

Extended Essay

Group 1

Juxtaposition of Poetry and Prose in *Alice in Wonderland*

To what extent does Lewis Carroll juxtapose poetry and prose to develop relationships between characters in *Alice In Wonderland*?

Introduction

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, or in layman's terms, *Alice In Wonderland*, is a well known children's novel written by Lewis Carroll. Even today, Carroll continues to be praised as a "master storyteller"¹. In the mid to late 1800's, he brought to life worlds of wonder and sought to provoke the imaginations of children. In order to bring his stories to life, Carroll used poetry to develop his themes and indicate the tone of relationships and events. Carroll narrated a nonsensical world while employing varying styles of poetry to divine the classic *Alice in Wonderland*.

Poetry is a writing style that is characterized by its emphasis on rhythm. Prose refers to a writing style lacking metrical structure, meaning it is not meant to be read in a rhythm. Lewis Carroll's use of poetry interwoven with prose writing is significant to *Alice in Wonderland* because he juxtaposes the two styles in order to develop relationships between his protagonist, Alice, and the other characters in Wonderland. The development of relationships between characters is evident in the theme and placement of his poems, which will be explored in the investigation. Furthermore, I chose this topic because after rereading my childhood favorite book, I noticed a motif of poetry followed by conflict or confrontation. In noticing this, I realized that Lewis Carroll intended for his poetry to drive the development of the conflicts or understandings Alice has with other characters. Therefore, my essay will outline why and how Carroll uses poetry in contrast with prose and the significance of the juxtaposition for the development of character relationships.

¹ Lovett, C. (2018). *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland by Lewis Carroll with Poems, Letters, and Biography*. Fulham, London: Flame Tree Publishing.

In Carroll's fantastical story, a young girl dreams of a place called *Wonderland* in which she cultivates intriguing and complex relationships with characters such as the Mock Turtle, the Caterpillar, the Hatter, and the Red Queen. Throughout the following essay, the nature of the relationships Alice has with these characters will be delved into. I will also explain how the insertion of poetry at specific points of the novel aided in setting the tone and complexity of those relationships. The use and significance of parody poetry will also be examined in order to further the investigation of how the relationships are developed when Carroll juxtaposes prose with poetry.

Body

The first character Alice comes in contact with in *Wonderland* is the Mouse. Her first words to the Mouse frighten it tremendously, as they are about cats. Then, Alice goes on to describe her own cat's ability to kill mice, which further offends Alice's new acquaintance. Immediately after the tense topic of Alice's cat, Alice mentions a dog she knows that "kills all the rats"². Thus, the audience can infer that Alice and the Mouse will not have a positive relationship. While this is up for interpretation based on the prose narration of their early encounters, after more dialogue and interactions, Alice thinks of a poem which blatantly states the relationship between the two characters at this point of the story. This particular poem is about a character named Fury and a mouse. The Fury threatens to prosecute the mouse in court for seemingly no real reason, saying "we must have a trial... for I've nothing to do"³. The mouse proceeds to point out that there will be no fair trial available to it, at which point the Fury

² P. 22. Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

³ P. 25. Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

promises to be the judge and jury. The Fury concludes the poem by saying “I’ll be the whole cause, and condemn you to death”⁴. The prose following the poem displays Alice and the Mouse having another misunderstanding in which Alice interprets the Mouse incorrectly about the homophones “tail” and “tale”. The juxtaposition of prose showcasing Alice continuously offending the Mouse in their initial meeting with the poetry detailing a character intent on killing the Mouse for whatever reason, which is then followed by prose style which further exhibits incongruencies between the characters’ communication indicates that the relationship between the two characters is developing into a tense and dysfunctional one.

The juxtaposition of prose style and poetry style was necessary to add a level of seriousness to the relationship. The prose style can be read as humorous because of the accidental yet obvious insults and miscommunication due to puns. However, Carroll effectively inserts poetry featuring a character prepared to go so far as killing the Mouse out of anger to instill a sense of solemnity in the reader. The seriousness Carroll intended to express is only achieved through the direct juxtaposition of poetic style and prose style to develop a disjointed and negative relationship between the Mouse and Alice. He also used this juxtaposition for the development of the relationship between the Mouse and Alice by including it after only a single conversation between the two characters. The fact that Lewis Carroll adds the poetic style in the midst of prose at this precise point in the novel suggests that he intended for his audience to take note of this different style of writing and evaluate the real relationship culminating between the Mouse and Alice.

