CHAPTER THREE

ANACENTRIC ARCHITECTONICS

PART II: STRATEGIES OF PLAY

The strategies used by Carroll and Lear to slip out of the costume of binary finery are principally strategies of play. These can be classified under four heads: formal and structural strategies, linguistic strategies, spatial and proportional play, and temporal strategies.

1. Formal/Structural Games

Some of the clever formal juggleries in the texts are worth highlighting to emphasize the point of deliberate play brought into use by the author. The most striking in the *Alice* books is the sliding of one chapter into another in *Through The Looking Glass*. Chapter X ("Shaking") is a mere one and a half paragraphs (*AA* 337–9) and Chapter XI ("Waking") is only half a sentence 60.

The conventional division of the content of a narrative into watertight (but connected) units of chapters is subverted and while Chapter X is only a few lines, Chapter XI is only one line – which is not our traditional ‘Chapter’ at all.

*A chapter*, according to Webster’s New World Dictionary, is defined as “any of the main divisions of a book or other writing” (235). The “Shaking” and “Waking” chapters are not major episodes of the narrative, not major enough to be given individual chapters. They could well have been incorporated into the prior or the next chapter with no damage to the flow of the narrative. Obviously, the purpose of this division is more to disrupt than smoothen to the transport of the reader from Alice's (or the Red King's) dream to the waking world.

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60 See page 138.
The physical turning of three pages to read a mere few lines and to be confronted with Tenniel's illustrations (somewhat eerie and more striking than the text of these chapters) is rather disconcerting. The awakening is a rude one. The shaking is of the reader, a rude shake, a jolt to see the blank eyes of the Red Queen turn into those of a kitten. Besides, the titles of the two chapters are almost their only textual content. “This is not merely the narrative of the exchange of identities, as one becomes the other through an act of agitation. Once again, chapters themselves transform, from their titles to their contents . . . One Chapter quite literally becomes the other, becomes other than itself” (Wolfeys 65). In short, the identity of the reader as a composite whole is shaken by a disturbing set of counter-movements in these chapters wherein the titles are the content, the illustrations are also the content, but the content is not complete enough to be itself considered “content”. The change of letters (‘w’ for ‘sh’) forces a mental back-reference which reverses the movement of the narrative in the minds of the readers. Thus, the reader is, as on many such occasions, forced into uncommon patterns of visual perception and assimilation.

Carroll uses other textual elements to surprise the reader by upsetting narrative conventions. The intermittent poetry has its own rhythm. Each piece is well-rhymed and metered. However, the pieces possess a rhythm strikingly different from the prose. Besides, the verses are not regular occurrences. They are not governed by the narrative. The author could have chosen to spring into verse in many other chapters and this would probably have served the presumed purpose of “livening up” the prose with verse or song. Alice could have been ordered to recite “You are old, Father William” by the Cheshire Cat in Chapter VII of Alice in Wonderland, or the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle in Chapters IX and X instead of the caterpillar in Chapter V, because the poem itself has no relevance to the situation she is in. This is true for all the verses, and is made more obvious by the fact that Carroll changed poems several times between his original manuscript and the published work. Martin
Gardner's footnotes support this. "In Carroll's original manuscript the Mock Turtle sings a different song" (Gardner AA 133). He further explains that, "in 1886 Carroll revised and enlarged the poem to sixteen lines for the stage musical of 'Alice'. This is the final version, which appears in editions of Alice after 1886" (140).

Similarly, "They told me you had been to her" was originally "She's all my fancy painted him" (AA 158). Even "How doth the little crocodile" (AA 38) is extraneous and intrusive.

"I must have been changed for Mabel! I'll try and say 'How doth the little —'” and she crossed her hands on her lap, as if she were saying lessons, and began to repeat it, but her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do: – (AA 38)

The poem has an arbitrary relation to the text. Alice wishes to recite a poem and decides to try "How doth the little". But it could have been another poem and she has tested her memory in other ways already: “... four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is – oh dear! I shall never get to twenty at that rate!” And “... let's try Geography: London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome – no, that's all wrong, I'm certain” (AA 38).

A natural conclusion would be that the poems are not functionally relevant. Long stretches of prose are completely without song or verse of any kind (Chapters I, IV, VII, IX in Alice in Wonderland and Chapters II, III, V, in Through the Looking Glass) thereby implying that their inclusion in the other chapters has been whimsical, arbitrary and functions only to decentre the text that is mainly in prose.
Emblematic Verse is the most striking visual strategy. It is used in Chapter III of *Alice in Wonderland* ("A Caucus Race and a Long Tale"). The text seems to take the shape of the tail of a mouse (AA 51).

‘Fury said to a mouse, That he met in the house,
"Let us both go to law: I will prosecute you. — Come,
I’ll take no denial; We must have a trial: For really this morning I’ve nothing to do."
Said the mouse to the cur, “Such a trial,
dear Sir, With no jury or judge,
would be wasting our breath.”
"I’ll be judge, I’ll be jury,"
said cunning old Fury:
"I’ll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death."

Fig. 3.2. The Mouse’s long tale from Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: Penguin, 1970; print; 51)
Charles Peirce called it 'Art Chirography' (Gardner AA 51). This kind of textual rearrangement forces an unconventional movement of the eye. The reader is simultaneously forced to look at the shape the words take, while reading and trying to understand their signification. This dual signification (shape + text) is further complicated by the use of verse to narrate the story. The difficulty is compounded by the added task of trying to find the rhyme and rhythm of the form, in a shape quite different from the indented form or traditional poetry. Besides, the tale is a tail also; that is the ‘tale’ is not just a ‘tale, but also a tail – but with no change in its identity and with no change even in its phonetic identity. The ‘tale’ is simultaneously itself and not itself. The ‘tale’ and the ‘tail’ have independent existences and force their recognition through separate acts of perception. Yet they are not ‘they’ but ‘it’ – one and the same. Carroll forces on the readers a visualization of the physical tail, which textually, has no necessary relevance.

This is simply one of the many attempts to disrupt conventional styles of passive reading and encourage more participation from the reader. The structures of the novels have also been toyed with for specific effects. Carroll seems to have made braver experiments in the structure of Through the Looking Glass than in Alice in Wonderland. The final chapter is not really final at all. The title itself is a question: “Which Dreamed It?” The chapter ends with a question: “Which do you think it was?” Even the poem inserted as a postscript (“A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky”) ends with a question: “Life, what is it but a dream?” The poem is also an acrostic, the initial letters of each line spelling Alice's full name, Alice Pleasance Liddell.

A boat beneath a sunny sky,

Lingering onward dreamily

In an evening of July –
Children three that nestle near,
   Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear—

Long has paled that sunny sky:
Echoes fade and memories die:
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
   Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,
   Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream—
Lingering in the golden gleam—
Life, what is it but a dream? (TTLG 345)
Such overt formal gimmicks propel the reader into an uncommon reading activity, disturbing the satisfaction that arises from mastery over meaning. The reader is left with a lurking suspicion that he/she has missed some hidden game, quip or gimmick; the feeling of dissatisfaction may perhaps be likened to the reading of a whodunit only to find that each likely suspect is the murderer.

Much of Carroll's "plural style" thus stems from a deliberate clashing of contrasts. The visuals, the prose and the poetry, all lack the synchronicity required to create an overall pleasant experience. The music that arises is jarring, because the instruments are not played in harmony. None of these aspects (prose, verse, illustrations) is necessary to the others. Yet, they are all indispensable to an understanding of the books in their totality. While the arbitrary sprinkling of verse and the graphic cartoons of Sir John Tenniel are used only to supplement the text, the text is actually virtually unimaginable without them; they not only complete the experience but become the experience itself.

It is pertinent to remember that Tenniel's Alice has no resemblance to the original Alice Liddell on whom the books are based. Tenniel's pictures of Alice are not pictures of Alice Liddell, who had "dark hair cut short with straight bangs across her forehead" (Gardner AA 25). Carroll wanted the Alice of his books to be "gentle and trustful", both of which characteristics are quite accurately manifested in Tenniel's illustrations. Tenniel's portrayal of a delicate Alice seems to reinforce the idea (myth) of an innocent Alice caught in a vortex of uncommon circumstances. However, the innocence in the pictures is deceptive and often found to be in contradiction to the cruel and rude acts that the character sometimes performs. This image of innocence is, however, disturbed by a strikingly common feature of all the illustrations: Alice does not smile in any of Tenniel's illustrations. The grim, sullen countenance is sustained through each situation, unpleasant or otherwise. This hints at the
probability that Tenniel may have sensed the sub-text of hostility that lurks behind the sweet, caring words of Alice.

Tenniel's visualization of Alice has even dominated later portrayals – including Walt Disney's film of the books. Disney's medium is more visual than auditory; cartoon films rely on colour and visual artistry. Therefore, if the movies carry Alice's grimness through them, it may be seen as a classic case of the supplement becoming more influential than the text itself - that is, the illustrations governing the content, instead of vice versa. In fact they enhance the richly loaded prose with an independent network of allusions to contemporary arts and politics to such an extent that the illustrations are immediately recognizable even when out of context.

Something similar can be said of the verses. Readers of Alice can probably remember the poems and poetic parodies but may often fail to place them in order of occurrence. The random sequencing of actions in the narratives makes it difficult to maintain a sense of a chronological beginning, middle and end. Even Through the Looking Glass, in spite of the logical chess movements, is not in comprehensible order. Neither time, nor space, nor chess are consistently handled. As a consequence, events and poems are recalled independently and not in sequence. In the final analysis we may say, then, that both strategies – verse and illustrations – seem to supersede the text itself.

This amounts to a subverted, inverted and diffused text in which no one component is allowed consistently to dominate the content. There is a forever-play between the need to hear (poetry), the need to read (prose) and the need to see (illustrations).

Ironically, however, the author is not dead in these works. In fact his authority seems to control this 'play' entirely. Carroll re-edited and re-wrote several portions, and pursued Tenniel for a high degree of perfection in the illustrations. Carroll comes across as a
meticulous task-master, wanting the books, in their entirety to mean, and communicate precisely what he himself desired. As a result, “Dodgson brought out the best in him. Tenniel's illustrations for the two Alice books have a lightness of touch and a wit that is almost totally lacking from his Punch drawings.” (Carpenter 521). Conversely, while Tenniel continued to exercise control over the illustrations, he also had some control over the text. The most striking manifestation of this influence is the removal of an entire chapter (“A Wasp in a Wig”) on Tenniel's recommendation; it is also commonly referred to as “The Lost Chapter”. On June 1, 1870, Tenniel wrote to Carroll:

My Dear Dodgson,

I think that when the jump occurs in the railway scene you might very well make Alice lay hold of the goat's beard as being the object nearest to her hand — instead of the old lady's hair. The jerk would actually throw them together.

Don't think me brutal, but I am bound to say that the "wasp" chapter does not interest me in the least, and I can't see my way to a picture. If you want to shorten the book, I can't help thinking — with all submission — that this is your opportunity. In an agony of haste,

Yours Sincerely,

J-Tenniel (Gardner TTLG 221)

Martin Gardner adds: “Carroll adopted both suggestions. The old lady and a thirteenth chapter about the wasp were removed. Alas, nothing of the missing chapter has survived.”

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61 This can be accessed and read at <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/alice4.html>.
(TTLG 221) When a cartoonist determines the significance or necessity of a portion of a text, it reverses the authority of the author.

The illustrations also have typical political overtones. Tenniel, being a Punch cartoonist, no doubt felt compelled to bring political or known figures into his cartoons for the two books. “It was widely believed in England that Tenniel’s lion and unicorn, in the illustrations for this scene, were intended as caricatures of Gladstone and Disraeli respectively. There is no proof of this; but they do resemble Tenniel’s ‘Punch’ cartoons of the two political figures who often sparred with each other” (Gardner AA 288).

Lewis Carroll was probably aware of the similarity of some of the caricatures of political figures in Tenniel’s illustrations but doesn’t seem to have curtailed the artist’s freedom. In effect, the illustrations have acquired an independent identity and are now worth a dissertation or two themselves.

“A comparison of the illustration of the man in white paper with Tenniel's political cartoons in Punch leaves little doubt that the face under the folded paper hat is Benjamin Disraeli’s. Tenniel and/or Carroll may have had in mind the ‘white papers’ (official documents) with which such statesmen are surrounded” (Gardner AA 218). Carroll wrote some time after both Alice books had been published:

Mr. Tenniel is the only artist who has drawn for me, who has resolutely refused to use a model, and declared he no more needed one than I should need a multiplication table to work a mathematical problem! I ventured to think that he was mistaken and that for want of a model, he drew several pictures of Alice entirely out of proportion—head decidedly too large and feet decidedly too small. (Carroll qtd. in Gardner AA 25)
Yet, as this quotation itself suggests, Carroll’s opinion on the Alice of the illustrations was not considered weighty enough to be accepted. Some of the illustrations are open imitations of paintings that were well-known at the time. Tenniel’s 'duchess' is clearly modelled on a portrait by the sixteenth-century painter Quentin Matsys (AA 82) of the fourteenth-century duchess of Carinthia, Margretha Maultasch. The drawing of Alice in Chapter III of *Through The Looking Glass* (AA 218) is a deliberate copy of *My First Sermon*, a famous painting of the time by the Victorian Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais. The Hatter is considered to “resemble one Theophilus Carter, a furniture dealer near Oxford” (AA 93). Earlier, the Hatter\(^6\) was thought to be a caricature of Prime Minister Gladstone, but this idea has been found to be groundless (AA 93).

The parodies are, therefore, not just restricted to the text. The illustrations quite clearly make references to the life and times of the Victorian age. Tenniel seems to have used the opportunity of illustrating the *Alice* texts to create a tale of his own, a subtext of his own; a subtext that often seems to overtake the text itself. The illustrations seem to draw the attention of the readers away from the text, rather than towards it. They serve to decentre the Alice tales, with their social and political parody. They supplement and displace the textual content, by demanding an entirely different sort of perspective. The illustrations, therefore, are among the formal elements that disrupt the traditionally smooth flow of reading activity.

\(^{62}\) Gardner accounts for the "mad as a hatter" phrase that was common in Victorian England, by referring to the effects of the mercury poisoning that the Hatters were exposed to in "curing felt". He mentions that it could be a corruption of the earlier phrase “mad as an adder” (AA 90).
2. Linguistic Strategies

In the text itself, there are parodies of nursery rhymes (Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat) and many of the nonsense poems are parodies of contemporary or known poems. T’is the Voice of the Lobster is a parody of The Sluggard by Isaac Watts, which was a dull and didactic poem meant to discipline rather than entertain children (AA 139). The Mock Turtle’s song (AA 133) parodies the first line of Mary Howitt’s poem “The Spider and the Fly”, altering “‘Will you walk into my parlour?’ / Said the spider to the fly”, to “‘Will you walk a little faster?’ / Said a whiting to a snail.”

Of all the poetic parodies, however, ‘Speak roughly . . . ’ and ‘How doth . . . ’ are the most striking. Speak roughly (AA 85) is a play on a poem by David Bates, which starts in the following way:

Speak Gently! It is better far
To rule by love than fear;
Speak Gently; let no harsh words mar
The good we might do here!

But Carroll transforms it into,

Speak roughly to your little boy
And beat him when he sneezes:
He only does it to annoy
Because he knows it teases. (AA 85)

In fact, “most of the poems in the two Alice books are parodies of poems or popular songs that were well known to Carroll’s contemporary readers.” (Gardner AA 38)

One such popular poem was Against Idleness and Mischief, one of the poems from Divine Songs for Children by Isaac Watts (1674–1748), English theologian and writer of well known hymns. The first verse is given below:
How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

Carroll changes it thus:

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcome little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws! (AA 38)

I join Pendlebury (35–36) in her disagreement with Tigges (95) when she argues against his claim that Nonsense is incompatible with parody. She points out that, “while nonsense is essentially ‘parodic,’ its distinctive approach to the parent texts separates it from true parody” (Pendlebury 36). She echoes Heyman’s (15–16) contention that the intention of pure parody is different from the intention of Nonsense. They identify this difference in the intentions behind the imitation, “for while strict parody is directed toward mockery of the original text, nonsense is not motivated by intertextual commentary, but rather by playfulness” (Pendlebury 36). While I agree with their basic point, I cannot help but notice that it is precisely the intertextual implications that allow Nonsense of the Carroll type to have a
greater impact on the reader. "Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat" strikes a chord instantly because we are all familiar with the original. Pendlebury herself notes that, "in the case of Edward Lear, many of the nonsense songs have their roots in or contain echoes of serious poetry: for example, the refrain of 'Calico Pie' alludes to the final lines of Tennyson's 'Break, break, break'" (Pendlebury 37). With Lear, it is the familiarity with (a) the Romantic form of poetry, (b) the genre of Narrative Poetry and (c) the traditional Fairy Tale that immediately makes us enjoy the humour of his works – for, besides the Nonsense that forms their content, it is the way in which they mock the original forms they draw on, that helps to heighten their comic effect.

Martin Gardner reminds us that "much of the wit of a burlesque is missed if one is not familiar with what is being caricatured" (38). A parody is therefore a deconstructionist's delight, wherein difference and deferral are rolled into a single activity. Neither the original, nor the burlesque makes complete sense on its own, until each is compared with the other. The back-and-forth referral is a continuous deferral of focus and the meaning emanates as a series of traces in the interpoetical flux. However, Lewis Carroll's parodies have, over the years, acquired a standing of their own, to the extent that they linger in the memory longer than the original poems on which they were based. In fact, apart from "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat", most contemporary readers would have to research in order to realise that the other poems are parodies at all. The supplement has superseded the original.

As has been indicated earlier, Lear acquired the limerick form from *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (1822), to create "his own Nonsenses and his own world" (Noakes *Wanderer* 33). No doubt, while a large number of people are familiar with Lear's limericks, very few people are aware of the Fifteen Gentlemen who prompted Lear to launch his career as a comic poet. Lear was struck particularly by the poem "There was an old man of Tobago":
There was an old man of Tobago
Who lived on rice-gruel and sago;
But at last, to his bliss,
His physician said this:

"To a roast leg of mutton you may go." (qtd. in Pendlebury 14)

The reader, who is used to Lear's brand of the limerick, will notice that the last line is unlike a 'typical' Lear line. Lear's mimicry seems to have surpassed the original because the kind of limerick that he wrote remains in popular perception as the basic format for all limericks. Lear's limericks are very popular today but most people have never heard of Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen, from which he drew his inspiration. Thus, even though it was Lear who borrowed the form, it may appear to the reader that the original is an aberration, that the rhymes in Anecdotes are a corruption of Lear's poetic style instead of vice versa.

A similar unsettling triumph of the supplement occurs, when one considers the use of a pseudonym in general, and then, the use of a pseudonym by Carroll. To use a pseudonym is to choose an alternative term of reference for oneself – usually to hide one's own identity. An average reader may use the book she reads to construct an idea of the author's personality. Readers tend to use their reading as a reflection of the mind of the author, and this mental picture is built on and anchored to the name printed on the book: the name, they mistakenly believe, is not just the name of the author, but the author himself/herself. But when a reader comes to know that the name given is not the name of the author, s/he is confronted by a confusing logical fallacy: "The author is not the author." As in this case, the reader accepts

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63 Lear published first published his Book of Nonsense under the pseudonym "Derry Down Derry", it was the custom in children's publication of the time to keep the name of the writer secret, but in the 1861 edition of the book, Lear had his name "printed firmly on the title page" (Noakes Wanderer 60).
that “Lewis Carroll is the author”, but finds that there is no such person as Lewis Carroll and so, “Lewis Carroll” does not exist, making such a statement impossible. This implies that “the author is Lewis Carroll but Lewis Carroll does not exist.” This throws the binary opposition system on which language is based completely out of gear because the signifier is and is not itself any more.

Just as the reader is in the process of sorting out this ambiguity, this reversal of power is shaken once again: ‘Lewis Carroll’ is a name that Dodgson constructed by Latinizing his two Christian names (Charles Lutwidge), reversing their order, and then translating them back to English. Dodgson chose ‘Lewis Carroll’ after considering other such anagrams as ‘Edgar Cuthwelis’ and ‘Louis Carroll’. Thus, though we know that ‘Lewis Carroll’ is not Lewis Carroll, yet ‘Lewis Carroll’ is, in a way, Lewis Carroll, just as Lewis Carroll is not ‘Charles Lutwidge’ yet, it is, but Latinized, reversed, and translated into English once again. Neither name is and isn’t the other. There is, thus, a constant interplay between the two signifiers, in the very name of the author, throwing the disarrayed linguistic games within the text against a background or source that is equally uncertain and non-fixed.

