully checks whether it is poisoned, showing awareness and self-care (Chapter 1:12). She later eats the cake despite uncertainty because she wants to move forward (Chapter 1:14). Her repeated crying reflects helplessness, but she also forces herself to recover and continue. Her habit of pretending to be two people suggests fragmented identity, which gradually disappears as she learns to become one whole self (Chapter 1:14).

Her most significant struggle appears when she repeatedly questions who she truly is: "*Who in the world am I?*" (Chapter 2:17). She seeks answers through logic, comparisons with others, and memories of home, but none provide certainty. She realizes that identity cannot be given by others and must be discovered through personal choices and experiences. Her longing for home reflects her desire for safety, while her curiosity represents freedom (Chapter 3:34).

Alice's External Struggle

Alice's external struggles strengthen her identity formation. When the Pigeon calls her a serpent, Alice insists that she is a little girl, even though she doubts herself (Chapter 5:48). When the Queen of Hearts threatens her, Alice courageously responds, "*Nonsense!*" (Chapter 8:74). She later challenges the King of Hearts' irrational rule in court (Chapter 12:114). Her final rebellion against the Queen of Hearts demonstrates that she has fully developed into someone who no longer accepts irrational authority: "*Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!*" (Chapter 12:118).

Through these experiences, Alice transforms from a timid and confused child into a brave, critical, and independent individual. She ultimately discovers that identity is formed through choices, struggles, and the courage to confront both internal uncertainty and external pressure.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study based on the findings discussed previously and provides suggestions for future researchers. During her adventure in Wonderland, Alice encounters various characters who contribute to her personal growth and journey toward self-discovery. Through internal and external conflicts, she gradually transforms from a shy, easily confused child into a confident individual who is brave enough to express her opinions. By the end of her journey, Alice is no longer afraid to face absurd situations and successfully overcomes the conflicts she experiences in Wonderland. Her struggle to find her selfhood can be seen in her ability to control herself, become more aware of her surroundings, find answers independently without relying on others, and defend her arguments even when others reject her ideas. After leaving Wonderland, Alice reflects on her experiences by sharing her adventure with her older sister, showing that her journey has shaped her personal growth.

For future researchers who are interested in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, this study suggests exploring the symbolic meanings embedded in the story through semiotic or psychoanalytic approaches. General readers interested in Lewis Carroll's work may also examine the dialogue, Alice's physical transformations, her interactions with other characters, and her internal struggles in greater depth. By understanding how Alice confronts irrational rules and navigates various conflicts, readers can gain valuable lessons from her journey. Literary institutions may also use this novel as a learning resource to

introduce literary concepts related to conflict, characterization, and interactions between characters.

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