⁴ P. 26. Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

Another example of Carroll's juxtaposition of two writing styles for the development of relationships among the characters appears when Alice meets a wise caterpillar. Her initial sight of the Caterpillar is when she is looking on the top of a large mushroom. The Caterpillar addresses her by asking her who she is. To this, Alice is unable to answer and admonishes this is "not an encouraging opening for a conversation"⁵, which irritates the Caterpillar. His irate disposition is apparent when he is described as "... in a very unpleasant state of mind"⁶. The two bicker about not knowing one's own identity until the Caterpillar challenges Alice to recite a poem to test her memory. She obliges and the second poem of *Alice In Wonderland* is presented. "Father William" is a poem about a young person judging an older person for attempting feats which are too taxing physically for him. After Alice recites her version of the poem, the Caterpillar offends her by telling her the recital is "wrong from beginning to end"⁷. Alice then admits a few lines later that she thinks "three inches is such a wretched height to be"⁸, which inherently affronts the Caterpillar who is this height exactly. Similar to the relationship between the Mouse and Alice, the dynamic developing between the Caterpillar and Alice is a tense and perhaps toxic one. However, the poem "Father William" is instrumental in helping to develop this notion by presenting a theme of old versus young. In the case of Alice and the Caterpillar, Alice represents the young and the Caterpillar symbolizes the old. The poem juxtaposed with the confrontational prose style is meant to develop the relationship to include spite on behalf of Alice. This claim is supported by the poem repeatedly saying "you are old"⁹, followed by a

⁵ P. 35 Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

⁶ P. 35 Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

⁷ P. 35 Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

⁸ P. 37 Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

⁹ P. 36 Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

negative comment such as “have grown ... fat”¹⁰. Carroll implied throughout “Father William” that the youth would harshly judge and dislike the elderly. Furthermore, Carroll’s decision to have Alice recite the poem rather than continuing the prose between the two characters adds an artistic aspect, emphasizing the distaste Alice already has for the Caterpillar. The negative prose dialogue which ensues directly after the poem continues to augment the unhappy dynamic between Alice and the Caterpillar. Alice laments that “she had never been so contradicted in her life”¹¹. The intention of this line just after Alice has finished demonstrating her abilities to recall the poetry she learned in school is to portray that the Caterpillar is treating Alice as though she is wrong again and again. The insinuation of Alice’s inferiority from the Caterpillar in prose form juxtaposed with the poetry which symbolized Alice’s knowledge and education was an effective measure by Lewis Carroll to make apparent the tone of the interactions between the two characters. Therefore, Lewis Carroll again utilizes juxtaposition of poetry and prose to develop the spiteful and judgemental relationship between Alice and the Caterpillar.

Lewis Carroll does use juxtaposition of poetry and prose to a lesser extent in the case of the relationship between Alice and the Duchess. The prose style dialogue is not as tense or hostile as in other conversations between Alice and new characters she meets throughout the book. Their initial conversation includes Alice hopefully trying to seem like an educated and well-rounded individual. Nevertheless, the Duchess speaks “in a hoarse growl”¹² to Alice. This brief dialogue is then juxtaposed with the short lullaby written in poetry style. The poem states one should “speak roughly to your little boy”¹³ if he is obnoxious because “he does it to annoy”¹⁴. The

¹⁰ P. 36 Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

¹¹ P. 36 Carroll. L, (1865).

¹² P. 43. Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

¹³ P. 43. Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

¹⁴ P. 43. Carroll. L, (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

message of the poem suggests that the Duchess is not fond of Alice, seeing as Alice is a child herself. Carroll conveys Alice's feelings for the Duchess through prose and the Duchess's feelings for Alice through poetry. The juxtaposition of two different writing styles was necessary to outline the sentiments of two polar characters, but he spends significantly less writing space on the development of these two characters. Furthermore, the poem repeats itself often, revealing that there was not an abundance of new ideas within the poetry rather than prose writing. However, the unbalanced relationship between Alice and the Duchess is still conveyed, in lieu of the lack of poetic writing juxtaposed to prose writing. The development of their relationship demonstrates that Carroll did not rely solely on poetry contrasted with prose writing to develop his characters' relationships.