Lear, too, knew that the name was a signifier of great power and much in social interaction hinged on the personal signifier. He also knew that to question the identity of the other was one of the best ways to upset people:

64 He had previously used the pseudonym B.B. (initials whose meanings he never explained), but Edmund Yates (Editor of the “Train”) did not care for this, and when he printed “Solitude” he gave as the poet’s name one that he chose from a list of alternatives supplied by Dodgson: “Lewis Carroll”. This was formed by Latinizing Dodgson’s two Christian names, reversing their order, and then translating them back into English (Carpenter 98).
There was an Old Person of Burton,
Whose answers were rather uncertain;
When they said, ‘How d’ye do?’ he replied, ‘Who are you?’
That distressing Old Person of Burton. (Lear 78)

Conversely, to refuse to posit a lucid identity for the self is equally unsettling for the other. Lecercle quotes a quaint piece of Nonsense that Lear once wrote to Evelyn Baring:

Thrippsy pillivinx,

Inky tinky pabblebucke abblesquabs? – Flosky! Beebul trimble flosky! –
Okul scratchabibblebongibo, viddle squibble tot-a-tog, ferrymoyassity amsky flamsky ramsky damsky croclefether squiggs.

Flinkwisty pommm,

Slushypipp. (Lear qtd. in Lecercle The Violence of Language 1)

Lecercle analyses the passage and finds that although it appears to be semantically meaningless, it holds on to patterns of punctuation and possesses “incipient series and partial structures” (4). He ignores, however, the deconstructive magnitude of the final word that Lear uses as a signature. Naming oneself is a retrieval of power since naming is usually perpetrated by the other. Giving oneself a name that is bizarre – or unrepeatable (like “Chakonoton the Cozovex Dossi Fossi Sini Tomentilla Coronilla Polentilla Battledore & Shuttlecock Derry down Derry Dump”) – is to render the other powerless, escaping the subjectivity that is inevitably thrust upon us when we are named by another. Calling oneself ‘Slushypipp’ or a ‘Derry Down Derry’ is ridiculing the very act of naming. It is also one of the easiest ways to disarm a wary child since a child spends the better part of her existence wading through a bog of signifiers, trying to figure out the arbitrary rules of naming and
perhaps looking for some relief from the stress and struggle of having to assimilate this vast compendium of randomness that we know as language. Lear provides this comic relief by diverting the child’s attention from his bearded face to his play with names. His very introduction told the children he met that he shared their secret, leading them instantly to resonate with him and join him in the game of Nonsense.

Lear also makes a mockery of the traditional storytelling/narrative technique of naming the characters in a tale by putting a ridiculous and strange sounding word in a place where one would expect a familiar noun. Names of characters help us organise the narrative experience, bringing order and coherence into the string of events that we piece together to make a story. Lear denies us the comfort of a typical story-telling technique by (a) using epithets as names (“Miss Maniac”, “Daddy-long-legs”, “Lady Jingly Jones”), (b) coining strange words as nouns or names for creatures, thus making it impossible for us to even imagine them (Quangle Wangle, Scroobious Pip, Pobble) and (c) filling his anecdotes and limericks with nameless old (or sometimes young) men and women, thus refusing to allow us to identify with the characters lest the veneer of Nonsense be broken and the tragic reality of the eccentricities of these social misfits be exposed.

With Lewis Carroll, the pseudonym is only the beginning of the play with words. ‘Lewis Carroll’ is the Humpty Dumpty of *Through the Looking Glass*, operating in the real world, but with full knowledge of the inevitable crash that comes as an end to all activities enmeshed in language. Carroll plays so much with words that we can almost hear his own voice when Humpty says, “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less” (*AA* 269). Carroll even goes on record to express this view in one of his many writings. In his *Symbolic Logic*, he writes:
The writers, and editors, of the Logical text-books which run in the ordinary grooves — to whom I shall hereafter refer by (I hope inoffensive) title “The Logicians” — take, on this subject, what seems to me to be a more humble position than is at all necessary. They speak of the Copula of Proposition “with bated breath”; almost as if it were a living, conscious entity... (165)

According to Carroll, it doesn’t really matter what the reader thinks a book should mean. In a precognitive argument to Reader-response theorists, he states:

I maintain that any writer of a book is fully authorized in attaching any meaning he likes to any word or phrase he intends to use. If I find an author saying, at the beginning of his book, “Let it be understood that by the word ‘black’, I shall always mean ‘white’ and that by the word ‘white’ I shall always mean ‘black’”, I meekly accept his ruling, however injudicious I may think it. (Carroll qtd. in Gardner AA 269)65

He puts this theory into practice endlessly, again and again. Alice’s plunge down the Rabbit hole brings all conventional ‘meanings’ to an end. The first bottle she picks is an empty one, making the large, clear label on it non-referential and insignificant: “She took down a jar from one of the shelves as she passed: it was labelled “ORANGE MARMALADE,” but to her great disappointment, it was empty...” (AA 27).

65 If binary oppositions play a fundamental role in establishing meaning, then 'black' gains its meaning by virtue of its difference from 'white' and vice versa. But by making the binary opposites mean each other, Carroll is creating a black hole of sameness into which the language of differences plummets further. If 'black' actually means 'white' and 'white' actually means 'black' then we are sent into a dizzying back and forth movement without even a Derridean trace to help us to arrive at a stable event of signification.
The Pun is Carroll's favourite tool. The titles are full of puns. The title of the third chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has two: 'Caucus – Race' and 'Long Tale'. The fifth chapter is titled “The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill”. ‘Bill’ is actually the name of the lizard that is sent into the house where Alice is besieged. Similarly, Chapter IX is titled “The Mock Turtle’s Story”, in truth, there is no creature called ‘Mock Turtle’. Mock Turtle soup is actually an imitation of green turtle soup, usually made from veal. Tenniel took note of this and drew the Mock Turtle as a turtle with the head, hind hoofs and tail of a calf (*AA* 124, 127).

M.H. Abrams defines a pun as “a play on words that are either identical in sound (homonyms) or very similar in sound, but are sharply diverse in meaning” (Abrams 173). Lear too used the pun (although not to the extent of Carroll). He loved playing with the phonetic similarities of words, deliberately misspelling them and thus forcing us to discover words that are “very similar in sound” but don’t need to have any meaning at all. While Carroll makes puns by replacing words with other existing ones, Lear tends to create Nonsensical, non-lexical puns which are humorous more on account of their non-referential nature than being of the same sound but “sharply diverse in meaning.” Lear purposefully misspelt words like ‘stew-jew’ as ‘studio’, ‘works of art’ as ‘vorx of hart’ (Wullschläger 71). He often writes words as certain people would tend to pronounce them – or simply with alternative vowels or additions, leading to effects similar to those of the pun (oppology, bingular (435), Eggstrax (454), roziz, noziz (453) etc.) While Carroll was the master of the portmanteau word, Lear excelled in jumbled coinage. Words like ‘Scroobious,’ ‘Grumpsifactual,’ and ‘Crumbobblious’ are unique twists and combinations of existing sounds of the English language (dubious, grumpy/factual, crumbly/bubbly). His punning (or quasi-punning) word play is a linguistic strategy that allows the readers to play on the surface
of language, permitting no facetious or hypocritical illusion of meaning even for a moment, allowing us to participate in this word-jugglery as a language game along with him.

Carroll, on the other hand, exploits the playful possibilities of the pun, to the hilt. He stretches the pun to an equivocation, to play on phrases as well as sentences, that allow alternative meanings when put in different contexts. However, the pun which gives rise to mirth in its general usage is used to bring about a sense of unease, a confused discomfort, when used by the characters in Alice's dreams. They do not simply suggest another possible meaning to thereby provoke laughter, but in effect leave the meaning uncertain and ungraspable. Alice is forced to overlook or forget these intangible tangles of puns and double significations, and go on with a conversation or situation, as if nothing were wrong. Most of the characters use puns, but to confuse, rather than signify something else.

"But I don't understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?"

"You can draw water out of a water-well," said the hatter; "so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle well - eh, stupid?"

"But they were in the well," Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice the last remark.

"Of course they were," said the Dormouse: "well in."

This answer so confused poor Alice, that she let the Dormouse go on for some time without interrupting it. (AA 102–103)

Alice is left baffled by puns that cannot be fixed in context; and while verbally they seem logical, they actually have no signification; people "in the well" are obviously "well-in" but there is no explanation as to how they can draw treacle out of a well while being inside the well themselves.

Every time a pun reaches a dead-end, Alice must shut up and ignore its meaninglessness. It is not, therefore, that the narrative is made of puns; rather the puns are more important than
the progress of the conversation to a particular end. Conversations occur with the enthusiasm of a game, where the play with words is the sole aim, the only prize to be won, or goal to be scored. The Dormouse's story reaches no conclusion, and Alice is driven away by rudeness:

"-- you know you say things are 'much of a muchness' -- did you ever see a thing as a drawing of a muchness!"

"Really, now you ask me," said Alice very much confused, "I don't think -- "

"Then you shouldn't talk," said the Hatter. (AA 103)

In her conversation with the Mock Turtle, Alice is faced with a torrent of puns:

Said the Mock Turtle with a sigh "... I only took the regular course."

"What was that?" enquired Alice.

"Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with," the Mock Turtle replied; "and then the different branches of Arithmetic -- Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision."

(AA 129)

As is obvious, the subjects are puns on 'Reading', 'Writing', 'Addition', 'Subtraction' and 'Multiplication' and 'Division'. But when Alice tries to pursue the meanings of these words, the Gryphon says, "If you don't know what to uglify is, you are a simpleton" (AA 129). The Turtle then adds to the list of subjects and all the names are puns on standard subjects in school. 'History' is changed to 'Mystery', 'Geography' to 'Seaography', 'Drawing' to 'Drawling', 'Sketching' to 'Stretching', 'Painting in oils' to 'Fainting in Coils', and 'Latin' and 'Greek' to 'Laughing' and 'Grief'. Alice does not make the mistake of probing the contents of all these subjects. Instead she attempts to change the subject, so that a more
comprehensible conversation may commence; but here too she is left with an open-ended dead-end.

“And how many hours a day did you do lessons?” said Alice, in a hurry to change the subject.

“Ten hours the first day,” said the Mock Turtle: “nine the next, and so on.”

“What a curious plan!” exclaimed Alice.

“That’s the reason they’re called lessons,” the Gryphon remarked: “because they lessen from day to day.”

“Then the eleventh day must have been a holiday?”

“Of course it was,” said the Mock Turtle.

“And how did you manage on the twelfth?” Alice went on eagerly. “That’s enough about lessons the Gryphon interrupted in a very decided tone. “Tell her something about the games now.” (AA 130)

Alice is full of eagerness because she has finally grasped a palpable system of functioning in Wonderland. The 'lessons' or 'lessens' are logical reductions of the number of hours each day. But just as she wonders what happens on the day after the hours become zero, she is forced to change the focus of the conversation by an assertive Gryphon. She is not allowed to deconstruct this world of nonsense; she is often prevented from acting as the deconstructor to help make this nonsensical world fall apart. There are no holes to pick in nonsense because nonsense is nothing but nothingness. In identical fashion, Alice is forced to let go of another attempt to deconstruct the systems of this nonsense-land, in “The Mad Tea Party”:

“Yes, that's it,” said the Hatter with a sigh: “its always tea-time and we've no time to wash the things between whiles.”

“Then you keep moving round I suppose?” said Alice.
"Exactly so," said the hatter: "as the things get used up."

"But what happens when you come to the beginning again?" Alice ventured to ask.

"Suppose we change the subject," the March Hare interrupted, yawning. "I'm getting tired of this. I vote the young lady tells us a story." (AA 99–100)

Much of the punning results from a confusion between the literal use of words, and the metaphorical.

"I dare say you never even spoke to Time!"

"Perhaps not," Alice cautiously replied; "but I know I have to beat time when I learn music."

"Ah! That accounts for it," said the Hatter, "He won't stand beating." (AA 97–98)

In another play on idioms, the White King takes Alice's use of a common way of speaking literally and admonishes her:

"I beg your pardon?" said Alice.

"It isn't respectable to beg," said the King. (TTLG 280)

In Chapter III of *Through the Looking Glass* titled "Looking Glass Insects", there are voices in the train that give a chorus refrain to every line and weigh everything in terms of a thousand pounds: "Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!" (TTLG 217). Carroll seems to have summed up the philosophy behind all his word-play in this one sentence. What he is effectively doing is saying nothing at all. But since silence itself is a language, he is writing page after page that actually means nothing. Language is worth nothing when unused; but its meanings are most confusing when used. Since all use is misuse, would it not then be better to combine the advantage of use of language with its misuse? Thus Carroll deliberately uses puns to make the word more arbitrary than it is, to
make it more effectively ineffective than it already is – as an attempt to gain control over the language even to a minimal degree. The only way to conquer 'sense' is to make it more shockingly nonsensical than it already is. Carroll puns his way to (an escape) a redemption from the net of signification.

These counter-signifying exercises are reinforced by non-sequiturs and fallacious syllogisms.

"But I'm not a serpent, I tell you! said Alice. "I'm a—I'm a—"

"Well! What are you?" said the Pigeon. "I can see you're trying to invent something!"

"I – I'm a little girl,' said Alice,...

"A likely story indeed!" said the Pigeon in a tone of the deepest contempt.

"I've seen a good many little girls in my time, but never one with such a neck as that! No, no! You're a serpent; and there's no use denying it. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you've never tasted an egg!"

"I have tasted eggs, certainly," said Alice, who was a very truthful child; "but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know."

"I don't believe it," said the Pigeon; "but if they do, why, then they're a kind of serpent: that's all I can say." (AA 76)

Alice knows she is not a serpent. But the syllogistic argument, “All serpents eat eggs; little girls eat eggs; so all little girls are serpents” forces her to have to prove her own identity to the pigeon. The argument's conclusion is irrational; but rationality is less important than the supremacy of language and Carroll expresses this several times in both books. A similar argument silences Alice when she wonders how inmates of a treacle-well can draw treacle out of it; or when motion is the only way to stay stationery: “Now, here, you see, it takes all
the running you can do, to keep in the same place” (TTLG 210). Or when she is forced to believe that she herself is not real (TTLG 239) or when growing older becomes dependent on number:

“I mean,” she said, “that one can't help growing older.”

“One can't, perhaps,” said Humpty Dumpty; “but two can.” (TTLG 266)

The Mad Tea Party conversation gives us six statements that create illogicality in logic, by applying illogical comparisons. Alice's contention is that “I say what I mean” is the same as “I mean what I say” The Hatter and the Hare equate Alice's pair of statements with theirs:

“Not the same thing a bit!” said the Hatter, “Why, you might just as well say that ‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see.’”

“You might just as well say,” added the March Hare, “that: ‘I like what I get’ is the same thing as ‘I get what I like’!” (AA 95)

But it would be wrong to equate their statements with Alice's, presuming that “if what they assert is silly or wrong then Alice's must be silly and wrong too.” In fact, however, Alice's statements can be equated (Sale 110). In ordinary usage, saying what we mean usually is the same as meaning what we say. But the Hare's and the Hatter's statements are not equitable. “I eat what I see” shows gluttony but “I see what I eat” is a more casual and common statement. Similarly “I get what I like” reflects power and wealth whereas “I like what I get” shows a more accepting attitude; but in a land of faulty logic and perverse rules, ordinary logic appears absurd. The reader's laughter is haunted by a disturbing feeling of danger. With the perversion of language and logic, all hierarchies and fixity of identity are fragmented because it is language that is the foundation for all norms and rules in human society.

3. Spatial and Proportional Play
The nature of Carroll’s systems can never be known because they are always relative to Alice and her situation. One notices immediately the fantastic elasticity of space and size that Alice experiences as she travels to the Garden. Space is created as she moves through it and it closes up behind her as she exits. It is as if space does not exist unless she inhabits it; the hole deepens as she falls through it; doors, keys and corridors materialize as she needs them.

Susan Sherer (2000) observes that each space closes after Alice has exited it, as if it had been created solely for the purpose of her encounter with it (Sherer 4). She does not return to any space once she has passed through it because it has simply disappeared. Each scene is complete in itself. Return to any would incur repetition of the space, and any repetition would imply a stable space. None of the scenes can even be used as reference by Alice, because they are not situations fettered to any external systems. Such a use of space is a creation of physical events that exist only as floating signifiers. Thereby, only diffuse memories of the events of both books are possible – and usually not in sequence.

Only one place occurs twice in the books and that is the long hall where Alice first finds herself after her drop through the rabbit hole. This is the only moment in the books when Alice can anchor her future plan of action on the memory of a prior moment:

Once more she found herself in the long hall, and close to the little glass table, "now, I'll manage better this time," she said to herself, and began by taking the little golden key, and unlocking the door that led into the garden. Then she set to work nibbling at the mushroom (she had kept a piece of it in her pocket) till she was about a foot high: then she walked down the little passage: and then – she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flower-beds and the cool fountains. (AA 104)

It may appear that this is an event which finally provides a semblance of certainty and fixity to the novel; but this illusion is quickly dispelled. Alice is in a state of bliss at having
achieved her earlier desire to enter the beautiful garden ("How she longed to get out of that
dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains . . ."
(Chapter I AA)). But on entering it she discovers that the white roses were actually being
painted red by the gardeners. The red roses were not really red but white, and were being
painted red in fear of the Queen of Hearts' punishment (AA 105). Besides, the garden is not
really a garden, but the Queen's Croquet ground. Thus, the use of prior experience to reach
her goal proves futile, because the goal she imagined is quite different once she attains it.

Julian Wolfreys, traces a text of anarchitecture (a combination of the words anarchy and
architecture) in the 'Alice' books. He defines anarchitecture as "surface and unpredictable
event without order or identity" and "that which is outside or beyond architecture, that which
has passed by architecture" (36). A study of the use of space and proportions – or the
'architectures' of the two books would lead one to the conclusion that the structures are
anarchic and a-architectural. "Houses, dwellings, furniture, domestic trappings are to be
found everywhere' in both Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through The Looking
Glass (Wolfreys 36). The books are full of spatial inversion. The rabbit's burrow is
immediately not a burrow — instantly other than itself — with all its 'cupboards and
bookshelves' (AA 26). The locks of the doors in the hall are too large for the keys; the door
which the key can open, is too small for Alice to pass through; besides, in Tenniel's
illustration (AA 30), it is Alice who appears too large and not the door that appears too small.

Wolfreys further supports his thesis by a mention of Chapter IV of Alice's Adventures in
Wonderland ("The Rabbit Sends In a Little Bill"), in which Alice becomes too large for the
house she is in, "her bodily limits threatening to burst the house at the seams!'" (AA 38).
Spatial inversion and proportional disparities especially of dwelling places — the March
Hare's house, the Duchess's house (four feet high), and the Looking Glass House — confuse
the very identity of a house. Wolfreys asserts that through these images, "architecture is
estranged from itself, . . . affirming *anarchitectural*ity", creating anarchic structures within structures (Wolfreys 39).

The confusing dwelling spaces that Alice encounters, in turn shake her identity. She is constantly made homeless, and forced to look for her own identity as an effect of her estrangement from a recognizable home or house.

Alice’s identity in both books is dependent on her knowledge of the architectural space: her sense of her selfhood should be confirmed by the house, the home; instead of which, her encounters with architecture and its spatial dimensions are anything but comforting. (Wolfreys 40)

Alice is always trying to relate her knowledge of structures to what she is confronted with, but “architecture” escapes her. Expectations raised by prior experiences of distance and symmetry are betrayed by what she encounters in Wonderland and in the Looking-Glass world.

“Well, in our country,” said Alice, still panting a little, “you’d generally get to somewhere else – if you ran very fast for a long time as we’ve been doing.” *(TTLG* 210)

To get to a place, she must go in the opposite direction, inverting those rules of navigation, on which all of British trade flourished:

“This goes straight back to the house! Well then, I’ll try it the other way.” And so she did: wandering up and down, and trying turn after turn, but always coming back to the house, do what she would. *(TTLG* 199)

Jumping over a brook lands her in the carriage of a train (217), shops turn into boats (254), and houses don’t look like houses at all:
She had not gone much farther before she came in sight of the house of the March Hare: she thought it must be the right house, because the chimneys were shaped like ears and the roof was thatched with fur. It was so large a house that she did not like to go nearer till she had nibbled some more of the left-hand bit of mushroom. (AA 91)

Wolfreys comments, “Carroll’s text may be understood as resisting the possibility of identity as dwelling, while affirming the homelessness of all identity even its own. Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass are texts which we suggest are never at home with themselves.” (41)

Wolfreys views Alice's identity-ambiguity as a healthy internal dissonance. He sees Alice as a textual effect (42), constantly becoming the other, affirming a resistance to the home-as-identity fixation. “The nature of the text's affirmative resistance is such that, while Alice may not be aware of what her actions entail, all her events affirm what Deleuze has described as the ‘disavowal of false depth’ (1990,9). Thus Alice can be read as being in the act of affirming, as an affirmative identity which mediates unknowingly against her own apparent desire for stable identity” (Wolfreys 41).

