

# The ability to recognize ones reflection english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



After discovering that her former companion in the mirror is merely her reflection; Alice dons a wedding dress which she finds "tucked behind the mirror" in the Duke's castle. The knowledge of what the mirror is, what it implies about Alice's true identity, and the desire to cover up her own nakedness is where Alice becomes markedly human. The act of putting on this dress separates Alice from the wolves and her beastly past. The desire to cover up her nakedness stems from a sense of shame she has started having ever since beginning her menstrual cycle. In addition, while wearing the dress Alice must walk on two legs. This discovery prompts Alice to leave this castle and into human civilization where the townspeople live, and the passage begins. Interestingly though, outside of the castle walls, it is Alice's keen animalistic sense of smell that alerts her to the imminent danger. While Alice decidedly has some semblance of humanity now, she is still very much an outsider, still a wolf, but this actually works to her benefit. This is why she runs from the threat that the local villagers pose to the Duke. Alice's orientation to the world through her sense of smell clues her into the proximity of the villages. The scent of "incense" alerts her to the danger that they bring with their guns. Lacking Alice's keen sense of smell the Duke is hit by a silver bullet which tears off his pelt, and forces him to limp away on two legs. The werewolf is revealed to be man, further illustrating the sad plight of the lonely misunderstood Duke. He is trapped between two worlds, accepted by neither human nor wolf. The mirror scoffs at him and refuses to acknowledge his existence. This is a plight that Alice can empathize with. The townspeople are scared of their base, animal instincts. Strip away the supposed civility for a moment and the townspeople aren't so different from

Alice or the Duke. They are, after all, looking for blood. Even though Alice is becoming more humane the townspeople still fear and reject her, but again this works to her benefit. Forced to walk on two legs due to the wedding dress, Alice winds up scaring off the townspeople, who believe her to be the ghost of one of the Duke's victims. The image of this zombie bride who came back from the dead to haunt the Duke is petrifying and it winds up saving the Duke's life. If Alice had completely separated from her animalistic identity and fully adopted her new human one, she too would have joined the villagers in their quest for revenge on the Duke. Instead, because she keeps these animalistic traits she empathizes with the Duke's plight. Much in the same way Alice is seen as an imperfect wolf, the Duke is an incomplete human. The townspeople are unable to comprehend the Duke's tragedy but Alice can because she has felt the same feelings. Alice brings the injured Duke back to the castle and observes him. The Duke is an "aborted transformation, an incomplete mystery". He is trapped between two worlds; he has not yet been drawn into the human experience. His existence is one of misery and isolation, he is an aberration. His presence strikes fear and in the hearts of the townspeople, but the mirror does not recognize his presence at all. After being shot he is in danger of disappearing entirely, forever an "incomplete mystery", howling away torn between two realms. His salvation, however, lies in Alice who understands the feeling of being trapped between two realms. Her empathy stemming from her animal kindness is what saves the Duke from fading away into nothingness, and allows him to enter human consciousness as well. Alice takes pity on this wounded creature and tenderly licks his dirty wounds. She does not hesitate,

she is not disgusted by the wounds, this is purely her innate animalistic kindness, Alice knows what the Duke is going through, as she has seen this before. The licking is erotically charged as well. Carter empowers Alice's femininity by making the motions of Alice's tongue actually serve to bring the Duke's life force back. The reference to her " gaunt grey mother" is a clear parallel to an earlier act in the story when Alice was found near her mother's bullet-ridden corpse. Once more, Alice encounters an elder being incapacitated by bullets, only this time she can do something about it. The roles in this new encounter have been reversed though. Alice is no longer the helpless infant; in fact the Duke is the helpless infant wold who is being tended to by the older, wiser Alice. He even " howls like a wolf with his foot in a trap". This time Alice can save this poor, trapped, pitiful little wolf, the wolf she used to be. The Duke's passage into human consciousness, like Alice's, is also marked by the mirror. " The master of the visible", without judgment the " rational glass" records Alice tending to the injured Duke's wounds. " The lucidity of the moonlight lit the mirror propped against the red wall." This is not the first time Alice has looked into the mirror as the moonlight has illuminated it, there seems to be a connection between the moonlight and the mirror and her menstrual cycle. In addition, the imagery of the red wall brings to mind the scene where Alice first started to menstruate, in which moonlight shone into the kitchen. Alice also notes that the Duke's wound did " not smell like her wound". Alice's menstruation was a key factor in her passage into human consciousness, without it she would still be timeless, and unable to bring the Duke with her into human consciousness. Alice's licking of the Duke's wounds has a transformative

effect, at long last his face reflects in the mirror. Alice takes the Duke out of limbo and gives him a newfound sense of self. The tenderness she showed him was based on her respect and empathy for his situation, a situation that she herself could relate to. Alice did not judge him for his actions as the townspeople did. Alice's tenderness struck a chord in the Duke, she understands who he is, and she has softened the angry beast and brought him into a softer, more humane identity.