Lewis Carroll actually seemed to utilize this poem as a catalyst for the relationship between Alice and the Duchess's baby. Since Carroll manifested this relationship purely from the poetry, he again illustrates that juxtaposition of poetry and prose is not his only method of relationship development. There is a relationship between Alice and the baby because the Duchess is being cruel to both of these characters; to Alice by ignoring and interrupting her, and to her baby by "tossing the baby violently"¹⁵. By including the paralleled situation for Alice and the baby, Lewis Carroll develops a sympathetic or pitying relationship between Alice and the baby, which is largely developed through the poetry and has little to do with the prose writing style. Since the baby is unable to participate in the prose dialogue, juxtaposition of prose and poetry seems inefficient and does not grow the relationship.

¹⁵ P. 43 Carroll. L., (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

Carroll effortlessly eases from prose to poetry and back again in this portion of his novel to develop Alice's relationship with two characters, rather than to juxtapose the two styles of writing. By breaking poetic verse to clarify that the Duchess "[gave it] violent shakes... every line"¹⁶, then proceeding directly into the poem in which the baby exclaims "wow, wow, wow!"¹⁷, Carroll develops two different relationships between Alice, the baby, and the Duchess. In choosing to only give the baby a voice in the poetry style is an indicator that Carroll did not intend to set the two types of writing style in contrast with one another. After a few lines of the prose are read, Carroll converts back to poetry for a moment to acknowledge the "poor little thing"¹⁸ to portray the still developing relationship between Alice and the baby. This short lived poetry morphs back into prose to continue the lines in which the Duchess is "flinging the baby... as she spoke"¹⁹. Therefore, although Carroll is continuously alternating between prose and poetry, he is not employing the literary device of juxtaposition to develop the relationship. He is using two different styles of writing to develop two different relationships, justifying that he uses juxtaposition of prose and poetry to a mild extent to develop relationships between his characters.

The next characters Alice is introduced to are the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon. As with the other characters, the poetry is included in the early stages of their companionship. Throughout the opening conversations between Alice and the animals, Alice feels uneducated and uncertain of herself. Her uncertainty is made apparent with statements such as "Alice did not feel encouraged to ask"²⁰ and "Alice... felt ready to sink into the earth"²¹. Her feeling of

¹⁶ P. 43 Carroll. L., (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

¹⁷ P. 43 Carroll. L., (1865).

¹⁸ P. 43 Carroll. L., (1865).

¹⁹ P. 43 Carroll. L., (1865).

²⁰ P. 65 Carroll. L., (1865).

insecurity is once again propagated throughout the poem the Mock Turtle recites. This poem has an overarching theme of overcoming trepidation. One character in the poem which parallels Alice is the Snail. This Snail is afraid to join a dance though he sees “how eagerly the lobster and the turtles all advance”²². Lewis Carroll juxtaposes the prose in which Alice feels unsure of herself and speaks “timidly”²³ with the poem which details a snail who is “askance”²⁴ and is unwilling to step out of its comfort zone. The relationship that is developed through juxtaposing the prose and poetic writing styles here is one in which Alice is not confident in her intellectual abilities and the Mock Turtle is very self oriented and arrogant. By using words such as “walk a little faster”²⁵ and the repetition of “will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you...”²⁶, the Mock Turtle is represented in the poem as persistent and officious. Carroll ensured that his audience would understand this parallel of characters by directly juxtaposing the prose style with poetry style writing. His purpose of contrasting two styles of writing so conspicuously is so that the reader will be aware that the relationship is being developed without direct dialogue. Although the spoken conversation between Alice and the Mock Turtle is not as abrupt and explicit, the reader is able to understand that the dynamic between the two is unbalanced in that the Mock Turtle gets most of the attention while Alice sits aside to second guess herself. It is safe to make this assertion because the poem includes two characters that represent caricatures of Alice and the Mock Turtle. These caricature characters have more open dialogue in which the sea creature shames the snail with repetition of “would not, could not, could not join”²⁷. The use of “could

²¹ P. 64 Carroll. L, (1865).