Considering Alice to be more a textual effect than a character, can lead to another conclusion: Alice works as a deconstructing device with her fixed spatial assumptions and her changes in size. The Wonderland and Looking Glass worlds have their own patterns which are most normal to them as ours are to us. Alice, with her fixed concepts of time, space, hierarchy and size, is the destabilizing effect for these worlds which are content in their unpredictability and arbitrariness. Both worlds abhor order. Alice is the anarchic effect that forces the characters to argue and reiterate their arbitrary and unfixed identities.

Carroll's worlds are already a-lingual and thus lacking in all symbolic fixedness. Alice repeatedly tries to force in her language of fixed meanings and her society of Victorian
etiquette. She is the attempt to reconstruct a pre-deconstructed universe. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, she is repeatedly defeated in her attempts to bring a semblance of order into her experiences and interactions. She is often bossed around and dominated over by the characters she meets:

“Stand up and repeat ‘T’is the voice of the sluggard,’” said the Gryphon.

“How the creatures order one about and make one repeat lessons!” thought Alice.

(*AA* 138–39)

In this case, Alice does try to recite the poem, but it comes out all wrong. In repetition is the affirmation of identity. But the impossibility of re-iteration leaves identity in a free-floating state, in a void. The original poem begins in the following way:

“‘Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard him complain,

“You have bak’d me too soon, I must slumber again.” (*AA* 139)

But Alice's version is entirely different except for the first five words:

... and the words came very queer indeed:—

“‘Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard him declare

‘You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair.’ (*AA* 139)

The Gryphon and Mock Turtle are disappointed by her recitation:

“Well I never heard it before,” said the Mock Turtle; “but it sounds uncommon nonsense.”

Alice said nothing: she had sat down with her face in her hands, wondering if anything would ever happen in a natural way again. (*AA* 139)
Nonsense is the diffuse, arbitrary operational force here. What is “uncommon nonsense” to the Mock Turtle is actually most natural to Wonderland. Alice’s “natural way” is alien to this world. She is trounced in her attempt to bring in her ‘natural’ categories of order. The non-sense of the world she is in still dominates over her. But she finally overcomes this a centric universe by becoming a centre of power, at the end of both dreams:

“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.

“Off with her head!” the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

“Who cares for you?” said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time).

“You're nothing but a pack of cards!” (AA 161)

*Through the Looking Glass* concludes in a similar fashion:

“And as for you,” she went on, turning fiercely upon the Red Queen, whom she considered as the cause of all the mischief — but the Queen was no longer at her side — she had suddenly dwindled down to the size of a little doll, and was now on the table, merrily running round and round after her own shawl which was trailing behind her.

“As for you,” she repeated, catching hold of the little creature in the very act of jumping over a bottle which had just lighted upon the table, “I'll shake you into a kitten, that I will!” (*TTLG* 336)

At the end of both narratives, Alice establishes her supremacy — over the Queen of Hearts in Wonderland and the Red Queen in the Looking-Glass world.
Alice, thus, ends every dream with the imposition of a hierarchy where she, the most powerful interference, gains full power, thus forcing the symbolic order, with all its attached destructiveness and violence, onto a universe that is free in its ambiguities, play, and non-signification. Thus, all the identity-shaking of the episodes in the books, seems to end up in an authorial triumph or an authorial helplessness, perhaps.

In both books, it is Alice's size that prevents the two worlds from falling into utter confusion. Complete disorder is imminent prior to each waking. If the dream-worlds that Alice passes through are episodes of anarchic (and anarchitectural) space, time and language, complete disorder is an inevitable and appropriate culmination of the dreams. But Alice prevents it. In Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Alice is finally physically attacked after all the assault of symbolic disorder when she declares that the characters around her are "nothing but a pack of cards!" (AA 162). In Through The Looking Glass, it is utter chaos, at the banquet table (Chapter IX):

And then (as Alice afterwards described it) all sorts of things happened in a moment. The candles grew up to the ceiling ... As to the bottles, they each took a pair of plates which they hastily fitted as wings, and so with forks for legs, went fluttering about in all directions . . . (AA, 335)

Here too, she becomes larger in size before gaining control over the confusion (by waking up to the world of 'fixed' signification).

"I rise to return thanks -" Alice began: and she really did rise as she spoke, several inches... (TTLG 335).

And the Red Queen becomes much smaller in size,
... — but the Queen was no longer at her side — she had suddenly dwindled down to the size of a little doll... (TTLG 336)

Size, therefore, is the advantage that enables Alice to conquer these already deconstructed worlds, where all hierarchies are undermined. Alice re-establishes power relationships by the superiority of raw physical force.

On the other hand, it appears an ideal way to end the books. The child, Alice, gets to reverse real-world adult-child power biases by remaining the child, but growing larger than the adult figures around her. This reversal too, however, is not sustained. Her acts of power also turn futile: the pack of cards turns into leaves, and the Red Queen does not turn into a kitten (as Alice wishes to shake and make her), but “....it really was a kitten, after all.” (TTLG 339) It was never really the Red Queen that she was shaking. Her power is defeated by ‘reality’; her arrogant dominance is futile; her efforts to destroy/deconstruct the two worlds of nonsense, come to nought, because her own identity as Queen (in both books) is permanently destabilized by her awakening. “Alice, for all her literal-mindedness and attempts to impose a tyrannical order of knowledge on Wonderland, is an imperfect reader, an observer in Eisenman's sense, unable to comprehend that she too is a textual trace. Her identity is involved in the textual event and determined by it as is any identity” (Wolfreys 44).

Lear’s play with proportions, on the other hand, is usually anatomical. He seems to have been particularly obsessed with the nose. When referring to himself, he writes, “His nose is remarkably big.” The limerick There was an Old Man with a nose is supported by a caricature of a man with a highly elongated nose that reaches several feet away from his body:
There was an Old man with a nose,
Who said, 'If you choose to suppose
That my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong!'

That remarkable Man with a nose. (Lear 158)

Like Alice’s elongation in Chapter II of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Lear’s Young Lady talks to her own nose. Alice eats a piece of cake and finds that suddenly she is “opening out like the largest telescope that ever was,” and wonders if she will have to send Christmas presents to her extremities once they become very distant, addressing them to

Alice’s Right Foot, Esq.,
Hearthrug,
Near the Fender.
(with Alice’s love). (AA 36)

In a similar fashion, Lear’s young lady literally cannot see the end of her nose:

There was a Young Lady whose nose,
Continually prospers and grows;
When it grew out of sight, she exclaimed in a fright,
‘Oh! Farewell to the end of my nose!’ (Lear 371)

His most extraordinary nasal distortion surfaces in the longer poem titled “The Dong with a Luminous Nose”. The Dong is lovelorn (one of Lear’s many lonely characters) and looking for his Jumbly Girl who went to sea on a sieve and never returned:

And because by night he could not see,
He gathered the bark of the Twangum Tree
On the flowery plain that grows
And he wove him a wondrous Nose,-
A Nose as strange as a Nose could be!
The phallic implications of these nasal extensions are not only a trifle superficial but also quite passé and, therefore, no longer need discussion. What is interesting is the preoccupation with body disproportion – a suggestion that the person with physical oddness is not a misfit but a person who finds his or her own means of putting the difference to use. Lear attributes a functionality to the noses he describes. The Dong discovers a unique possibility: since his nose is so large, he could well use it as a lamp to help him in his quest for the Jumbly Girl whenever it is dark.

Of vast proportions and painted red,
And tied with cords to the back of his head.

– In a hollow rounded space it ended

With a luminous Lamp within suspended,
All fenced about

With a bandage stout

To prevent the wind from blowing it out; –

And with holes all round to send the light,

In gleaming rays on the dismal light. (Lear 424)

Another Old Man with a bizarre nose puts it to an exceptional application:

There was an Old Man of West Dumpet,
Who possessed a large nose like a trumpet;
When he blew it aloud, it astonished the crowd,
And was heard through the whole of West Dumpet. (Lear 359)

It seems that the poet seems eager to make people realise that the overtly atypical person may have hidden talents that no one else might have; and that is precisely what makes the
eccentric special and indispensable. Whatever an eccentric may be, she is herself a victim of her weird peculiarity and must live with it the best way she can:

There was an old person whose legs,
Bore a striking resemblance to pegs;
When they said, ‘Can you toddle?’ he answered – ‘I waddle,
What else 

Lear’s play with bodily proportions is an attempt to reinstate the not-so-normal body into a culture that is obsessed with a ‘normal’ appearance. It didn’t matter if the person of Pinner was “thin as a lath”, he could be rolled up for convenience (335). It made no difference if you had a large nose – you could use it to support a light while fishing at night (333) or could hire an old maid to carry it whenever you had to move around (91). Lear seems, in his own way, to be making a case for the strangely proportioned people of the world, using humour and the limerick form to introduce into our consciousness those identities that we tend to ignore or side-line – for if we must begin to accept them, it is essential that we at-least begin to think about them in the first place. Lear’s rhymes, playing with proportions of the body, introduce the existence of this subaltern species into our minds – perhaps with the hope that the next inevitable stage will be the acceptance and assimilation of the anatomically different into our daily lives and psycho-social perceptual spaces. Once the other begins to recognise the existence and identity of the differently-abled, perhaps, their exclusion from the mainstream may finally come to an end.

The *Alice* books are a conscious effort by the author, to provoke a temporary redemption from tyrannical identity confusions imposed on us through language; Carroll played with all that was considered taboo until then. He toyed with language, the written word and perceptions of space and all forms of socially accepted order.
But he went one step further. He also played with Time.

4. Temporal and Situational Strategies

Carroll's narratives play with Time. The books are a succession of vignettes, a series of autonomous moments. None of the episodes in either book is in sequence. Except for the concluding ones (*Alice's Evidence* and *Queen Alice*), the chapters could very well be interchanged from one book to the other. Disconnected episodes make a mockery of the linear movement of conventional narratives. There is as such no 'plot'; there is a 'beginning, middle and end' in the narratives, if one considers 'Falling asleep - Dreaming - Waking' as a common sequence of events in both. However, what occurs in between is completely devoid of such Aristotelian parameters. *The Mad Tea Party* could well replace Chapter IV of *Through the Looking Glass* — “Tweedledum and Tweedledee”. On the other hand it could also be exchanged with Chapter X of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, i.e. “The Lobster Quadrille”, with no change in the ultimate effect of the text. Thus, in the layout of the text itself, conventional chronology is deliberately discarded for an inconclusive and erratic distribution of events arranged in disarray, so as to cause a deeper feeling of instability in the reader, “for it isn't the characters as such that count, but the bit or the scrap, the episode, which is why learning to read one scene helps us very little in reading the next one. A good deal of what makes the books unnerving, especially ‘Wonderland’ is that they offer no sense of continuity, or of a past or future tense.” (Sale 111)

In Chapter VII of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, “A Mad Tea Party”, Alice is first introduced to a new perspective on time: “If you knew Time a well as I do,” said the Hatter, “you wouldn't talk about wasting it. It's him” (AA 97).

Time is personified, as a man who “won't stand beating” but “if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock.” Time is shown to be a
whimsical, tyrannical ruler, who punishes the Hatter and his friends by keeping it always six o'clock. Martin Gardner (AA 96) mentions that Carroll's manipulations of time anticipate H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895).

Time is the fourth dimension of the universe we inhabit and its malleability could only be considered once Einstein's theory of relativity was propounded. This is one more of the many subtle prophesies that fans and critics have discovered in Carroll's books. The concept of the linear movement of time is another 'master-concept', which eludes denial or revolt. Time always moves forward, time and tide wait for none, days that pass can never be retrieved or relived. Most social mores and norms are based on these truisms. Young people are advised: “Carpe diem” – to seize the day; our entire life is scheduled round the clock from birth to school, to work, to death. The child and adult alike are punished for lack of punctuality, and not ‘doing the right thing at the right time’.

But the *Alice* books do away with all graspable concepts of time. Nothing is on time, or late; nothing ever really happens because there is no ‘ever’ and no ‘never’; simply because none of the incidents have any external entity by which to compare time. There is no sun or moon to clock their days, and the only mention of these is when they are both shining together (*TTLG* 233). Just as Humpty Dumpty can make “glory” mean “a nice knock-down argument”, because he realizes that everything depends on “which is to be master”, the Mad Hatter realizes that it's always going to be six o'clock for him because he had not “kept in good terms with” Time – and, in this case, Time is the master.

Time is the same kind of structure as language. It is self-contained, systematic, intra-dependent and tyrannical. In both books, Time is as evasive as meaning. The Hatter explains to Alice, his quarrel with Time, and why it is always 6 o'clock for him. He is singing “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat”, when the Queen cries “He's murdering the time! Off with his
head!” — meaning that he is spoiling the song's meter. But here, Time is personified as a person who “won't stand beating”:

"And ever since that," the Hatter went on in a mournful tone, "he won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now."

A bright idea came into Alice's head. "Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?" she asked.

"Yes, that's it," said the Hatter with a sigh: "it's always tea-time, and we've no time to wash the things between whiles." (AA 99)

The tyranny of custom — of the custom of having tea continuously simply because it is six o'clock, is not the tyranny of time. It is the senseless perpetuation of a social custom associated with Time. ‘Time’ is a social, hierarchical construct, repeatedly used and misused by persons in power as an instrument of control. Carroll represents the revolutionary perspective through the tea-party absurdity. While in the first book he parodies our concept of Time, he escapes this hierarchical perspective altogether in the sequel, Through the Looking Glass.

The common attitude to time usually assigns greater importance to the present, a little importance to the future and much less to the past; Carroll reverses this hierarchy. The Hatter is so trapped in the conservative habit-fixing attitude to time that he doesn't see the possibility of washing “the things between whiles.” If it is always six o'clock, there is already no “between whiles” — irrespective of the fact that the passage of time has no relation, whatsoever, to the working of a clock. Besides, if it is always 6 o'clock, it doesn't matter what they really do, because it is only a pseudo-timelessness, a mere freezing of the clock. The clock which is the product of civilization is the instrument of tyranny not time itself.
In *Through the Looking Glass*, however, the concept of Time is entirely reconstituted, then deconstructed. As it is a Looking-Glass world, everything moves backward except for Alice, who is a pawn and moves from one square to another on a chessboard to become ultimately Queen Alice. This backward movement of time is extensively discussed between Alice and the White Queen in Chapter V, "Wool and Water".

"It must come sometimes to jam today," Alice objected.

"No, it can't," said the Queen. "It's jam every other day: to-day isn't any other day, you know."

"I don't understand you," said Alice "It's dreadfully confusing!"

"That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first -" (*TTLG* 247)

The movement of time is backward, in a regress, rather than a progress. Thus the sequence is effect-to-cause rather than cause-to-effect; the punishment comes before the crime. The Hatter is imprisoned before he even commits the crime. Carroll is perhaps also mocking the legal system of incarceration on suspicion, prior to being proven guilty; either way, the very idea of imprisonment first, trial next and finally the committing of the crime is ridiculous:

"There's the King's messenger. He's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all."

"Suppose he never commits the crime?" said Alice.

"That would be all the better, wouldn't it?" the Queen said. (*TTLG* 248)

And the Queen's finger bleeds before it is pricked.

"Oh, oh, oh!" shouted the Queen, shaking her hand about as if she wanted to shake it off. "My finger's bleeding! Oh, oh, oh, oh!"
“What is the matter?” she said as soon as there was a chance of making herself heard. “Have you pricked your finger?”

“I haven’t pricked it yet,” the Queen said, “but I soon shall - oh, oh, oh!” (AA 249)

There is an inversion of time and memory. There is a reversal of the Present-Future-Past hierarchy. ‘Today’, the present, is least important because there is never any “jam today”. No longer can you ‘seize the day’ because there is no present moment as such. The rule is “jam tomorrow and jam yesterday - but never jam to-day” (TTLG 247).

Matters are further complicated by the backward movement of time. What comes as ‘tomorrow’ is ‘yesterday’ and what one did ‘yesterday’ was the effect of what was to happen ‘tomorrow’. No longer can one look to the future and forget the past because the future happens first, and then the past occurs. Thus, the White Queen doesn’t need to scream at all once her finger is pricked by the pin because she has already screamed earlier.

“But why don’t you scream now?” Alice asked, holding her hands ready to pull over her ears again.

“Why, I’ve done all the screaming already,” said the Queen. “What would be the good of having it all over again?” (TTLG 250)

Carroll, thus, overturns the logos of the present and further emphasises the hollowness of the time-concept, by assigning jam to two intangible time-elements - yesterday and tomorrow; by prioritizing effect over cause; by prompting the future and yet enacting the past-as-future. But the steadily backward movement of time provides another stable time-concept to anchor one’s actions on. The clock moves steadily backward, giving the White Queen the “one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways” (TTLG 247). Carroll refuses to let any one movement (of time) take control. Once again, Alice is the alien factor that enters the White Queen’s space to try and expose the gap in her deconstructed
space-time continuum. Alice is the deconstructor of the deconstructed time concept the Queen has; which does not mean that she reconstructs it or gives it its original signification; what she really does is expose the hypocrisy and fallibility of the White Queen’s explanation of how Time moves, simply by her presence and questions. “The idea of living backward, as we approach it, thus, is not an idea offered by Lewis Carroll. It is the White Queen’s effort to explain the mess that is her life” (Sale 118). According to Roger Sale, the White Queen feels the desperate need to invent or find a rule to make some order, to prevent her from complete defeat at the hands of the disorder in which she lives — to deny that she is a victim. “She is in fact inventing the rules, rather as the White Knight invents anklets for warding off sharks, because she is not at all the tyrant in her world, but the victim.” (120).

There is no real rule to the movement of time in Wonderland or in the Looking-Glass world. 'Time' is arbitrary, erratic and whimsical. It is also only limited to cause-and-effect regressions; otherwise the other movements of the Queen are quite chronologically conventional. For example, the Queen's efforts to grasp her shawl are rewarded and her sentences are syntactically appropriate; but with the backward movement of time, even language should have been affected, forcing people to speak the words in reverse (from object to subject, for example). Besides, Alice is completely untouched by these changes in time. However, one may be tempted to disagree with Sale’s estimate that “the idea of living backward, is not an idea offered by Lewis Carroll” (Sale 118). It is, in fact another conscious move by Carroll to challenge a master signifier of his age. It doesn't matter what time it is or “how old you are” because one can believe whatever one wants, if one tries. As the Duchess says, “sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast” (TTLG 251).

A human being’s system of thought and network of beliefs are entirely governed by experience of the world and its representation by society, and thus, other humans. A belief-
system — however sacred — is never unchangeable, because it is in fact independent of time, space and the empirical world. *Time* as a concept, is independent of the time it signifies. One chooses to believe in a particular idea of ‘time’ because it helps to cut up a mass of confusing experiences into an illusion of orderly compartments. The likelihood that Carroll hoped to express something akin to my thesis above may be indicated by his letter to a child friend called Mary Macdonald, in 1864: “Don’t be in such a hurry to believe next time – I’ll tell you why – you will tire out the muscles of your mind, and then you’ll be so weak you won’t be able to believe the simplest true things. Only last week, a friend of mine set to work to believe Jack-the-Giant-Killer. He managed to do it, but he was so exhausted by it that when I told him it was raining (which was true) he couldn’t believe it, but rushed out into the street without his hat or umbrella, . . .” (Carroll qtd. in Gardner *TTLG* 251).

The White Queen is choosing to find a belief (the backward movement of time) to anchor her ship of existence and her identity, to make some meaning of her own identity/existence. Carroll exposes the futility of this attempt through the conversation between Alice and the Queen.

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "one can't believe impossible things.” (*AA* 251)

Alice's amusement is Lewis Carroll's matter-of-fact advice: one cannot believe ‘impossible things’ like ‘Time’, whether in reverse, or moving forward. Indeed Lewis Carroll could be called the most adventurous philosopher of his time. The same, however, cannot be said about C. L. Dodgson.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson spent his life in Christ Church College, Oxford, teaching mathematics and leading a quiet life, vehemently denying that he was in any way connected with the *Alice* books. But as “Lewis Carroll”, he registered an eternal and revolutionary
protest against the systems and the meaningless compulsive laws, norms, morals, institutions and diktats of human society; he did so with the same strategies that another revolutionary thinker was to propound a hundred years later. He did so by writing the two most entertaining children's books of all time: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.

Lear’s corpus of work also seems to be completely removed from any historical assertion. While almost all of his old persons are situated in geographically specific locations (Tring, Spain, Ealing, Blythe, Greenwich, etc.) none of them is time-bound – and this is perhaps what gives his limericks their timelessness. Quite clearly, the names of the places are also quite irrelevant and seem to functioning more to facilitate the rhyme than as indicators of culture-specific codes. The names of cities, countries or villages that usually appear at the end of the first line of each limerick usually have nothing to do with the eccentricities of the character or the kinds of people who live in that precise spot. Lear is particularly irreverent about geography in his tales:

In former cays – that is to say, once upon a time, there lived in the Land of Grambleamble, Seven Families. They lived by the side of the great lake Pipple-Popple (one of the Seven Families, indeed, lived in the Lake), and on the outskirts of the City of Tosh, which, excepting when it was quite dark, they could see plainly.

(Lear *The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple* 192)

None of the geographical details are of any relevance and nothing in this introduction helps the reader to position the events in a familiar place and time. The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, for example, could have lived anywhere on the earth (or outside it) and has no connection with the “Coast of Coromandel” where he is placed (Lear 324). His *Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World* also begins with the clichéd “Once upon a time”. John
Clute (946) points out that the use of this common phrase to begin a tale is related to the function of retelling. The lack of temporal specificity lends the story a repeatability that is eternal and suits the medieval perception and categorisation of time according to the cycles of the seasons because “what is significant is a form of retelling: the cycle of the seasons and the twice-told structure of the fantasy story are different ways of expressing the conviction that what counts, what is true, is to be found again. For the medieval mind, and for the fantasy writer or reader, to say “Once upon a time” is to seize the day.” (Clute 946)

Lear’s typical beginning in his limericks – the ubiquitous and convenient “There was . . .” – is nothing but another form of the “Once upon a time.” It sets the writer free of the necessity of supplying extraneous and superfluous detail about space and time since they would not make a significant difference to the rest of the verse (or tale) either way.

Pendlebury also points out how temporal disorientation is visible in several of Lear’s illustrations – especially the ones that accompany limericks concerning death: “One of the uncertainties frequently introduced into the text by way of the drawing involves chronological incoherence, as it may be unclear which part of the plot of the limerick its illustration is intended to represent.” (Pendlebury 84). She presents a case in point with the following limerick:

Fig. 3.3. “There was an Old Man Person of Tartary” from Edward Lear, Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense (London: Penguin, 2000; print; 77).
There was an Old Person of Tartary,

Who divided his jugular artery;

But he screeched to his wife, and she said, 'Oh, my life!

Your death will be felt by all Tartary!' (Lear 77)

She observes that in this image, the man who is supposed to have already cut his throat, seems to be pointing accusingly at his wife and actually flinging the knife at her, indicating that he is still alive. This is also another instance of how the image in Lear’s limericks sometimes works against the text.

**Postmodern Fairy Tales**

It would be useful first to study how much of a fairy tale, the Alice books really tell. The fairy tale, in all its diversity, has some common elements, some of which have been specified in the first chapter. The Alice books are indeed modified versions of the fairy tale. Carroll himself called *Alice in Wonderland* a fairy tale, though he was quite clear about the fact that it had no fairies. Carroll, in a letter to Tom Taylor (dramatist and writer for Punch magazine), wrote for advice in June 1864, a month after he had sent part of *Alice in Wonderland* to the Clarendon Press, wrote: “I should be very glad if you could help me in fixing on a name for my fairy-tale...The heroine spends an hour underground, and meets various birds, beasts, etc. (no fairies), endowed with speech.” That he thought of it as a fairy story himself is further supported by the names he proposes, further, in the same letter:

Here are the other names I have thought of:

- elves
- Alice among the Goblins
- hour
- elf-land
- Alice's doings
- adventures
- wonderland
Of all these I at present prefer *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. (Carroll qtd. in Carpenter 16)

Though Carroll calls it a 'fairy-tale', he is emphatic in declaring that it has no fairies. The tales have no elves and goblins either. But they can still be seen to fit a pattern that belongs predominantly to the fairy tale tradition.

First of all, as in the earlier fairy tales, the essence of the books is in their telling rather than in their progress. The fairy tale was oral in tradition and underwent changes with every narrator. Its charm lay in the narrator's ability to communicate to an audience and the ability to adjust or improvise the story in the process of narration. It was the telling of the tale and not the tale itself that was in focus. Similarly, the story of Alice's adventures is told by a narrator whose joy lies in the narration – a self-conscious, self-aware, tongue-in-cheek narration where the movement is either aimless (as in *Wonderland*) or across a chess board (as in *Through the Looking Glass*), neither of these movements ever taking precedence over the focus on language.

Both Alice books have "happy" endings where Alice is pulled away from the threatening situations of her dreams by waking up into the 'secure' world of 'reality'. All fairy stories do not have happy endings; but the Alice books would seem to fit into the popular notion of the "fairy-tale ending".

Typical of the fairy tale is also the quest-motif. The protagonist (usually a child) is faced with a puzzle or a puzzling situation and must search for a resolution, which is ultimately found. Some readings of the Alice books share the opinion that they are the story of a quest for growth; Alice evolves into an understanding, into a better adjusted girl, gets onto the right path to adulthood, having learnt much about the world in her adventures. Examples of Alice maturing are located in the changes she undergoes in size (Chapters I, II, IV, V and XII of
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; she is also often entrusted with responsibilities, all of which she tries to perform to the best of her ability. She readily attempts to recite poems whenever she is told. In Chapter VI of Wonderland, the Duchess assigns the nursing of the baby to Alice, which she does, until the baby turns into a pig:

"Here! You may nurse it a bit, if you like!" the Duchess said to Alice, flinging the baby at her as she spoke. "I must go and get ready to play croquet with the Queen," and she hurried out of the room.

Alice caught the baby with some difficulty, as it was a queer-shaped little creature . . . (AA 85-86)

The spiritual growth that the child undergoes in fairy tales can also be located in the Alice books, and has been, by some critics. The beautiful garden that Alice wants to reach ("the loveliest garden you ever saw" [AA 30]) is a symbol of the Garden of Eden and her underground plunge (AA Chapter I) can be seen as a journey akin to Dante's in The Divine Comedy. Dante has to pass through Hell and Purgatory to become spiritually pure enough to enter Paradise. Similarly, Alice must go down the Rabbit Hole, and pass the tests of the doors and keys and cakes and bottles to enter the garden.

Carroll always lost interest in his child girl-friends once they emerged from childhood. Something similar seems to have occurred with Alice Liddell. Carroll himself once wrote:

"About nine out of ten, I think, of my child friendships got shipwrecked at the critical point "where the stream and river meet", and the child-friends, once so affectionate became uninteresting acquaintances, whom I have no wish to see again." (Carroll qtd. in Pudney 69)
Pudney further adds:

The intensity of his feeling for Alice Liddell steeply declined after the publication of the book, and quite evaporated after her marriage to Reginald Hargreaves, a county cricketer, crack shot and landowner. (Pudney 69)

Alice Liddell’s physical growth in real life, from adolescence to adulthood, and thereby her disappearance from Carroll’s life, are often seen as signified by Alice’s journeys in the two books and the feeling of despondency that pervades the end of both adventures. The final chapter of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* ends with the following lines:

Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children and *their eyes* bright and eager with many a strange tale perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. (*AA* 164)

A similar nostalgia is echoed at the end of her adventures through the looking-glass:

Long has paled that sunny sky:
Echoes fade and memories die:
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes. (*TTLG* 345)
Thus, perhaps, the books are about the growth of Alice – at least, physical and psychological growth – which Carroll resents.

Alice changes size several times and this reminds us of the transformations we are used to hearing or reading of in fairy tales. There are several personified animals and almost all the creatures she meets are capable of speech; they talk with Alice (the Mouse, the Dodo, the Duck, the Lory, the Magpie, the Rabbit, the Lizard, the Caterpillar, the pigeon, the Fish and Frog footmen, the Cheshire cat, the Hare and the Dormouse, the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, in Wonderland; the Gnat, the Fawn, the Sheep, the Lion, the Unicom, etc. in the Looking-Glass world.) Talking birds and animals are common in fairy tales and folk tales. Alice passes through woods in both books, and, as in the stock fairy-tale, she undergoes several changes in the Woods. In *Wonderland*, Alice “ran off as hard as she could and soon found herself safe in a thick wood” (AA 64) and once she is in the wood she alternately finds herself too small and too tall, or rather, with too long a neck. Similarly in the *Looking-Glass* world, she enters a wood and forgets all names: “This must be the wood” She said thoughtfully to herself, “where things have no names” (*TTLG* 225).

Alice then encounters strange, often threatening, situations there. The pigeon virtually attacks Alice suspecting that she is a serpent, (in *Wonderland*) and she loses her own identity in the wood where things have no names (in the *Looking Glass* world). Thus, it is easy to see that the two books on Alice are a form of fairy tale. The fairy tale, as a form, is such that it can be easily appropriated by any age and used with modifications to suit the time, clime, and culture of the teller or the hearer/reader.

Carroll uses all the standard fairy-tale motifs. But he uses them with startlingly different treatment and effects, such that, the reader is forced to question whether the books are really fairy stories at all. The experiences and events in the books are Victorian and will always remain bound to the age and its culture; but the technique is postmodern. A postmodern text
functions to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the “meaninglessness” of existence and the underlying “abyss” or “void” or “nothingness” in which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended (Abrams 20). Postmodernism is a ‘mood’ involving a focus on the collapse of grand narratives into local incommensurable, language games, or “little narratives”. As Rice and Waugh observe, in the postmodern world, “there is no longer a transcendent space from which to offer a critique of culture: only disruption from within, micropolitics, language games, parody and fragmentation” (307–308).

Both Alice books are full of such little narratives, language games and are very fragmented in nature (as has been amply discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter). These texts reveal innumerable examples of the parody and pastiche that postmodernist art forms advocate in these texts. This precocious perception of the world affected Carroll enough to parody social norms, all Victorian hierarchies, and the history and tradition of English Literature and the English Language. Carroll exaggerates Victorian social etiquette to the limit in the final banquet in Through the Looking Glass:

“You look a little shy: let me introduce you to that leg of mutton” said the Red Queen, “Alice—Mutton: Mutton—Alice.” The leg of mutton got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice, and Alice returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused.

“May I give you a slice?” she said, taking up the knife and fork and looking from one Queen to the other.

“Certainly not,” the Red Queen said, very decidedly: “it isn’t etiquette to cut anyone you’ve been introduced to.” (AA 331)
Carroll is punning on the word “cut” here. One of the numerous rules which governed a proper Victorian lady's behaviour was the admonition against “cutting”. A true Lady could never “cut” someone, that is to say, fail to acknowledge their presence after encountering them socially. Carroll ridicules this with the absurd bowing of the leg of mutton.

Carroll satirises royalty several times, either exaggerating or reversing the attitudes of and towards Kings and Queens. Both the Red Queen and the White Queen fall asleep on Alice's shoulder and their heads roll down onto her lap (AA 326–327). The idea of Queens sleeping with their heads cradled in the lap of a little girl is a drastic reversal of the Victorian reverence of Royalty: Alice is irritated:

“I don't think it ever happened before, that anyone had to take care of two Queens in the History of England – it couldn't, you know, because there never was more than one Queen at a time. Do wake up, you heavy things!” she went on in an impatient tone: but there was no answer but a gentle snoring. (TTLG 327)

To make a Queen snore is to destroy the entire aura that surrounds royalty. The scene is a conscious and clear parody of the hollowness of servility to the Royal family.

Carroll has parodied several well-known poems such as William Wordsworth's “Resolution and Independence” (TTLG 307–313) and Robert Southey's “The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them” (AA 70–71) in content and theme. He also parodies poems by Isaac Watts (AA 38, 139–140) and Thomas Hood (TTLG 233–236) in style.

Carroll’s punning and wordplay, the deliberate confusing of homophones and semantically meaningless phrases, all contribute to the parody of the English language. Thus if verbal gimmickry and narrative hodgepodge and ridicule of all systems are the last resort of the postmodern author, Lewis Carroll has preceded such authors by a century in seeing the
world in the postmodern way; and he has done so using the elements of the fairy tale. At one stroke, Carroll has merged the future and the past into one narrative to express his perception of his own world, through the telling of a story about a child, to a child.

The plural ideology of the fairy tale is ideally suited to its becoming an effective vehicle for postmodernist concern. Fairy tales tend to present their own critiques of the prevailing ideologies and therefore allow plural perspectives to reign. Carroll has thus used the flexible form of the fairy tale to address postmodernist concerns like childhood, gender, language, social structures and power politics. It would not be wrong to call the Alice books postmodernist fairy tales.

But Carroll has taken another giant leap forward. He not only uses the old motifs to create his own fairy tale, he also proceeds to dismantle these inherent fairy-tale elemental structures. In using the animals, the woods, etc., he reverses and dismisses their functionality altogether so that the fairy tale form itself becomes an object of parody. There are enchantments but no spells, transformations but no weavers of magic. Witches, elves, wizards and sorcerers are replaced by more mundane things. Mushrooms and cakes and bottles govern the changes in size that occur in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. There are Kings and Queens and Duchesses but they are not the authoritative figures of traditional fairy tales. They are mockeries of Royalty, trying to maintain an air of power and authority through etiquette (as in Through the Looking Glass) and pseudo-aggression (like the Queen of Hearts in Wonderland, who orders everyone beheaded, but no one really is). The woods do have an aura and effect of their own, but in no way do they help in any kind of spiritual growth or psychological maturity in Alice, as is usually seen in children who return from the woods in fairy tales. The Knights (TTLG 293–314) are a tumbling, fumbling, bumbling lot, in contrast to the heroic Knights of the myths of the Round Table, etc. Besides, Alice is sometimes a force of good (like the time she helps the White Queen in Chapter V of Through The Looking
Glass) and sometimes a force of evil (for example, her compulsive, almost subconsciously purposeful, references to cats in Chapter III of *Alice in Wonderland*, before all the creatures who are traditionally food for cats). She is sometimes the dwarf (as when she confronts a puppy who is enormous in comparison with her, in Chapter IV of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), sometimes the ogre (for the pigeon, Alice with a long slender neck is nothing short of an ogre who, it fears, will devour her eggs and children); sometimes the mother (nursing the baby who turns into a pig, in Chapter VI of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), and sometimes the wicked witch (when Alice declares "You're nothing but a pack of cards", all the creatures, as if bewitched by her spell, turn into cards and come flying down upon her). She is sometimes the giant: for example, she fills up a house and uses her giant size to fend off the rabbit and the lizard (Chapter V of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) or shakes the Red Queen into a kitten (in Chapters X, XI of *Through the Looking Glass*). At times she even becomes the good fairy, trying to set things right: she is eager to prevent Tweedledum and Tweedledee from fighting:

"And I've got a toothache!" said Tweedledee, who had overheard the remark. "I'm far worse than you!"

"Then you'd better not fight to-day" said Alice, thinking it a good opportunity to make peace. (*TTLG* 242–243)

In short, almost all traditional fairy characters are clubbed together into the single character of Alice. Perhaps the only thing that Carroll seems to have avoided is to morph Alice into an animal (although she does temporarily turn serpentine).

The magic is abrupt, unexpected and unrelated to any symbolic aim or message. Amateur psychoanalysts may find a symbolic birth in Alice's passage through the rabbit hole, but that is an imposed signification; and at any rate, fairy tales refer openly to births, and not symbolically. In *Snow White*, a Queen pricks her finger and wishes for a child, which is
born; in Rapunzel, a couple vainly wishes for a child until a witch from whom the husband
has stolen rampion, announces that a child will be born. Roger Sale dismisses the idea of the
Alice books signifying or assisting in psychological or spiritual growth because “the
generalizations one wants to make about him (Carroll) tend not to hold. Alice, for instance,
does not “grow up” or grow in stature, in either book” (Sale 102). The anthropomorphisms
are inconsequential. The Cheshire Cat may be the only 'friend' that Alice finds in Wonderland
but it does not significantly assist or guide her:

“Cheshire puss,” she began “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go
from here?”

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. “I don't much
care where —” said Alice. “Then it doesn't matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“—so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation. “Oh you're sure to do
that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.” (A.A 88)

Instead of bringing meaning and direction into Alice's journey, the cat simply shows her
how meaningless all journeys are. Neither the cat, nor the puppy, nor the Dodo nor the
Gryphon, nor the pigeon, etc. appear as friends or enemies. They are all part of the game,
participating in the play, juggling words and debating the nature of meanings. None of them
assists Alice in reaching a goal because there is no prize to be won in the first place.

A further analysis of the two tales would show how far the fairy-tale motifs are inverted:
The garden is a garden of false colours; the Duchess is nursing a howling baby in a kitchen
full of pepper instead of resting in luxury; the forests exercise no lasting magic or dreadful
curses on Alice, in fact it is Alice who is seen as an intruder who disrupts the peaceful life (of
the caterpillar, the pigeon, etc.) in the forest; the creatures don't retain any of their beastly
natures, as in fairy tales, but speak to Alice as humans and seem wholly concerned with
poetry, language and song; Alice is assigned many tasks – recitation and tests of knowledge –
but never with a worthy prize to be won or a punishment to fear; her changes in size are never
lasting enough to keep her in a position of power or weakness long enough to form a coherent
fairy sub-tale; the frog is not a prince, but a footman. The examples are endless. Besides, the
endings of the two books are not as secure as the ‘happily ever after’ of our concept of fairy
tales. In fact, they close with feelings of unease that linger uncertainly in a reader’s mind.

Carroll has thus used the Fairy Tale as a base for his story and then turned over the
base—-inverted its function altogether. This, he has done by introducing all the familiar fairy
tale conventions and then revealing their superfluous nature, by using them against
themselves.

Finally, by throwing both tales into the uncertain frameworks of dreams, Carroll subverts
the whole realistic basis on which fantasy stories begin; i.e. “Once upon a time”. Fairy tales
begin in the "once upon a time", and end in the same (vague) age that they referred to by the
“once”; the fairy story depends, therefore, on an internal logical and chronological
consistency, where cause must have effect and beginnings must have ends. But the Carroll
books are inconsistent in logic, action and chronology. The absurd logic of the characters’
arguments, (like Humpty Dumpty, the two Queens, etc.) the unpredictable effects of the
things Alice eats or drinks (sometimes causing her to grow and sometimes to shrink) and the
complete absence of any time-references make the books internally inconsistent. They are
dreams within dreams, with not even the basic assumption that the world we live in is real.
They are neither real tales, nor unreal; neither fact, nor fantasy; neither novels nor fairy tales.
They are, in short, decentred fantasies, deconstructed fairy tales.

Lear seems to parody the craft of writing more than anything else. His limericks are a
mockery of the genres of poetry and their canonized relationships between form and content,
since they – at least up to and during the Victorian Age – insisted on a rigid structure, often without having anything significant to say. In Lear’s poems, the purpose of poetry, which is usually to convey something meaningful in the most appropriate (and beautiful) words and lines, is abandoned completely. “The Owl and the Pussy-cat” (Lear 238), for all its romantic tenderness, seems to be an exercise in romantic satire. The Owl and the Pussy-cat are not on a cruise but in a little pea-green boat and all they have is money and honey wrapped up in a five-pound note. They go to a land “where the Bong-tree grows” and in a wood where “a Piggy-wig stood.” Lear seems to be making fun of the typical romantic setting – the lovesick couple going out to sea and finally getting married – by embellishing it with irrelevant, nonsensical details that reduce the entire poem to an exercise in word play rather than a story of romantic consummation. On the other hand, Nonsense itself seems to uphold an individualistic and maverick point of view – a foundational perspective it shares with the Romantic poets (Pendlebury 128). Thus, it may appear that “Lear both supports the ideals of romanticism and sees their excess, and his further immoderation both revels in and laughs at them, and at himself” (ibid). But it seems to me that Lear’s Nonsense goes further than merely operating on “the prevailing principle of mockery of self and other” (ibid.). He seems to mock the entire genre of Romantic Poetry by using it in a manner uniquely his own.