²² P. 67 Carroll. L, (1865).

²³ P. 67 Carroll. L, (1865).

²⁴ P, 67 Carroll. L, (1865).

²⁵ P. 67 Carroll. L, (1865).

²⁶ P. 67 Carroll. L, (1865).

²⁷ P. 68 Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

not” demonstrates that the snail was not capable, or lacked the skill. This is an allusion to how Alice feels in comparison to the Mock Turtle who is more educated than her. The juxtaposition of prose and poetry aided in concluding that Alice feels this way around the Mock Turtle by providing Carroll with a way to present the dialogue much faster, leading into the next point.

Lewis Carroll took advantage of the fact that things can develop much quicker in a poem than in prose, explaining why he used this juxtaposition to develop relationships among characters to a large extent. The reason things can develop quicker in prose rather than poetry is because prose is less about artistic expression and more about conveying a story. As a result, events in prose writing often need a background or context for them to be understood. Therefore, a coherent dialogue that would present the relationship dynamic between Alice and the Mock Turtle may take three or more pages to develop. Rather than creating more dialogue to accrue a logical relationship between Alice and the Mock Turtle, Carroll opted to juxtapose a different writing style to present the dynamic of the relationship much faster. He manipulates the reader to understand the parallel characters by placing the two styles in immediate succession to draw attention to the underlying message of his figurative words. When the story switches to poetry, the reader has to slow down and consider the rhythm of the words. Lewis Carroll simply exploits this to cause his readers to draw the connection between the literal meaning of his metaphorical poems and the prose story that directly follows the poem. The concept of poetic interludes within prose narration is akin to the concept of the Chorus in a Greek play. The chorus gives background information at certain intervals of the play’s dialogue to prevent the audience from misunderstanding things, as the poems intend to offer clarification of the relationship between characters.

The next poem to present itself amidst prose style writing is “ ‘Tis the Voice of the Sluggard”. This poem manifests when the relationship between Alice and the Mock Turtle morphs into a different dynamic. The Mock Turtle has now become interested in Alice’s story, asking her to “explain all that”²⁸, referring to her situation in Wonderland. Lewis Carroll is sure to include another juxtaposition of prose and poetry as the topic of their conversation and tone of the relationship changes, which supports the claim of this essay. This poem has two verses that are seemingly unrelated; however, both feature a character that is overpowered or controlled by another. The first verse recounts a lobster who is normally a confident character known to “trim his belt and buttons and turn out his toes”²⁹, but when the Shark is around the lobsters demeanor changes. Alice throughout the story has been eager to share her past experiences, seem intelligent or witty, and to solve riddles when she hears them. Yet, when she is in the presence of the Mock Turtle, she is reserved and intent on keeping attention off of herself. Again we see her projected in the poem as the lobster who is “gay as a lark”³⁰. The Lobster will “talk contemptuously... of the shark, but when ... sharks are around, his voice has a timid and tremulous sound”³¹, similar to how Alice’s disposition changes when she is around the Mock Turtle.

Therefore, Lewis Carroll used juxtaposition of poetry and prose writing to convey the development of the relationship between the Mock Turtle and Alice. Alice is the one speaking the poem this time, which symbolizes to the reader that these are Alice’s thoughts about her and the Mock Turtle’s relationship. In writing this poem from the other character’s point of view, Lewis Carroll employs juxtaposition of the two writing styles to develop the other character’s

²⁸ P. 69. Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

²⁹ P. 70. Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

³⁰ P. 70 Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

³¹ P. 70 Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

feelings about the blossoming relationship. Furthermore, the way Carroll includes representational characters in his poems portrays that he does intend for his audience to make assumptions about and realize the tone of the relationships between the characters having interactions immediately before the poem.