Although they were written long before the term postmodernism became popular, Edward Lear’s Nonsense stories also appear to be postmodern subversions of the fairy tale. Postmodern fiction, typically, displays “a plurality of forms, a scepticism towards generic types and categories, ironic inversions, a predilection for pastiche and parody, and a metafictional insistence on the arbitrariness of the text’s power to signify” (Woods 56–57). I shall study two of Lear’s stories – “The Story of Four Little Children Who Went Round the World” (Lear 220–232) and “The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple”
Lear uses the quest motif in his tales – but the quests are so ridiculous that they seem to mock the tradition more than uphold it. In the little narrative poem about “The Pobble who has no Toes” Lear describes in detail how the Pobble swims across the Bristol Channel but the Pobble achieves nothing in the process and to perplex us further, we are not told why he lost his toes either. In “The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World”, the four little children don’t really go anywhere in particular even though the title says that they “went round the world.” Lear seems to mock the typical features of a traditional fairy tale and as the tale unfolds, the reader begins to feel that what she is reading is nothing but a parody. While the children of fairy tales tend to wander away (as in Hansel and Gretel) or go out in search of a special thing or person (like the three sons who set out to find The Golden Bird), the four little children (Violet, Slingsby, Guy and Lionel) simply decide to set out because “they should like to see the world” (Lear 220). Typical of the fairy tale, there are creatures that help the principal protagonists, but here they don’t provide significant assistance towards the achievement of a higher goal. The crow in Hans Christian Andersen’s The Snow Queen helps Gerda get closer to finding her brother Kay, but the “sixty-five great red parrots with blue tails, sitting on a rail all of a row” do nothing to further the tale for they are “all fast asleep” (222). The four children take a small cat to “steer and look after the boat” and “an elderly Quangle-Wangle, who had to cook the dinner and make the tea.” The four children reach strange lands with peculiar animals, but there is none of the step-by-step progression that a legendary hero must undergo to reach his goal or the series of ordeals that a child must undergo to reach the happy ending. The first place they reach is an island – but,

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In another version of the same poem titled The Story of the Pobble, Who Has no Toes, and the Princess Bink, Lear presents a more traditional quest narrative. The Pobble manages to find his love in the Princess Bink and they dance about all day with happiness (Lear 396).
Lear plays a postmodernist trick by telling us that it is an island of water surrounded by land (221) – an inversion that leaves the reader quite perplexed. The geographical detail that is usually lacking in fairy tales is painstakingly presented in such a way that the location becomes all the more incoherent and indiscernible:

After a time they saw some land at a distance; and when they came to it, they found it was an island made of water quite surrounded by earth. Besides that, it was bordered by evanescent isthmuses with a great Gulf-stream running about all over it, so that it was perfectly beautiful, and contained only a single tree, 503 feet high.

(Lear 221)

Next, they arrive at a shore where there are “sixty-five red parrots with blue tails sitting on a rail,” whose tail feathers are bitten off by the Pussy-cat and the Quangle Wangle and then used to decorate the Violet’s bonnet, giving her a “lovely and glittering appearance, highly prepossessing and efficacious” (Lear 222). Lest we take Lear’s description seriously, he presents an illustration of Violet with the feathers stuck into her bonnet quite contrary to accepted ideas of loveliness and beauty:

Fig. 3.4. Violet “proceeded to insert all the feathers, two hundred and sixty in number, in her bonnet.” from Edward Lear, Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense (London: Penguin, 2000; print; 222–223).
They later reach a “country which was wholly covered with immense Orange-trees of a vast size, and quite full of fruit.” In a fairy tale, each stage of a journey makes a significant contribution to the attainment of a serious and vital objective. The land of orange trees in Lear’s tale presents no ordeal or magical tool. On the contrary, the oranges begin falling on their heads “by millions and millions” – a calamity that has no serious repercussions except that the “Quangle-Wangle’s fight foot was so knocked about, that he had to sit with his head in his slipper for at least a week” (Lear 224). Following this, they arrive at (1) A land with a “countless multitude of white Mice with red eyes, all sitting in a great circle, slowly eating Custard Pudding,” (Lear 224) who attack one of the children (Guy) by sneezing at him, (2) a country with “an incredibly innumerable number of large bottles without corks,” each containing a Blue-Bottle-Fly (3) a place full of “crusty Crabbies” trying to make “worsted Mittens,” (Lear 228) (4) a “vast and wide plain of astonishing dimensions” with a huge “Co-operative Cauliflower” (Lear 229) in the middle of it (5) overhanging rocks from which an “odious little boy, dressed in rose-coloured knickerbockers” throws a large pumpkin at their boat (Lear 230) (6) a land with numerous pits full of Mulberry Jam (Lear 230). Finally, they return to their home on the back of Rhinoceros. Like a pastiche of the voyages of Homer’s *Ulysses* (or Sindbad of the *Arabian Nights*) the four children encounter monsters – the odious little boy who attacks them and a “Seeze Pyder, an aquatic and ferocious creature” (Lear 230) who bites their boat into “fifty-five-thousand-million-hundred-billion bits” (Lear 231). The children help strangers but these, in turn, contribute nothing to help the children and thus do not function as the typical *donor* of the traditional fairy tale. Lear mocks “the text’s power to signify” (Woods 57) by summing up each of the incidents in the tale with inconsistent and unexpected adjectives. The four children leave the land of “veal-cutlets and chocolate drops” (221) “with the utmost delight and apathy” (222). After their encounter with the Co-operative Cauliflower, they return “immediately to their boat with a strong sense of
undeveloped asthma and a great appetite.” Occasionally, he uses an unexpected noun that subverts the preceding adjectives: the children decide to thank one among them for lifting their spirits, not with affection but by a “testimonial to Lionel, entirely made of Gingerbread and Raspberries, as an earnest token of their sincere and grateful infection” (Lear 225 – emphasis mine).

Lear uses similar subversive textual tactics in The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple Popple. Heyman (1999) notes how the tale parodies the typical didactic literature that was written for children before Nonsense works entered the literary scene.

Lear’s most involved and parodic treatment of such moralistic literature is The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-popple (written in 1865, published 1871). This prose work encompasses many different types of children’s literature, including the fairy tale, the natural history, the “awful warning book,” and the “animal party” books initiated by Roscoe in the early 1800s. The story begins, “in former days – that is to say, once upon a time, there lived in the Land of Gramblamble, Seven Families” (p. 107) indicating a conventional fairy tale beginning, yet the following story only roughly resembles a fairy tale.” (Heyman 45)

Heyman fails to see that, in fact, the tale has several resemblances to the typical fairy tale – elements that are used for the sole purpose of turning them on their heads. Firstly, even though there is a happy ending (the flea, the mouse, Clangel-Wangel, Frog and Blue Boss-Woss all come together and celebrate), it is ambiguous because, in the sections prior to this, the principal protagonists have all been declared dead. After the parrots, storks, geese, owls, guinea pigs, cats and fish are all dead, the Plum-pudding Flea, the Mouse, the Clangel-Wangel, the Frog and the Blue Boss-Woss meet to rejoice and then return home “full of joy and respect, sympathy, satisfaction, and disgust” (Lear 204). Similar to the subversive use of
the word *disgust*, Lear uses a typical narrative cliché when he describes how the Seven young Cats "gradually died of fatigue and exhaustion, and never afterwards recovered" (Lear 232). The purpose of the tale seems to be to provide a superficial textual effect — to provide us a reading experience that makes us more aware of the workings of language than leave us with a cohesive sense of story. While fairy tales use rhymes to bring an exotic and mystical element into the narrative, Lear (like Carroll) uses rhymes simply to rhyme. In Chapters V, VI and XI of The "History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple Popple", Lear adds rhymes that are purely for onomatopoeic effect and add nothing to the development of the story. The young Parrots get into a dispute about a cherry:

On which all the Seven began to fight, and they scuffled,
and huffled,
and ruffled,
and shuffled,
and puffed,
and muffled,
and buffled,
and duffled,
and fluffed,
and guffled,
and bruffled. (Lear 197)

The Seven young Storks quarrel about a frog:

And when they saw that he was gone, they began to chatter-clatter,
blatter-platter
patter-blatter
matter-clatter
flatter-quatter (Lear 198)
The Boss-Woss plunged into a

spicular
orbicular,
quadrangular,
circular depth of soft mud,
where in fact his house was. (Lear 203)

Lear’s use of numbers also appears to satirise the way in which numbers are used in fairy tales. Typically, in a fairy tale, there are *three* fairies (witches, sisters, pigs, or brothers) or *seven* dwarfs (gates, crows, young kids) etc. Lear, however, uses arbitrary numbers which have no mystical or magical importance. The use of the number seven in *Pipple-Popple* is quite pointless because *none* of the creatures survive (the parents as well as the children, all perish at the end) — unlike in a fairy tale, where the last one is usually the cleverest, strongest and most successful in defeating the evil protagonist. In style, content and treatment as well, Lear’s stories seem to be a unique blend of the past (the fairy tale) and the future (postmodernism).

While this concludes my deconstructive/postmodernist scrutiny of the Nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, there are several aspects that remain to be explored. Both Carroll and Lear present worlds that are snapshots of linguistic mechanics, the Victorian milieu and their own psychological constitutions. In the next chapter I attempt to use the Poststructuralist views of Jacques Lacan to reveal other facets of their works and minds.
CHAPTER FOUR

PSYCHOLINGUISTRICKS

It is impossible to say just what I mean

T.S. Eliot

All discussions on the nature of sense must eventually ramify towards a contemplation of the mechanics of language. The previous chapter attempted to probe the processes of meaning-making and to reveal the insight of nonsense-writers into how language functions, as a system. In this chapter, several examples from the lives and works of Lear and Carroll—and some from other texts of nonsense—are presented to demonstrate how the writers of nonsense seem to have fathomed and exemplified, through their works, the subtle connections between language and the psyche. Using the tools of Psychoanalysis—Lacanian Psychoanalysis in particular—I shall attempt to lay bare the psychological elements and psycholinguistic recognitions of nonsense writers and also to identify patterns of similarity or difference between the psychological make-up of Lewis Carroll and that of Edward Lear—their kinds of minds, the relation of their minds to language and the unconscious forces that may have impelled them to become two of the most popular producers of nonsense in the History of English Literature.

The matter warrants discussion and not without reason. It is true that much critical water has flowed under the bridge when it comes to the psychology of writers like Carroll and Lear. Several seminal works—viz. Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense*, Lecercle’s *The Philosophy of...

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67 Lacan uses the term “linguisterie” (which Bruce Fink translates into “linguistricks”) while supporting Jakobson’s contention that “all that is language (tout ce qui est du langage) falls within the ambit of linguistics—that is, in the final analysis, within the ambit of the linguist” (Lacan *Sem. XX* 14-15). Lacan uses the term after considering, and thereby, referring to “everything that, given the definition of language, follows regarding the foundation of the subject...” (*Sem. XX* 15). I add the prefix ‘psycho’ to encompass the strategies adopted by the psyche to deal with the vagaries of language acquisition (the acquisition of language, the acquisition by language)—one of which is the use of Nonsense.
Mukeijee 209

*Nonsense*, Stewart’s *Nonsense*, Wim Tigge’s *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* and Sewell’s *The Field of Nonsense* – have tracked the roots of nonsense to specific workings of the mind. It is, however, interesting to note that such critical work usually seems to deal with either the purely psychological aspects or purely linguistic ones. The purpose of this chapter is to make the twain meet.

**Linguistic Studies**

Four exceptionally meticulous critical enterprises exhaustively discuss the linguistic aspects of nonsense and their relations to sense. Jean Jacque’s *Lecercle* (1994), has made a detailed analysis of the Semantics, Phonetics, Morphology and Syntactics of Nonsense – including its pragmatic and philosophical implications. The book does not, however, notice the connections between the use of nonsense, the acquisition of language and the psychological make-up of Lear and Carroll. Gilles Deleuze’s (1990) application of Lacanian theory is path breaking and his study goes far deeper than merely the psychological aspects of language. While I reiterate some of Deleuze’s salient observations in this chapter, I shall also attempt to use Lacanian and Deleuzian ways of seeing to go beyond the logic of sense and connect the biographical with the socio-psycholinguistic. Susan Stewart’s (1979) intra-linguistic study states virtually everything that could be stated about the nature of Nonsense, how it connects with oral tales and how it operates. Elizabeth Sewell (1952) shows how, even within nonsense, certain rules operate. Sewell likens the preservation of certain linguistic parameters to rule-driven play. She defines Nonsense as a game, i.e., “the active manipulation, serving no useful purpose, of a certain object or class of objects, concrete or mental, within a limited field of space and time and according to fixed rules with the aim of producing a given result despite the opposition of chance and/or opponents” (Sewell *Brillig*

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68 See Chapter Two for a detailed summary of the views of these outstanding critics.
79–80). Wim Tigges (1988) studies and traces the history and development of several types of Nonsense and is one of the first critics to correctly identify that the psychological foundations of Nonsense lie in the motive to escape – a “mental holiday” (Tigges 242). These excellent works, however, tend to focus on the play with words, grammar, semantics and phonetics of Nonsense but, except for Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense*, do not attempt a study of its psycholinguistic associations.

**The Freudian Slip**

Apart from biography, the most influential critical work on Carroll has been psychoanalytical. The earliest and most influential, pioneering psychoanalytical interpretation was made by A.M.E. Goldschmidt (or Tony Goldsmith) in the *New Oxford Outlook* in 1933 in his essay *Alice in Wonderland, Psychoanalyzed*:

> Here we have what is perhaps the best-known symbol of coitus. Next, the dreamer (who identifies himself with Alice throughout) is seen pursuing the White Rabbit down a series of passages…

> Here we find the common symbolism of lock and key representing coitus; the doors of normal size represent adult women. These are disregarded by the dreamer and the interest is centred on the little door, which symbolizes a female child. (qtd. in Harris 121)

> As one critic has put it, Goldschmidt’s “reading is now suspected to be fraud rather than Freudian” (Brooker 79).

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69 See the “Introduction” of this dissertation for a discussion of the lives of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll.
This was a circular argument as the interpretation, was likely to have been based on a prior knowledge of Carroll’s suspected paedophilia. To find sexual symbolism in a children’s classic was blasphemous enough to stimulate several hostile reactions. Freudian analyses of the Alice texts typically took the top-down view, treating texts as dreams. The discussions have centred on laying bare the dreamwork – the Freudian symbols and what they might refer to. Tony Goldsmith’s essay was an undergraduate’s playful dig rather than a carefully researched critical essay; as Hudson states in his preface, “Though the article proved perspicacious, and prophetic of much to come, Tony’s tongue was halfway into his cheek; he was very willing to laugh at his discovery, which is more than can be said of those who followed him” (Hudson 13). The influence of Goldschmidt’s article can be found in almost everything that has been said about Carroll and his work for the last seventy-odd years. “If it was a joke, then it was one of the best” (Leach Dreamchild 36).

Many more ‘psychoanalysts’ contributed to building this fantasy or myth about Carroll as a paedophile, woman-hater, etc. on the basis of the texts, with far-fetched evidence – or absolutely no evidence at all – to corroborate the claims70.

Paul Schilder detected “astonishing cruelty” and “oral sadistic traits of cannibalistic character” in the character of Alice (qtd. in Brooker 79–80). Kenneth Burke described Alice as a “prim, well-trained potty-girl” and even saw “cloacal ambiguities” in Carroll’s description of the dormouse being stuffed into the teapot (qtd. in Brooker 80). William Empson saw the flamingoes in Chapter VIII of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and mustard as signs of sexual desire:

70 The culmination of such amateur psychoanalytics can be found in Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll’s Dreamchild As Seen Through the Critics’ Looking-Glasses – a collection of critical essays edited by Robert Phillips (1971)
Mustard may be classed with the pepper that made her “ill-tempered” when she had so much of it in the soup, so that flamingoess and mustard become the desires of the two sexes. (Empson 55)

Earlier in the essay, Empson takes Goldschmidt’s pseudo-Freudian observations to their extreme:

The symbolic completeness of Alice’s experience is, I think, important. She runs the whole gamut; she is a father in getting down the hole, a foetus at the bottom and can only be born by becoming a mother and producing her own amniotic fluid. (Empson 52)

Paul Schilder (1938) saw Alice as a penis-substitute (Schilder 310). Martin Grotjahn used the Alice books to reveal that Carroll had a schizoid personality and that he had a “loving fascination (with) sexually undifferentiated child-actresses” (qtd. in Leach Goldschmidt n.p.)

These views proliferated. Much of the conjecturing was stemmed in 1953, when an edited version of Dodgson’s private diary was published in two volumes. This, and later biographies, have served to revive the image of the scholarly Carroll and the exaggerated sexual symbolism has been more or less dismissed (Hudson 14). A valid point in argument against such pseudo-Freudian dream analyses is that all of them centre on the first few chapters of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, failing to find any such convenient symbolism in Carroll’s other works. Florence Becker Lennon’s observation that Jabberwocky is a castration story is weak because the boy who slays the monster (father) gets no kingdom or princess (mother) as reward as in fairy stories (Lennon 176). Besides, as Roger Sale observes, “I don’t think Florence Becker Lennon, Phyllis Greenacre, Geza Roheim, or Martin
In another highly influential psychological biography, Karoline Leach used Freudian psychoanalysis to piece together a theory of Carroll’s psyche. Like the others mentioned above, Leach also appears to have sidestepped Carroll’s unique psychological relationship to language – a relationship that, incidentally, also finds similarities in the psychic organization of Edward Lear. Quite evidently, those who tried their lay hands at Freudian evaluations made a few Freudian slips.

The time then is ripe to talk of more than cabbages and kings. The remaining sections of this chapter attempt to explore the network of inter-relationships between the nature of Nonsense, the psycholinguistic constitution of its practitioners, and their profound understanding of a child’s encounter with language and its entrance into the language system.

**The Lacanian Question**

The fact that much has been left unsaid regarding the linguistic-psychoanalytic connection and its manifestations in aspects of Nonsense Literature, unavoidably leads us to consider the use of the theories of Jacques Lacan for the purpose. Lacan was one of the first philosophers to understand the significance of Freud’s focus on language, enhance Freud’s observations with Saussurean theory and extend them to a new level of profundity. The blend of Saussure and Freud precipitated into one of the most comprehensive theories of the linguistic development of the child within a social context.

Lear and Carroll are pioneers when it comes to linguistic experimentation and the genre of Nonsense. Their popularity among children as well as grown-ups indicates that their works strike a chord with people across the stages of the human psyche’s development – a
chord that plays different tunes at different times; a chord I shall attempt to highlight from among the chaotic tangle of strings stretched across the frames of our cultures. A research project such as this one would seem grossly incomplete without a Lacanian analysis of Nonsense as a genre and the Nonsense texts of Lear and Carroll in particular. Thus far, I have attempted to bring to light their prescient intuitions into the postmodern predicament through the Derridean theory of Deconstruction. Lacan strove to point out that “psychoanalysis was the same as linguistic analysis” (Diatkine 1050). It stands to reason, then, that the next step after a linguistic analysis be a psychoanalytic one.

In this chapter, therefore, I attempt to apply a Lacanian perspective, using Lacanian theory in three ways:

1. as a tool to tease out elements in the texts that have lain hidden underneath the mud of superficial critical works and, through these elements, to unearth new layers of meaning within the texts of Lear and Carroll,

2. as a theory that seems to have been precognitively demonstrated by Nonsense writers, a priori through their texts,

3. and as a psychoanalytic parameter to locate the significance and position of Nonsense with respect to the psyche of the Nonsense-writer.

However, before the application of Lacanian theory, it would be prudent to explicate in a short summary, the notions most fundamental to Lacan’s thought.

**The Vagaries of Language**

The complexity and convoluted multi-referentiality of his seminars and the theories that emerge prevent even the most interested readers from comprehending Lacan’s amalgamation of Saussurean linguistics and Freudian Psychoanalysis. “Something that appears
nonsensical in a Lacanian text can always testify to the reader’s intellectual incapacities” (Diatkine 1051). It is an arduous task for the uninitiated to wade through the cryptic texts of Jacques Lacan, as they have been translated from the French and, at times, the pitfalls of translation augment their incomprehensibility. Nonetheless, I shall make an attempt in this section to distil the most relevant essentials of his theory for my purposes and to present them in as understandable a way as possible.

**Freud and Lacan**

Lacan considered himself a Freudian. His famous statement when he dissolved his *Ecole Francaise de Psychanalyse* in 1980 could not have been more laconic: “You are free to be Lacanians if you like. As for me, I am Freudian” (Roudinesco 662). This statement indicates two significant facts: (a) Lacan considered Freudian Psychoanalysis to be complete, cohesive and reliable in theory and practice, and (b) Lacan believed himself to be merely instrumental in taking Freudian tenets to their natural conclusion. It was his way of pointing out that had he not entered the Freudian edifice he would never have had the opportunity to open a new window in it.

While Freud’s biologism was constricted by the parameters of his episteme, Lacan may be said to represent the epistemic break in the progress of psychoanalytic thought. The change of focus from the drives of the libido to the vicissitudes of linguistic socialisation can be seen as a change in the “Formation of Objects” that Foucault describes in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault *Archaeology* 40–49). Freud spent most of his life attempting to trace the roots of psychic activity in neurological or organic processes. Lacan, working to advance

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71 “The episteme is the condition of possibility of discourse in a given period; it is an a priori set of rules of formation that allow discourses to function, that allow different objects and different themes to be spoken at one time but not at another.” (McNay 52)
Freudian theory, propounded a set of concepts that attempted to place the conscious as well as the unconscious mind within the framework of linguistic and ideological structures.

The Three Orders

In Lacanian theory, the stages of psychic development are not merely stages. In fact, these stages translate into three ‘Orders’ or ‘Registers’ – the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic – that constitute our psychic topology for the rest of our lives. Although this is reminiscent of Freud’s concepts of the Oral, Anal and Phallic stages of psychosexual development (and closer to the Id, Ego and Super-ego in terms of the topographical representation of the psyche) and their multifarious fixations that surface as symptoms later, the only similarities appear to be in the parallel age durations and some fundamental concepts like the Oedipus Complex and the fear of castration. The resemblance, however, ends there.

Table 1: A Comparative Representation of Stages of Psychic Development in Freud and Lacan

<table>
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<th>STAGES ACCORDING TO FREUD</th>
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<th>STAGES ACCORDING TO LACAN</th>
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<tr>
<td>ORAL</td>
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<td>PHALLIC</td>
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The terms Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic, therefore, refer to a stage and a register, both. To avoid confusion, I shall discuss them as stages and registers both. I shall, then, present an overview of the three, how they link together, their dynamics and consequences.

1. The Real

The Real, as a stage, would approximately occur between the ages of 0 and 6 months. According to Lacan, the child that is born drops into existence like a baby-blob, a cracked egg or l’hommelette. The new born child is a mass of undifferentiated sensations, an amorphous plasma of pulsations, not yet crystallised into a body that is characterised by motor control. It is this stage that allows the child to feel itself one with the universe, as it were. The absence of the perception of separateness permits the infant to experience a bliss of total oneness with every encountered object, especially the mother. In a sense, there are no encounters at all because nothing is separate and there is no understanding of otherness. The cogito is impossible because the sum has yet to occur. The baby’s being can only wobble with the winds of sensation but cannot will its own direction. This universal fullness, therefore, is one of helplessness and confusion but – as will be shown farther on in this chapter – is later perceived as a state of bliss that is lost forever. The infant that grows out of the Real Stage then puts himself on a perpetual quest to regain that psychic bliss that he (mis)believes that he once had.

The infant soon begins to pass through several stages that split this omnipotent singularity and lead to the formation of the Subject. Birth was already responsible for separating the Subject from his mother. The pre-natal state is the only state in which a subject is entirely one with another. Birth is a trauma. The natal separation is, in a sense, fatal, because, being

\[72\] I shall use the masculine pronouns (‘he’, ‘him’ and ‘his’) to refer to the human subject in this chapter since Lacan’s theory primarily presents an understanding of the psyche of the male child.
born means that the child has lost a significant part of his self, the complete oneness with his mother which he can not attain again. It is an unwilling separation that can never be remedied.

Lacan then picks up from Freud the point that the free-floating libido of the child is forced to coalesce towards certain parts of the body – the parts which are given the most attention – wiping, cleaning, washing, etc. Permanent libidinal lakes are formed at the mouth, anus, etc., leading to the ‘Territorialisation of the Body’ – or the creation of what are popularly known as the ‘erogenous zones’. This segregation of the libido is a further detriment to the child’s blissful state of unclassified tactility, forcing a discipline that pulls parts of himself into sensory relief.

The stages that follow – the Imaginary and the Symbolic – are dependent on the unconditional repression of the Real. As the subject’s psyche develops, he must – in order to enter *civilised* society – suppress the impulses of the Real, deny its existence and evade its reminders, yet, all the while, use the Real as the foundation for his psychic personality. The Real now transforms itself into one of the registers that constitutes the subject’s psyche, sustains or hinders him for the rest of his life and organises the basic dynamic of the psyche, i.e. lack v/s fantasy.

This brings us to Lacan’s concept of the *Lack*. According to Lacan, each of us is born with a primordial lack – a psychic hole that cannot be filled. The life of an individual is consumed by infinite desires, all of which are geared towards a goal that can not be fulfilled: the elimination of a perceived lack in the self (or another as the case may be). Since this Lack is integral to the organisation of the psyche, it is irrevocable and permanent. The idea that something can fill this lack is a fantasy. Life, therefore, is propelled by an infinite series
of desires, each of which is based on the fantasy that the lack can be filled. The dynamic prevails lifelong.

All desires are a desire for what Freud has called the ‘lost object’ – usually a reference to the mother. All demands (at the Imaginary stage) and all desires (in the Symbolic) are, in fact, a clamouring for the oneness with the M/other which is perceived to have been lost.

2. The Imaginary

The Real is a phase that is characterized by an absolute corporeality that is animal in nature and is first exposed to socialization by the caregiver’s territorialisation by an excess of attention to select segments of the anatomy. This pure materiality of the subject is now further canalized by what Lacan called the Mirror Stage:

This event can take place . . . from the age of six months, and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial . . ., he nevertheless overcomes, . . . the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image (Lacan Ecrits 2).

When he arrived at this breakthrough concept, Lacan was influenced deeply by the novel experiments being conducted, at the time, by the French Marxist Psychologist, Henri Wallón. Noting what Wallón was doing with mirrors and chimpanzees, Lacan was struck by the realisation that, in virtually all ‘civilised’ societies, it is roughly at the age of 6-8 months, that a child is inevitably held up before a mirror and told that the reflection in the

73 See Billig (2006) for a detailed inventory of Lacan’s Misuse of Psychology
mirror is he. Although his failure to cite Wallón as the source of his ideas\textsuperscript{74} has caused much controversy, it remains one of his most significant contributions to psychological theory in the twentieth century.

Lacan's \textit{Mirror Stage} thesis draws our attention to the fact that from the age of 6 months to about 3 years, the child first begins to understand that he is a separate individual. This perception of self \textit{v/s other} is another trauma – a shocking declaration of his subjectivity, a disconcerting discovery that delivers a blow from which he will never recover. The child is faced with an image that seems more complete than itself. In his state of motor incoordination, he is told that the image he sees is himself. This recognition is also a misrecognition, a \textit{meconnaissance}. The subject is forced to identify with an image of himself – which is not himself at all. At the same time, he must also accept that he, who was, so far, \textit{here} is actually also \textit{there} where his image is. Thus, the mirror stage is characterised by two principal events: misidentification and duality.

The infant now so admires the completeness of the mirror image that he creates an ‘ideal I’ – an ideal ego, moving from a perception of his incompleteness to an ‘orthopaedic’ concept of his totality. Lacan clarifies:

\begin{flushleft}
The \textit{Mirror Stage} is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{74} According to Billig, “the most significant omission in Lacan’s psychological citations about the mirror stage is not Paul Guillaume – large though that omission is -- but the omission of Henri Wallon . . .” (17). Stavrakakis defends Lacan stoutly in his rebuttal titled \textit{Wallon, Lacan and the Lacanians: Citation Practices and Repression} (2007) concluding that “Billig’s own ‘repression’ operates on at least two levels: first, his argument fails to consider plausible hypotheses regarding the lack of a Wallón citation in Lacan’s work on the ‘mirror stage’; second, it ignores a substantial part of Lacanian scholarship in evaluating its role in the reproduction of what he perceives as a Lacan mythology” (Stavrakakis 136).
fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic . . . .

(*Ecrits* 5)

Lacan terms the infant’s vision *orthopaedic*, because “it serves as a crutch, a corrective and supportive instrument, which will help the child imagine itself as whole” (Klages 80).

This formation of the concept of *self* is the creation of the ego. The subject is now condemned to perceive all around him, others, who appear to be fuller than he – people with whom he will identify and whom he will attempt to emulate. Each such identification functions as an additive leading to the formation of a personality that is the residual total of all these misidentifications. Identity, then, is nothing but a series of (mis)identifications.

With the Mirror Stage and the birth of the Imaginary Register, the subject moves now from the stage of needs (the Real) to the stage of Demands (the Imaginary). Since each demand is a demand for the Real Order bliss and a reunion with the lost object; nothing can satisfy the child at this stage and every attempt to do so proves futile. In order for the subject to become truly social, demands must remain ultimately unmet because the unquenched want catalyses the precipitation of the first desire – and it is desire that powers the symbolic order, the society that we live in.

3. The Symbolic

The subject’s visual understanding of otherness is only one of the degrees that separate him from himself. The child now begins to learn language, which is made of signifiers. Instead of maternal nourishment he is now forced to get increasingly used to a distance from the mother-figure. Instead of instant tactile/oral gratification, he is force-fed signifiers, which he must desperately learn if he wants to attain his mother again. As Saussure has pointed out, language is made up of signs (which, in turn, comprise signifiers and signifieds). Each sign
only makes sense when compared with another. Meaning is between signs which have nothing to do with reality or real people. The child is further alienated by the realization that the whole transaction of signification takes place without the least necessity of his own involvement. To make matters worse, he must now refer to himself through the signifier ‘I’. It is, therefore, not the subject that acquires language but language that acquires the subject. The subject is “reduced to the status of a signifier in the field of the Other” (Silverman, K. qtd. in Jackson 57) – implying that each person’s identity is reduced to a signifier, without which it is impossible to mediate in society:

Henceforth it is the symbolic, not the imaginary, that is seen to be the determining order of the subject, and its effects are radical: the subject, in Lacan’s sense, is himself an effect of the symbolic. Levi-Strauss’s formalisation of the elementary structures of kinship and his use of Jakobson’s binarism provided the basis for Lacan’s conception of the symbolic – a conception, however, that goes well beyond its origins. According to Lacan, a distinction must be drawn between what belongs in experience to the order of the symbolic and what belongs to the imaginary (Sheridan xi–xii).

While the Imaginary is the realm of the signified, the Symbolic is the domain of the signifier. Lacan refers to Freud’s narration of his nephew’s game with a ball of string, the *fort-da* game, which Freud saw as the boy’s attempt to bring back his mother when she was busy elsewhere. Lacan repositions the game as the child’s entry into language – the understanding of the first binary opposition (there v/s gone) which introduces the child to the Symbolic Order.

The Symbolic Order – language, the social structure – is based on the exclusion of the Real. This leads to the complete splitting of the subject. The subject’s psyche is now permanently split into two mutually exclusive halves – which Lacan represents by the dollar
sign ($). On either side of the division are (a) the Real – (somewhat akin to Freud’s ‘Unconscious’) and (b) the Symbolic.

The Oedipus Complex

Lacan rephrases the Freudian Oedipal Resolution in structuralist terms. The resolution of the Oedipal complex is more linguistic than biological – the understanding that the subject as signifier must identify with the perceived fullness of the Father figure (his ‘phallus’) in order to remain a functional, ‘normal’ subject in this patriarchal social order. The subject must give up his ‘penis’ in order to accept the power of the symbolic phallus, which begins to represent everything that the subject has lost. This would then enable the subject to accept the Names-of-the-father – the Master Signifiers that function as the pivots of the symbolic order such as Law, Medicine, Knowledge, Justice, etc. Like Freud, Lacan usually speaks of the subject as a male. He shows how the subject, with the entry into the Symbolic Order, graduates from demands (expecting satisfaction from an other) to desires (realizing that one must hack one’s own path through the thicket of signification to reach the phallus). The subject’s identification with the same-gendered parent is nothing but an identification with a ‘Name’ – or signifier – and the chains of signifiers that come associated with it.

However, as Levi-Strauss points out, the Symbolic Order or “language could only have been born in one fell swoop” (Lévi-Strauss qtd. in Derrida *Structure 447*). The totalising, all-encompassing, effect of the Symbolic Order leads Lacan to speak of the symbolic as a universe:

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In the symbolic order the totality is called a universe. The symbolic order, from the first, takes on its universal character. It isn’t constituted bit by bit. As soon as the symbol arrives, there is a universe of symbols.” (Lacan Seminar Book II: 5)

There is, therefore, no question of a gradual, continuous transition from the imaginary to the symbolic; they are completely heterogeneous domains. Once the symbolic order has arisen, it creates the sense that it has always been there.

**Jouissance and the Objet petit a**

Since the Symbolic Order (the Other with a big ‘O’) depends on the repression of the Real, every subject is reduced to a desiring machine – condemned to a lifetime of yearning to possess an-other, an objet petit a which promises this Real Order fullness (jouissance); or alternatively, to be the object-cause-of-desire to someone else, be the promise for someone else’s jouissance. Since the symbolic is constituted by the prohibition of the Real, desire is an asymptotic curve that will never achieve its goal.

The ‘a’ in question stands for ‘autre’ (other), the concept, having been developed out of the Freudian ‘object’ and Lacan’s own exploitation of ‘otherness’. The ‘petit a’ (small ‘a’) differentiates the object from (while relating it to) the ‘Autre’ or ‘grand Autre’ (the capitalized other). (Sheridan Ecrits xiv)

As such, the objet petit a is never the object-of-desire. In truth, it is the thing that merely sparks off a desire, never really providing the fullness that the subject desires and always failing to give the pre-linguistic bliss of the Real stage that is banned for life.

**The Four Discourses**

Starting in 1969, Lacan began to lay out aspects of his Theory of Four Discourses – the four possible forms of discourse that can exist between humans – each of which, however, is
doomed to fail. Each discourse is made up of four empty slots which represent four different positions which could be occupied, at any given point in time, by four separate terms.

![Diagram of discourses]

Fig. 4.1. The circuitry of the discourses from Paul Verhaeghe, *From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory on the Four Discourses* (The Letter. 3. Spring: 1995. Web: 97. 15 Apr. 2009)

While these positions never change, the terms that fill them shift position in an anticlockwise direction and thus, the form of discourse changes. These terms are:

- **$S_1$** – The Master Signifier
- **$S_2$** - Signifiers
- **$\$** - The split subject (the subject constituted by a lack)
- ‘$a$’ – The *object petit a*, the lost object

Each of these four terms may occupy one of four positions:

1. **Truth**: The “prime mover” – the moving force of the discourse, the primal truth which can never really be accessed.
2. **Agent**: The speaker – or rather- the source of the communicative act.
3. **Other**: The receiver of the message – the one who is addressed
4. **Product**: The result or the effect of the discourse.
Depending on the position a term occupies, Lacan identified four different possible ‘discourses’ or social bonds:

Master’s Discourse

\[
\frac{S_1}{S} \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} \frac{S_2}{a}
\]

is clarified by regression from the:

Hysteric’s Discourse

\[
\frac{\$}{a} \xrightarrow{\text{impotence}} \frac{S_1}{S_2}
\]

University Discourse

\[
\frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{\text{impotence}} \frac{a}{\$}
\]

is clarified by its “progress” in the:

Analyst’s Discourse

\[
\frac{a}{S_2} \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} \frac{\$}{S_1}
\]

Fig. 4.2: The Four Discourses from Jacques Lacan, Seminar XX (New York: Norton, 1999; Print: 16)

1. The Discourse of the Master: The Master’s discourse, influenced by Hegel’s thoughts on the master-slave relationship, is the primary discourse and the rest of them originate from it. “It is the first one, because it founds the Symbolic Order as such, and it gives us a formal expression of the Oedipus complex and the constitution of the subject. (Verhaeghe 99)\(^76\).

\[
\frac{S_1}{S} \xrightarrow{\text{}} \frac{S_2}{a}
\]

2. The Discourse of the University: This is the hysteric’s discourse turned upside down. Knowledge is the agent that reduces the other to the status of a mere object that causes desire. What results is the subject’s deeper perception of his own lack. The secret is,

\(^76\) All discussions on Lacan’s Four Discourses have their source in Verhaeghe (1995).
however, that every body of knowledge needs a point de capiton – a Master Signifier, a guru like Einstein, Freud, etc. – an $S_1$.

3. *The Discourse of the Analyst*: The lost object propels the subject to turn to the analyst whom, he perceives, as a Master, an other-supposed-to-know. The truth, however, is that the analyst is himself lacking. This bond, being in the zone of impossibility, can only help the subject circumnavigate the object. The subject must create his own master signifiers to survive.

4. *The Discourse of the Hysteric*: The split subject makes a master of another, seeking to be told what he or she desires. Whatever answer the Master provides will always miss the point, thus leading to a production of endless knowledge. The Master can only give the hysteric endless words and thus, every hysteric is destined to be disappointed with every master and look for a new one soon enough.
Nonsense is the other of language and what is language but the visible web of the Symbolic Order, woven by delusory categories of ‘sense’. The proof of this is the fact that the categories of what constitutes nonsense change over the years. This, in turn, reflects the changes in social systems, perspectives and ways of seeing. “The ‘content’ of nonsense will always shift as a result of the ongoing social process of making sense” (Stewart 39). The illusion of sense is the power grid that enables the social to function, that holds together the carpet of the symbolic order by weaving itself through every category that shapes its design.

There is thus in Lacanian theory of desire, a tension between its partial expression, within the limits of the symbolic order, which defines the possibility of enjoyment according to the pleasure and reality principles (with the crucial distinctions of enjoyment/pain and existence/fantasy), and the unconscious pursuit of jouissance (an impossible fantasy of contact with the “real”). . . . what he calls the ‘real’, remains outside of symbolization, inaccessible to thought. (Kirshner 86)

Nonsense is, after all, babble; and babble, being pre-linguistic, is a threat to the symbolic lifeworld, a threat that must be suppressed77. Nonsense is a symptom - a bulge in the carpet – the threat of the ultimate jouissance that portends the satisfaction of the death drive and thus, must be flattened. There are two reasons why, in spite of its potential to capsize civilised society, Nonsense still prevails. All Real Order pulsions are desperately glossed over. What the Unconscious tries to throw out is intolerable and so reveals itself in disguises such as symptoms. However Nonsense, which should, by the same laws, be forced to ex-sist is

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77 This is the reason why adults who indulge in babble are considered weird or not-normal. It also explains why one of the few legitimate channels for adults to indulge in babbling is when they talk to infants in their tongue – as if they had turned into infants themselves.
allowed to sub-sist within our tightly-bound sense-ible lives, our high-brow intellectual
categories and our University PhD dissertations. The Symbolic allows certain forms of
jouissance – select ‘legal’ modes of enjoyment such as sexual contact (usually within
marriage), alcohol or drug-induced ego-dissolution, etc. Complete subservience to such
patterns of enjoyment, however, reflects an extreme desire for Real Order lawlessness – also
known as ‘addiction’. This is inevitably dealt with through punitive measures. Taking any of
these symptomatic contacts too seriously leads to a collapse of the symbolic grid, and a
psychological breakdown.

Similar to this is our encounter with nonsense. It is the promise of jouissance that
perpetually attracts us towards Nonsense. This encounter with the Real, however, is
legitimate. It is disguised as a limerick, a nursery rhyme, a poem, a children’s tale, an
introduction to the alphabet, a song, a list of botanical terms, etc. It is, thus, the quintessential
symptom – the synthomme – the quality that makes a man a man – condemning him to the
normalcy of neuroses rather than the uncontrolled babble of psychosis.

The mask that makes Nonsense a symptom is the mask of humour. At first we do not
know whether to take the nonsense work seriously. When we finally attach the signifier of
‘humour’ or comic intention to it, it saves us from the schizophrenia of taking the Real Order
seriously and misbelieving that the Symbolic Order has an ‘Other’. Like the Fool in
Shakespearean drama or the character of Birbal in Indian History, the appearance of ‘Play’ in
Nonsense texts, permits it to protrude as a powdered pimple, or a decorated sore.

Nonsense harbours the fantasy of potential jouissance – one of the few legitimate ways of
filling the lack in this crowded morass of signifiers. “The langue reading of the text is
subverted by the absence of sense, and a second reading is induced. The new reading starts
from semantic blanks” (Lecercle 23). Nonsense escapes the snare of the langue through this
alternative way of reading. “By focusing on semantic gaps, this second reading lets
language play on its own – it lets language speak. This is no longer a langue reading, but, in
Lacanian terms, a lalangue reading” (Lecercle 24).

The babble of nonsense either (a) reduces language to a series of unary signifiers or (b)
exaggerates all signification to its absurd multiplicity, in effect, rendering the signifying
principles of the symbolic order, illogical or non-sensical.

Ironically, then, Nonsense is the symptom around which the symbolic is built.

The self-consistency of a symbolic construction of reality depends on the harmony
instituted by fantasy. This fantasmatic harmony can only be sustained by the
neutralisation of the symptom and of the real, by a negation of the generalized lack
that crosses the field of the social (Stavrakakis Lacan and the Political 65).

The symptom is that which, in its insistence, re-presents a prohibited pulsion in the guise
of a mannerism, action, aberration or pathology. The symptom, then, is that which, in its
compulsive repetition allows the subject to deal with the Real that is attempting to burst out.
The symptom, in short, saves the subject from total breakdown. It serves as a point de
capiton – the quilting point that holds the psychic fabric together. Like marriage is to society,
the Greenwich Meridian is to international time and the Jews were to the Nazis, Nonsense
serves as a point de capiton to the entire structure of language – a symptomatic pillar that
allows the subject to sustain the sliding framework of the fantasy of sense.

Thus, taking nonsense seriously, quoting from Nonsense literature to support our beliefs
and ways is as ruthlessly futile as Hitler’s ‘final solution’ or divorce; because that would be
addressing the symptom directly, rather than reaching for what lies beneath. The reader or
writer who quotes from the Alice books to explain science or management principles, for
example, has not understood Nonsense at all; for he, like an untrained psychoanalyst, is attempting to deal with the surface aberration, taking the symptom so seriously as to interpret it through the hermeneutics of the Symbolic; he fails to understand that Nonsense must be allowed to remain what it is, that it is Nonsense *qua* Nonsense that gives breath to ‘language’ and ‘meaningfulness’. It has the same value as the seemingly insignificant number: zero.