Another method used by Carroll to further weigh the significance of the poetry juxtaposed with prose is the use of parody poetry. Parody poetry is the imitation of another author's style or specific work to achieve an effect of comical exaggeration or satire³². The reason a portion of this essay is dedicated to the parody poetry is because by looking into the poems Carroll imitated, the audience can understand how the original poems affect the development or the meaning of the relationship between two characters.

“You are old, Father William” is one poem which Carroll parodied from a poet named Robert Southey³³. The source from which this information was retrieved supports this claim by placing the two poems directly side by side. When compared to the original poem, there are entire lines directly used from the original poem. These lines include “have grown most uncommonly fat”³⁴ and “In my youth... I kept all my limbs supple”³⁵. The purpose of this direct quotation of other poems is to encourage the audience to refer to the original poem and understand the meaning of it. The original poem is about a younger person questioning the physical capabilities of an elder, just as Carroll’s poem in *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll used

³² Sullivan, Maggie. (2016). The Poetry Archive. <https://www.poetryarchive.org/glossary/parody>.

³³ De Rooy, Lenny. (2015). Poem Origins: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/resources/analysis/poem-origins/alices-adventures-in-wonderland/#william>

³⁴ De Rooy, Lenny. (2015). Poem Origins: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/resources/analysis/poem-origins/alices-adventures-in-wonderland/#william>

³⁵ De Rooy, Lenny. (2015). Poem Origins: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/resources/analysis/poem-origins/alices-adventures-in-wonderland/#william>

stanzas from another author's work to develop the relationship between the Caterpillar and Alice. The reason he did not include original poetry is because parodying allows him to convey the original theme of old versus young. The imitation also suggests that he added poetry with the intent of juxtaposing it with the prose writing rather than because he wanted to create poetry. Lastly, this pulling from other authors allows Carroll to omit whichever portion he felt did not contribute to the development of the Caterpillar and Alice's relationship. Southey's poem is longer, including lines such as "I am cheerful, young man"³⁶ and "I remember'd my God! ... not forgotten my age"³⁷. The quotes about the elder's happiness and religion did not add anything to the development and was not necessary to juxtapose the prose writing style to the poetic style; therefore, he excluded these parts.

Conclusion

In summary, Lewis Carroll uses juxtaposition of poetic writing and prose writing to develop relationships between his characters. This claim is supported by the several characters throughout the book who recited poetry when they met someone new. Alice's encounter with the Mouse includes a poem in the midst of the Mouse telling a story, revealing to us how Alice felt about the Mouse. Alice then meets the Caterpillar who asks her to recite poetry, at which point she "wrongly"³⁸ recalls a poem she knows. The reason her recitation is incorrect is because she is

³⁶ De Rooy, Lenny. (2015). Poem Origins: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/resources/analysis/poem-origins/alices-adventures-in-wonderland/#william>

³⁷ De Rooy, Lenny. (2015). Poem Origins: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/resources/analysis/poem-origins/alices-adventures-in-wonderland/#william>

³⁸ P. 35 Carroll. L. (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. England: Macmillan Publishers.

inserting her personal feelings about the Caterpillar. Again, Carroll has utilized poetry to demonstrate Alice's sentiments about a new acquaintance. The third character, the Mock Turtle, is marked with two poetic interludes. From the first poem to the next, the dynamic of the relationship between Alice and the Mock Turtle is altered. Lewis Carroll makes the change apparent by weaving prose writing between the poems to link their ideas. By this, the reader can easily see how the relationship initiates and morphs in a short period of time.

The Duchess and the Baby were also introduced and explained via a mix of poetry and prose. Carroll once again uses poetic style to artfully include ideals and values each character holds to develop and manifest the relationship between the three characters. However, Carroll uses much less poetry in these interactions, yet there is still a relationship understood by the audience. In this way, Carroll uses juxtaposition of poetry and prose to a lesser extent to develop the relationships between his characters.

Furthermore, Carroll uses parody poetry in his book to emphasize the fact that he doesn't include poetry for the purpose of artistic expression; he includes it to outline the type of relationship between the characters. By using other works, Carroll can imply the connotations and messages associated with that work rather than having to spell out his own original work. So, to answer the question, Lewis Carroll uses juxtaposition of poetry and prose writing style to a great extent, though not to a full extent, to develop relationships between his characters.

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