Nonsense is the zero of language. Just as – until Brahmagupta – most people found it difficult to consider that nothing is actually a thing – that “zero is actually a number,” (Bentley 20), it took Lear and Carroll to show the world that Nonsense is what helps everything make sense in the first place.

The similarity between the mathematical zero and Nonsense is most evident in the following ways:

(i) Like the zero, Nonsense derives various shades of importance depending on where it is placed, how it is used and changes in context. Conversely, the positioning of Nonsense imparts different levels of importance to the elements of sense around it. Having to run very fast to stay in the same place, for example, sounds corny and childish and perfect for a book of fantasy for children. It may even begin to make a little sense when placed in a marketing management text book to explain the rat race, the degree of competitiveness and the pressures of holding your own in a changing market:

> Added to the whimsical nature of customers, brands operating in mature markets often face intense competition. Opportunities for growth in established categories are usually limited to stealing customers from the competition – and as a result there may be heavy pressure on price. Given all of these factors, it can often require the full energy and attention of a brand team just to defend the market share and support
price. It’s rather like the observation made to Alice by the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*: ‘In this place it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place’ (Miller 126).

It is the tongue-in-cheek absurdity of the idea (running to stay static) that tempts the layman to misperceive it as a metaphor and use it as a *point de capiton* for the entire capitalist milieu. But put it in a book about athletics, in which the “running” becomes real, and the stitches open up and arguments burst apart at the seams.

The flip side of zero is not, as most suppose, infinity, but something undefined— or rather, something indeterminate (Bentley 23). In this sense, zero is a placeholder – the *point de capiton* of mathematics that enables all of mathematics to function. Zero is the site of the lack – the point at which the lack appears, threatening to make the structure collapse. However, mathematics – through the efforts of Brahmagupta and hundreds of mathematicians since then – has successfully performed what Lacan has been recommending all along: to accept the Lack as inescapable, live with it, build around it and proceed by using the site of the Lack as a symptom that, in a pivotal fashion, holds together the personality of the common-or-garden neurotic or mathematical lunatic. Lewis Carroll, Professor of mathematics and inventor of innumerable mathematical puzzles and riddles, was quite likely to have an understanding of this characteristic of mathematics.

Similarly, Nonsense is the placeholder – the symptom, the site of the lack that must be lived with, traversed and navigated to allow the symbolic structure to survive. As Deleuze puts it, sense is “... regarded not at all as appearance but as surface effect and position effect, and produced by the circulation of the empty square in the structural series (the place of the dummy, the place of the King, the blind spot, the floating signifier, the valued degree zero, the off-stage or absent cause, etc)” (Deleuze 82).
The Jouis-sense of Nonsense

Lacan’s topological formulation of the psyche was the Borromean Knot. According to him, the R.S.I. (Real/Symbolic/Imaginary) co-exist as three rings interlinked in such a way that “one cannot think of the interrelation between any two of its terms without immediately implying the existence of the third term that secures their relation” (Dravers 8). Thus, for instance, the Symbolic and the Imaginary cannot be conceived of independently of the Real, for it is the Real that actually holds the two Registers together as both are constructed on the same substrate. Paradoxically, “in securing the relation between two, the third term also keeps them apart, thereby ensuring that the two are free to play across each other’s surfaces without becoming directly interlinked” (Dravers 8).

Fig. 4.3: “Jouissance and the Knot”: The Borromean Knot of the three registers and the different forms of jouissance they afford from Phil Dravers, “Joyce & the Sinthome: Aiming at the Fourth Term of the Knot” from Psychoanalytical Notebooks of the LSNS 13, Lacan with Joyce. (2005; Web, 9)

As Dravers (9) points out, "Joui-sense or enjoy-meant, the enjoyment invested at the level of meaning, is produced in the overlapping of the Imaginary and the Symbolic." Where, then, should we place the joy of meaninglessness? Dravers explains the pleasure we receive from play with signification (puns, figures of speech, ‘sensible’ poetry, etc.). But he does not position the jouissance that we would experience on account of a complete and deliberate absence of signification – the insensé.

Paradoxically, the jouissance of nonsense is the ‘plus de jouir’ that is always elsewhere: while it plays with signifiers, it is play for the sake of play, refusing to enter the Imaginary – because, instead of multiplying signification, it thrives on non-referentiality. The otherness of Nonsense lies not in its meaninglessness but its resistance to meaningfulness.

Fig. 4.4: A more explicit representation of the Lacanian RSI from Dravers (2005:9) (labels added are mine).
The pleasure of Nonsense is not phallic (JΦ) either because, instead of perpetuating the fantasy that the phallus can be accessed through this encounter, it reminds us of the Lack in the Symbolic – the Lack in the other.

It is my contention, then, that the jouissance of Nonsense (or jou-insensé) lies in the elsewhereness of the three orders. The Symbolic Order’s famous diktat, il n’y a pas de hors-texte (Derrida Of Grammatology 158) is thrown into question. Like the things in the sheep’s shop (AA 252–54) the pleasure of Nonsense is elusive and cannot be pin-pointed at any one of the overlapping portions of the knot. Nonsense floats like its signifiers, affording a jouissance that is itself a Derridean trace and disappears when questioned. Nonsense permits no capture.

There is, however, a vestigial Imaginary pleasure visible here and this lies in the symmetry of the form that Nonsense emerges in. Nonsense is given a shape that appears familiar and full – the aabba rhyme pattern of the limerick, or the familiar fairy-tale narrative construction of the Alice books. This Imaginary fullness provides the disguise that permits nonsense to pervade our corridors of paranoid symbolisation while subverting the very rules that we uphold.

Glossolalia

If “language is rendered possible by that which distinguishes it” (Deleuze 214) and “communication implies reference” (Lacan Sem. XX 138), it is the non-signifying utterance that enables sense to persevere in its fantasy of meaningfulness. The utterance that is devoid of signification, that is, made up of unary signifiers, Lacan calls lalangue:

Llanguage serves purposes that are altogether different from that of communication.

That is what the experience of the unconscious has shown us, insofar as it is made of llanguage, which, as you know, I write with two l’s to designate what each of us deals
with, our so-called mother tongue (*lalangue dite maternelle*), which isn’t called that by accident. (Lacan *Sem. XX* 138)

The babble of the Real Order unites one and all. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel, all subjects speak one common incomprehensible ‘Ilanguage’ before they learn language. Nonsense is pure babble, unalloyed *lalangue*. This is supported by the fact that most translations of Nonsense lose their quality, their phonic fun and their humorous ambiguity when translated. Translations of Nonsense lose much more than what is usually accepted as ‘lost-in-translation.’ The random repetition of sounds and the ambiguous allusions that are generated by the words combined through auditory associations render Nonsense — especially Nonsense Verse — quite impossible to translate. Here is an example of a Nonsense poem by Sukumar Ray in Bangla (but presented in the English alphabet), followed by two English translations:

```
pecha koi pechani
khasha tor chechani
shuney shuney an-mon
nachey mor pran mon!
maja gola chacha shur
ahladey bkorpur!
gola chera dhomkey
gach pala chomkey,
surey surey koto pech
gitkiri kech kech!
joto bhoi joto dukh
duru duru dhuk dhuk,
tor ganey pechi re
shob bhuley gechi re,
chand mukhey mithey gaan
shuney jhorey da’noyon.
```

(A sound-based representation of Sukumar Ray’s poem from *Abol Tabol*)
This has been translated thus by Sukanta Chaudhuri:

The Owl's Love Song

Said the Owl to his mate, "O my peach,
How sweet, I aver, is your screech!
Each squawk that your mandibles utter
Reduces my heart to a flutter,
The croaking crescendos you capture
Inspire me with fathomless rapture!
Your tremolo flows all a-quiver,
The trees grow ecstatic and shiver,
And O what an intricate tangle
Of titters you mix and you mangle!
All torment and trembling and sorrow,
Despond for the past and the morrow,
The pit-a-pat play of my tensions,
Are drowned by your dulcet inventions.
Such strains from your sweet pout leaping
Unman me with measureless weeping! (Sukanta Chaudhuri The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray 14)

Another translation has been attempted by Sampurna Chattarji:

Mister says to Missus Owl,
I just love it when you howl,
Listening absent-mindedly
My soul dances blindly!
That rubbed voice and scrubbed croon
That upswelling happy swoon!
Just one of your ear-splitting hoots
Rips the trees out of their roots,
A twist, a turn in every note
Crescendos creaking from that throat!
All my fears all my woes
All my thobby sobby lows,
Are all forgotten thanks to you
My darling singing Owleroo,
Moonbright beauty, sweet as sleep,
Your nightly songs, they make me weep. (Chattarji The Tenth Rasa 9)

In both of these it is quite evident (especially to one who is familiar with the Bangla language) that the attempt to translate shifts the focus of the writer from the phonic/tonic to the merely literal. The absent alliterations are replaced by misplaced meaningfulness, troubled transliterations and forced rhymes which come together to condemn the translation to inevitable ignominy. Nobody can translate baby-talk. Unary signifiers are acoustic images first and only turn semantic later. That is why a nonsense poem is enjoyed better orally and is entertaining to the ear for its combination of sounds, whether one knows the language or not.

Yet, not all forms of babble are the same. Nonsense as babble is different from the anatomical utterance that one witnesses in patients afflicted with schizophrenia. The DSM-IV\(^7\), in its criteria for schizophrenia lists “disorganized speech (e.g. frequent derailment or incoherence)” as one of the characteristic symptoms of the active phase (Gelder et al 277). The ICD-10\(^7\) is a little more precise and notes “breaks or interpolations in the train of thought, resulting in incoherence or irrelevant speech, or neologisms,” (Gelder et al 277) as one of the key diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia apart from “paucity of speech”.

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\(^7\) The DSM is short for the APA’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) the current version of which is the DSM-IV TR.

\(^7\) The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision (ICD-10) as classified by the World Health Organization (WHO).
While nonsense writers prefer the experimental combination of sounds – the Lacanian "mother-tongue" – that are favourite childish indulgences, schizophrenics attempt to strip language of its constituting principle of surface effects by letting the utterances turn into sounds of the body. Nonsense plays with infinity, simultaneity and other boundaries (Stewart) but limits itself to onomatopoeias, portmanteau-words and neologisms of a specific kind. There is a gentility in nonsense that prevents the nonsense-writer from resorting to animal-like sounds or uncivilised phonemics. The schizophrenic, however, has no obligation to stay genteel. For the schizophrenic, the symbolic order is not entirely comprehensible. The schizophrenic subject is unable to fathom the way in which signifiers achieve hypothetical and provisional connections with signifieds and how the sliding nature of signification functions. The subject, thus, fails to grow into language. In a study of schizophrenic children and their use of language, Sulamith Wolff and Stella Chess (1965) found that “non-verbal utterances and repetitive non-communicative speech appeared to have no aim beyond the activity itself and resembled the pre-intentional behaviour patterns which occur in the early infancy of normal children” (Wolff and Chess 39). How schizophrenics tend to use language is quite clearly summarised in a recent study:

The bizarre language of schizophrenics is nowadays generally believed to be the meaningless breakdown product of a neurobiological disorder . . . schizophrenics speak a meaningful language that is syntactically and morphologically similar to ordinary language, but is qualitatively different in terms of semantics and pragmatics. From a semantic perspective, the ordinary distinctions between words, things, body states and actions are absent, creating words, and sentences that are not representational or symbolic. It is a language of equivalence, immediacy and action as contrasted with a language of self-awareness, thoughtfulness, reflection and communication (Robbins 383).
The difference between the schizophrenic’s use of language and the ‘normal’ use of language is visible. But “schizophrenese” (Robbins 385) is not the same as Nonsense. Deleuze articulates this difference by comparing Carroll’s *Jabberwocky* with Antonin Artaud’s version.⁸⁰

According to Deleuze, Antonin Artaud and Lewis Carroll are exemplary of the “two opposed treatments of nonsense” (Lopez 103) – that of the schizophrenic as against that of the linguist/philosopher. Deleuze shows how, with the schizophrenic, the surface collapses: “The first schizophrenic evidence is that the surface has split open. Things and propositions have no longer any frontier between them” (Deleuze 99).

Deleuze presents Artaud’s version in an endnote to his chapter “Thirteenth Series of the Schizophrenic and the Little Girl”:

Il était roparant, el tles vliqueuz tarands
Allaient en gibroyant et en brimbulkdrıquant
Juske là lò la rourghe est a rouarge a rangmbde
et rangmbde a rouarghambde:
Tous les falomitards etaient les chats-huants
Et les Ghoré Uk’hatis dans le Grabugeument. (Artaud qtd. in Deleuze 106)

Artaud transforms Carroll’s masterpiece of Nonsense into a jumble of guttural sounds, “breath-words (*mot-souffles*) and howl- words (*mots-cris*) in which all literal, syllabic and

⁸⁰ Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was a noted French playwright, poet and actor who founded the *Theatre of Cruelty* – a form of theatre which used “gesture, movement, sound, and rhythm rather than words,” and “depicted behaviour no longer bound by normal restraints, aiming rather to shock the audience into realizing the underlying ferocity and ruthlessness of human life, and so releasing its own inhibitions” (Hartnoll n.p.). Artaud included bizarre auditory elements such as grunts, screams and cries in the drama, while also pioneering the use of electronic instruments in background scores for plays. Artaud passed away in a psychiatric clinic with all the symptoms of what today would be diagnosed as schizophrenia.
phonetic values have been replaced by *values which are exclusively tonic* and not written,” (Deleuze 101) until “there are no longer any series at all” (Deleuze 103).

On the other hand, Carroll insists on a familiar grammar, a sticking to the rules that govern the positions of words in a sentence, the iambics and trochees and the strict rhyme schemes. “Carroll needs a very strict grammar, required to conserve the inflection and articulation of words and to distinguish them from the inflection and articulation of bodies . . .” (Deleuze 103). Deleuze thus concludes that “we can oppose Artaud and Carroll point for point – primary order and secondary organisation,” (104) because Artaud “explored the infra-sense which is still unknown today,” but “Carroll remains the master and the surveyor of surfaces – surfaces which were taken to be so well-known that nobody was exploring them anymore. On these surfaces, nonetheless, the entire logic of sense is located” (105).

Deleuze’s contention is partly contradicted and minimally expanded by Lopez (2004). He asserts that Carroll’s nonsense successfully encompasses both types of nonsense — that of madness and that of the linguist/philosopher. Lopez believes that Carroll recognised the fact that “the two realms of nonsense are fundamentally cathected together continually enveloping into but also *away* from each other . . .” (118). It would be inappropriate to trivialise and “reduce Alice’s confrontation with the schizophrenia of nonsense to a series of topological exchanges carried out *only* at the level of the linguistic or syntactic” (116). In fact, Lopez feels that Alice’s subjectivity is so drastically questioned by the conditions within the simulacrum that is Wonderland, that the texts plunge us into the depths of an almost schizophrenic self-reflexivity.

Lopez’s argument teeters on an edge. Deleuze himself states that “in Carroll, invention is essentially vocabulary, rather than syntactical or grammatical,” whereas with Artaud, “there is no longer a problem of sense properly speaking” (107). Therefore, Carroll, at no point,
enters the realm of a “body-without-organs,” remaining fully aware at all times of the surface
that constitutes the symbolic order. “Schizophrenic language is concrete” (Robbins 384)
while Carroll and Lear use precisely the abstract qualities of language to produce this
nonsense. Lear’s alphabet and botanical neologisms are quaint improvisations on traditional
forms of nomenclature, rather than the ravings of a madman. A sketch of a plant with
barking dog-heads instead of leaves is titled “Barkia Howlaloudia” (Lear 383). A stem with a
huge hanging bell cropping out is called “Stunnia Dinnerbellia” (Lear 385). In examples
such as these, the nonsensical effect is triggered off by a familiarity with the typical words
one reads in traditional textbooks of botany and taxonomy – a combination of the semantic
and contextual familiarity and simultaneous incongruity of the reshaped words.

Besides, even if the two realms are “fundamentally cathected together” (Lopez 118), it is
the nature of the libidinal cathexis that is different – one purely anatomical and the other at
the level of the abstract. “Schizophrenia patients do not want to be understood, for it
threatens them with unwanted knowledge about themselves. Schizophrenese not only lacks
communicative intent, it is a language of deception” (Robbins 398).

By contrast, Nonsense is a purely communicative act garbed in garble, delivering depth in
a deliberate miscommunication. Every nonsense text depends on a sound knowledge of the
’sense’ possibilities and it is this knowledge in the reader’s mind that renders Nonsense as
Nonsense. Lear’s poem, *Thweeth Thuthan Thmith*, for example, is the quaintest Nonsense
because it is a childish rendering of words we already know to be phonetically different.
Lear’s babble is a temporary recess, a linguistic holiday from the adult’s symbolic cage. This
most fitting example is from one of Lear’s letters after an apparent “thaddakthident” in which
he has “broken off my front teeth, so that I thall never thpeak plain again. Thith cometh of
biting cruth.” (Lear qtd. in Noakes 503). I quote it in full for its aptness to my point and
intensely tragic sincerity:
O Thuthan Thmith! Thweet Thuthan Thmith!
I thit in thilenth clothe to thee
And lithning to thy thongthreth lipth
I watth the tholemn thtately thipth
Acroth the thounding thilver thea!
   And thith – o! thith!
   I thay ith blith –
   Thweet Thuthan Thmith!
   Thweet Thuthan Thmith!

The thlender Thrimp ith gambolth playth,
The thiny thprightly fitheth thwim,-
The thandy thore, the dithtant hillth,-
All thethe I watth; - but nothing stillth
The thindy that my bothom filth
In gathing on thy thape tho thlim!
   With burthting thobth
   My thoft thoul throbth –
   Thweet Thuthan Thmith!
   Thweet Thuthan Thmith! (Lear 219)

Carroll’s parodies, again, are inextricably dependent on reference to originals. Twinkling bats and wily crocodiles only take shape when compared with the shining stars and busy bees. Such context-based use of language is a purposeful parry at what lies hidden in the symbolic rather than the schizophrenic's desire to deceive the reader or hide what he or she really feels. The neologistic innovations and morphological aberrations of the schizophrenic are aimed at a denial of reality so that the subject does not have to face it. The schizophrenic truly believes that what he has 'uttered' has been 'outered' — that the word is the thing itself.
To utter a word differently, then, is to eliminate from reality, the thing itself. Nonsense, on the other hand, through playful manipulations, draws attention to the superfluous nature of social symbols, questions accepted layers of signification by intentional misrepresentation, and thereby puts them in the spotlight.

The morphological changes and new words coined by Carroll and Lear are actually linguistic games, not material actions. They stem from a clear understanding of the abstract and elusive malleability of language rather than from a bizarre escapism. Thus, to say that the two types of nonsense are perpetually “enveloping” each other, would perhaps be somewhat inaccurate. Lopez seems to get it right on one point, viz. that the two worlds of Nonsense are “away” from each other, though they are separated by a thin line.

Though the realms of surface and depth could be said to touch each other, insofar as they mutually constitute those two determinations of nonsense, they remain in opposition to each other . . . . (Lopez 111).

He adds to Deleuze’s argument in a re-statement: “it is thus not that surface has less nonsense than depth; it is simply not the same nonsense.” (Lopez 111). Lopez believes that underneath the surface-play of Wonderland is a haunting “incompossibility” – the impossibility of a joint existence; the threat of collapse – of the breaking-through-of – the – depth-nonsense of the schizophrenic type. The rules of Nonsense, he feels, are instrumental in keeping schizophrenic disorder in check.

We might agree with Lopez, that Wonderland, and Nonsense worlds like it, call into question “the givenness of Alice’s subjectivity” (116) but it must not be forgotten that Alice wakes up at the end of both books and, before waking, assumes full control and domination over her phantasmatic surroundings, re-asserting the supremacy of Symbolic Order sense in a world in which there is none. Lopez fails to realize that for the natives of Wonderland, Alice
is the call of the wild, the shout from the Real. It is not that the two types of Nonsense are at war here; it is the battle between the Real (Wonderland) and the Symbolic (the real world, the world of Alice, which is the Real for Wonderland). I am inclined to perceive that the underground of wonderland is not the schizophrenic void. Rather, what lurks beneath the surface of the world of Nonsense is the Symbolic Order itself which must constantly be held down and yet remembered for Nonsense to exist.

Contrary, therefore, to Lopez's conclusion that the *Alice* books are a meeting point of these two kinds of nonsense or that the two worlds of Nonsense supplement each other as binary opposites, I would find it more apt to see them as two divergent and mutually exclusive alternatives to the Symbolic – both of which share the same binary other: 'Sense'.

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 4.5:** The Nonsense of the schizophrenic is neither the binary other nor the 'underground' of the Nonsense of Carroll and Lear. They are, in fact, both positioned on the other side of 'Sense'.

Schizophrenenese is not Nonsense at all because it aims at deception for the sake of concealment or of unbearable libidinal pulsions. Nonsense of the Carollian sort, however, is
the supplement of ‘Sense’, which holds up the other end of the balance that enables the Symbolic Order to sustain itself. Nonsense of the surface level can co-exist with ‘Sense’ – and must do so – for society to function. Schizophrenese is not Nonsense even of the depth. Language can only be language as long as it is a conglomerate of surface effects. Schizophrenese, therefore, cannot be called a language at all – and, in effect, is not even a form of Nonsense, because, Nonsense is, after all, a linguistic exercise.

Tell me What I Desire

Lopez, however, is not far wrong when he claims that “nonsense here performs the discourse of the critical hysteric . . .” (105). He refers to Lecercle’s statement that I reproduce below:

The most striking feature of Victorian nonsense is the quality of its intuitions, this mixture of diachrony (the genre reflects, refracts and arranges the elements of a historical conjuncture) and anachrony: it anticipates and it criticizes in advance, the developments of philosophy and linguistics”( Lecercle 224).

The Victorian Nonsense writers seem to have not only explicated the pontifications of the twentieth century in advance, but actually, pointed out the loopholes of Critical Theory before Theory took shape. Lopez contends that the critics’ attempts to discover metanarrative theoretical tenets in Victorian Nonsense texts are nothing but the cry of the Hysteric, begging Lear and Carroll to show them the truth of what they desire. The figure below shows exactly how the hysterical critical endeavour proceeds.
Fig. 4.6: Critics of Nonsense Literature are stuck in the discourse of the Hysteric

According to Lacan, the Discourse of the Hysteric is formulated thus:

As can be seen, the desire of the divided subject “originating in the primary loss, has to express itself by way of a Demand, directed to the other. In terms of discourse, one has to turn the other into a master-signifier in order to get an answer. Hence, the hysterical subject makes a master out of the other, an $S_1$ who has to produce an answer: $S \rightarrow S_1$” (Verhaeghe 100).

What the hysteric fails to understand, however, is that the Master Signifier – the other to whom he/she turns, is equally lacking. The hysteric turns to the Master with the hope that the
S₁ will tell him/her what he/she desires. The Master can never really allow the hysterical subject to reach the truth because the objet a is merely a cause of desire for the Real – which is banned. The product, then, is language – heaps of signifiers that perpetually circumvent the truth, never allowing the subject to reach the Real.

We, as hysterical critics, make gurus of Lear and Carroll, make the them the 'other-supposed-to-know'. We desperately attempt to ferret out the autre we desire from the works of Nonsense writers like Lear and Carroll hoping to unearth some golden truth, deluding ourselves that the potential Real Order jouissance that Nonsense offers, is not just a jouissance but a path to a final quenching of desire. What results from our hysterical analyses is not an access to the truth, but unending tomes of theoretical produce. It also exposes the author of this dissertation as one who is trapped in the discourse of the hysteric. As Verhaeghe puts it, the history of science is nothing but a “hystory” (Verhaeghe 101). I think we could safely say the same of the history of literary theory for we have made shamans of Lear and Carroll as we have of Derrida and Lacan.

**Outside the Inner Circle**

As Berry—of a Mountain Bush

Transplanted--to the Road—

Emily Dickinson

In furtherance of my hysteric enterprise, I shall attempt, in this section of the chapter to trace connecting links between biographical aspects of Carroll and Lear, their psychic dispositions and their consequences.

Nonsense, it must be remembered, is produced by Nonsense Writers – real people with real experiences, personalities that are unique and childhoods that serve to shape them into what they appear through their books and works. Both Lear and Carroll grew up as social
misfits in their own ways. The Imaginary is the refuge of the Symbolic Outcast. Both, Lear and Carroll were, in their own ways, extremely uncomfortable living in Victorian civil society. Carroll chose to be reclusive:

He became less and less sociable as he grew older. 'The noise was too great for comfort. 'I weary more and more of dinner parties, and rejoice that people have almost ceased to invite me', he writes in his diary; and later 'I decline all invitations', admitting that he was a 'selfish recluse'. (Wullschäger 62)

Lear decided – with the legitimate reason of his ill-health - that the only way out was to leave England as often as possible on innumerable expeditions to places as far-flung as Sicily, Malta, Turkey, Egypt and India (Noakes Introduction xxviii). Their discomfort with Victorian British social strictures was primarily on account of their aberrant sexual preferences. Lear’s homosexual attractions can be traced to a case of possible physical abuse at the age of ten:

There is also a hint that he was abused as a boy of ten by a brutal soldier-cousin, and that he came to see this as the origin of his homosexuality. In his diary, he recalls this cousin who, ‘did me the greatest Evil done to me in my life ... which must last now to the end – spite of all reason and effort!’ (Noakes, Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer quoted in Wullschäger 69)

Lear’s famous friendships with several young men are well recorded. Some, like his relationships with Evelyn Baring, Earl of Cromer and Chicheser Fortesque (MP) were sustained till the end, though as platonic but intimate friendships. Others dissolved over time. Lord Westbury, for instance, once much attracted to Lear’s nonsense, suddenly rejected him as soon as he became Lord Chancellor:
Lear, I abominate the forcible introduction of ridiculous images calculated to distract the mind from what it is contemplating (Wullschläger 80).

Similarly, Carroll had an obsession with little girls, seeking them out and forming deep and emotional attachments with girls at seaside resorts, trains and hotels, even though he had never met them before. While the same patterns can be traced in Lear’s sojourns, he entertained both, little boys and little girls and quickly forgot the children once they ceased to be in touch with him. Carroll’s profound friendships with little girls – and little girls only – were rather like Lear’s love for young men. Their inclinations were similar.

Lear’s most unhappy “affair” was with a young man called Franklin Lushington “to whom he was deeply attached but who scarcely returned his affection” (Carpenter 306). Having met him for the first time in Malta, Lear fell in love with him.

The two had a romantic holiday in Greece which Lear remembered as the happiest weeks of his life: ‘I do not know when I have enjoyed myself so much . . . we only complain that the days are too short.’” (Wullschläger 81)

Lushington turned stiff-upper-lip and distant with Lear, however, as soon as he became Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Lear was distraught with Lushington’s cold-shouldering and “... sobbed in his room and wrote broken hearted letters to Emily Tennyson...” (Wullschläger 81). In one such letter, he wrote of Lushington: “Say or think what one will, he is the most perfect character I have ever known...” (Wullschläger 81). His biographer, Vivien Noakes, writes, “If Lushington had loved and encouraged him, theirs might have developed into a full homosexual relationship.” (Noakes qtd. in Carpenter 306)

Carroll’s friendships with little girls must, by no means, be considered similar to Lear’s playful interactions with children. A parallel, however, must be drawn between Lear’s
fondness for male youths and Carroll’s fixation on pre-pubescent females. Given Carroll’s emotional affiliations and correspondence, in today’s paranoid times, Carroll would have been more notorious than famous:

Dodgson began to keep a diary in 1855, and sometimes recorded in it his admiration for the beauty of children, especially girls, sentiments which stand out all the more because there is no hint in the diary (or elsewhere) that he felt any attraction to women. (Carpenter 98)

Carroll’s pleasure trips were almost like missions – expeditions with a single-point agenda: to find and make friends with little girls. “He spent his summers at a seaside resort, and at the end of each holiday made a list of the names of little girls he had got to know” (Carpenter 101). This was followed by spates of letters of nostalgia, longing and affection, couched in typically Carollian innocence and pure humour.

Like Lear, Carroll also experienced heartbreak when he felt deserted or rejected by an attractive little girl. His emotional attachments were like adolescent infatuations and his epistles remind us of the typical letters of a desperate lover. Here are a few snippets that demonstrate his passion:

1. MY DEAR E ------, ----- Though rushing, rapid-rivers roar between us (if you refer to the map of England, I think you’ll find that to be correct), we still remember each ‘other, and feel a sort of shivery affection for each other . . . .

   - Dec. 26, 1886

   (Collingwood 392)

2. CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, Dec. 9, 1875.

   MY DEAR GERTRUDE, --- This really will not do, you know, sending one more kiss every time by post: the parcel gets so heavy, it is quite expensive . . . . I
sometimes wish I was back on the shore at Sandown; don’t you? (Collingwood 381-2)

3. The following is a clip from a missive of pure lovelorn evocation to Emily or Violet Gordon, dated 14th August, 1877:

Oh child, child! I kept my promise yesterday afternoon, and came down to the sea, to go with you along the rocks, but I saw you going with another gentleman, so I thought I wasn’t wanted just yet: so I walked a bit, and when I got back, I couldn’t see you anywhere, though I went a good way on the rocks to look . . . I didn’t cry all the way. (Carroll qtd. in Wullschäger 39)

In the context of their ‘aberrant’ affiliations, therefore, it is logical to conclude that both Lear and Carroll were outsiders to the patriarchal social setup of Victorian England. Both, therefore, inevitably turned to pre-linguistic sublimations – artistic endeavours that either centred on the purely visual, or linguistic play that resembled babble. Lear was a renowned landscape painter for a time and received commissions, patronage and encouragement from royal personages such as Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby: “In 1846, during a visit to England, he was appointed drawing-master to Queen Victoria . . .” (Noakes xxviii). Lear’s attempt to escape the confines of upper-class propenseness was to turn to landscape painting – the purely visual, the pre-linguistic, non-mediated image that resists signification and brings a pre-symbolic jouissance to one who is already acutely aware of his own otherness. It is pertinent to note here, that both Lear and Carroll grew up surrounded by women.

Lear spent the rest of his life wishing he had had a truly childish childhood and tried to escape adulthood by acting like a child. He often indulged in babble conversations even with
adults\textsuperscript{81} and longed to “giggle heartily and to hop on one leg down the great gallery” of the Earl’s mansion at Knowsley (Wullschläger 73).

Just as Carroll turned to photography, Lear turned to the landscape painting to escape the entrapments of the Symbolic Order. While his landscapes had to be accurate and realistic, his caricatures allowed him the freedom to play — to play with one of the sacrosanct master signifiers of the age — i.e. the human body. In these drawings he could stretch out noses, make strange faces, weird dresses, elongate legs and hands and make stomachs bulbous (especially in self-portraits). These sketches are significant for two reasons: (a) They show him to possess the objective and critical eye that only a person who feels himself outside ‘normal’ social interactions could have, along with the ability to laugh at them as well as himself (for he saw himself as one of the many eccentrics he writes about). (b) A pre-symbolic understanding of the world emerges in his anatomical exaggerations, showing his ability to view the marginalised and the eccentric with sympathy, each of the drawings being quaint and interesting rather than uncanny or horrifying. I present some of these below:

Fig. 4.7. Lear’s depiction of the “Derry Down Derry” from \textit{Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense} (London: Penguin, 2000; print; 71).

\textsuperscript{81} In a letter to Evelyn Baring, Lear wrote the following word/sentence/letter: deerbaringiphownldacupelloffotografsthismawningwitchisendjoothereiswunofeechoortsyooy kankeepbothifyooliketodoosoanwenyoo=haveabetterwunofyourselfnetmehavit.

Yossin seerly,

DwdL[ear]] (Lear qtd. in Noakes 188)
There was an old Derry down Derry,
Who loved to see little folks merry;
So he made them a Book, and with laughter they shook,
At the fun of that Derry Down Derry. (Lear 71)

Fig. 4.8. "There was an Old Man with an Owl." from Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense (London: Penguin, 2000; print; 176).

There was an Old Man with an Owl,
Who continued to bother and howl;
He sat on a rail, and imbibed bitter ale,
Which refreshed that Old Man and his Owl. (Lear 176)

Fig. 4.9. "There was an Old Person of Tring," from Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense (London: Penguin, 2000; print; 170).
There was an Old Person of Tring,
Who embellished his nose with a ring;
He gazed at the moon every evening in June,
That ecstatic Old Person of Tring. (Lear 170)

What is noticeable in some of these illustrations (and many more) is that Lear seems to be having as much fun in the act of drawing as in the act of composing the limerick. In the limericks, the purpose seems more to find a word that rhymes than a word that makes sense or adds to the meaning. In the same way, the drawings seem to be more concerned about minor exaggerations that do not have a connection with the rhyme they support. Both seem immersed in the jouissance of play – the play of jouissance – an Imaginary and pre-linguistic feeling of joyfulness. In “There was an Old Person of Tring,” for example, the poem states that he gazed at the moon but the image shows us a glowing sun instead. Besides, the artist seems more keen to make the reader join him in his play with the visual, linger a little longer in the dabble that goes with the babble, for, if we look a little closer, we can see that the sun in the picture has an extra-long nose, like the Old Person of Tring. The sketch for the poem “There was an Old Man with an owl” also emphasizes the Lear’s joy in the act of drawing. Here too, he depicts the Old Man looking almost exactly like the owl he is sitting next to. Besides, the bitter ale seems to be placed closer to the owl than the man. Lear seems to be keen to subvert, not just language (through his Nonsense texts), but the general scheme of things, the expected and normative aspects of society itself (as can be seen in his illustrations).

Lear himself was the Derry Down Derry who could bring humour into people’s lives. His humour, his art, his wanderings, his cartoons and his Nonsense verse, all performed the same function – they were symptomatic resolutions of his own feelings of discomfiture with the
Symbolic. They were a flight from the constraints of the societal structure he lived in – a flight into the Imaginary.

Carroll, too, turned to non-linguistic visuals in one of his multifarious attempts to pluck a *lalangue* out of this claustrophobic, omnipresent *langue*. In contrast to Lear’s desire for overt subversion, Carroll, who had had a happy childhood, tried to fit in with the symbolic in a conscious attempt to overcome his otherness by attaching master signifiers like ‘Mathematician’ and ‘Oxford Don’ to his name. He remained a child in his mind till the end but vainly tried to accommodate himself into the categories of adult patriarchal hegemony. Evidently, he did not succeed sufficiently in either of these socially acceptable professions. His endeavours to suppress his symptoms had limited success. Evelyn Fox Keller (1986), in a seminal essay, sees his mathematics as a manifestation of perverse and aggressive desires:

> It should, perhaps be said that Carroll’s use of mathematics might alternatively be described as simply obsessional, but the evidence available suggests that such a description would be incomplete. The prevalence of hostile impulses expressed quite consciously throughout his work, as well as his evident substitution of mental activity for genital sexuality would argue for the failure of mathematics as a purely obsessional defense and for turning to perversion as an alternative solution. (Keller 156)

I feel, however, that more than an obsessional defence, Carroll’s choice of mathematics was a desperate attempt to achieve the hyper-symbolic, to claim ownership of those societal master-signifiers that might allow him to feel closer to the phallus. We are all, after all, foundlings, forever floundering in search of the Names-of-our-Fathers. This may have been one reason why Carroll, all his life, preferred to keep his two identities separate. ‘Priest’, ‘Don’, ‘Mathematician’ etc. were master signifiers of his age – none of which would be compatible
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with the in-significant signifier ‘writer’ – and even worse – ‘writer of nonsense’ or ‘writer of stories of/for little girls’. He often emphatically denied that he was the author of the *Alice* books, when confronted by strangers:

\[
\text{... he would never publicly acknowledge himself as the author of the *Alice* books, objected to being catalogued under ‘Dodgson’ and sent back, unopened, any letters which arrived at Christ Church addressed to ‘Lewis Carroll, Esq.’ (Carpenter 102).}
\]

In fact, Carroll went to bizarre lengths to keep his literary persona separate from his actual one. Carroll’s nephew recalls that once, when Carroll “was dining out at Oxford, and someone, who did not know that it was a forbidden subject, turned the conversation on *Alice in Wonderland*, he rose suddenly and fled from the house” (Collingwood 272–273). To accept himself as Carroll would have made him his real other, foiled all his attempts at attaining a secure symbolic position and revealed his true identity as a childish babbler instead of an adult dabbler in the intellectual pursuit of mathematics or the edifying vocation of the Church.

Carroll escaped into the purely visual – i.e. photography, which was both, icon and index but not symbol; which was both, a non-symbolic art and a scientific (and therefore socially respectable and higher up in the patriarchal ladder than childish nonsense) skill that presented an ideal sublimation for his real order turbulences.

Like an over-determined symptom, Lear and Carroll used nonsense and the visual arts to deal with their radical alterity, their irrevocable otherness. Both stuck their m/other tongues out at the Symbolic – Lear, with a paint brush; Carroll, with a lens. Both excelled in non-symbolic activities, therefore, precisely because they saw themselves as ostracized beings who were too “Real” to be allowed to survive in the signifying web of society as themselves. Carroll’s imaginary order fixation is also visible in his obsessive cataloguing and recording of
events in the diaries. Both poets were obsessed with their own images; Lear thought he was the ugliest man alive – he was a Dong with a luminous nose, a man who’s “visage is more or less hideous”; and Carroll was always intensely fastidious in appearance and dress. Both were dedicated diarists and epistolary enthusiasts who marked specific days – either with a white stone (Carroll) or a red cross (Lear) depending on the significance of the events of that day. Carroll’s innumerable letters are also well known. This compulsive drive to document events and bring some order into their social environment is another sign of an Imaginary Order fixation – the attempt to attain an ideal and ‘picture-perfect’ image of how they and world around themselves should be.

St/Utterances

Nor was I hungry – so I found

That Hunger – was a way

Of Persons outside Windows-

The Entering – takes away –

Emily Dickinson

Desire is sparked off by the feeling of a Lack. A subject’s sense of Lack is greatly augmented when he feels himself excluded from society, unable to join the mainstream and make a ‘meaningful’ contribution to the community at large. What rendered Carroll drastically exterior to the symbolic order was his stutter. He was unhappy in Rugby school, where “he was bullied, was regarded as a ‘muff’ (one who is useless at games and other physical activities), and was probably mocked for the stammer he had developed in childhood” (Carpenter 98). “His public lectures were judged to be extremely dull” (ibid.) by most students and his duties as a Deacon (being ordained in 1861) were difficult since conducting funerals and reading prayers involved speech and “his stammer made these things an ordeal not to be sought willingly” (Carpenter 99). It is no surprise then, that although his public image was one of “pious and dutiful . . . deacon at Christ Church,” (Wullschlager 46)
in reality, “beneath the surface was a passionate romantic, sexually frustrated and vengeful towards a world he saw as absurd” (Wullschlager 46).

Lindsay Smith (2004) views both – Carroll’s hobby of photography and his stutter – as a desire to be an infant once more:

... stammering provides a kind of perpetual, if unwelcome, connection for the adult to his own child self, the self as frightened, disempowered, vulnerable. More emphatically, such a connection to the child through imperfect speech (in which the speech impediment comes to stand in for the speech of childhood) suggests a way of preserving, halting that imperfect speech, that state of disequilibrium prior to its translation into sense. (Smith 104)

The stutter is the utterance that does not proceed, that is frozen in time. The idea that he lost his stammer in the company of all little girls is not entirely definitive because, “one of his young models, May Barber, recalls the occasion of Carroll’s stammering as “rather terrifying”,... She notes that it wasn’t exactly a stammer because there was no noise, he just opened his mouth. But there was a wait, a very nervous wait from everybody’s point of view: it was very curious” (Barber qtd. in Smith 97).

Through his stutter, then, Carroll’s body – or rather his imaginary order perceptions – achieved a contact with the Real – something that he could also attain through photography, a visual totality, a completion that he was unable to achieve linguistically in oral speech. The jouissance that Carroll touches through photography is neither the phallic jouissance of the symbolic, nor the jouis-sense of the pleasure at the level of meaning, but a Real+Imaginary Order jouissance that is not merely ante-linguistic but anti-langue – the JA, the jouissance of the Other that is produced by the overlapping of the Real and the Imaginary (Dravers 9).
In this sense, then, the stutter is not an utterance at all – is, strictly speaking, not spoken at all, but is actually a *stutterance* – i.e. a speech act that has failed to ‘outer’ the signifiers of the self; the speech act that has suddenly brought to the foreground the fact that language is merely a combination of syllables which have an arbitrariness that is ridiculous and must be suffered as it is the only way we know to communicate with one another.

Carroll’s escape into the Imaginary is thus, both, a consequence of and evidenced by his stutter. After all, for the person who prefers the signified, the signifier is an obstacle to expression; presentation is more vital than re-presentation and visual order takes precedence over verbal perfection. Nobody understands the Lack in the Other, the inconsistencies in the Symbolic, better than one who is extra-linguistic in disposition, extraneous to language in position. Speech emphasises Lack. Photographs and paintings reiterate a fantasy of speechless perfection. A photograph is silent and it silences all speaking subjects, ensures that the photographed subject inhabits that frame that hangs between the word that is spoken and the word that is about to be said. A photograph can make a noise, but itself, is always between two sounds. In this sense, then, what Carroll has successfully done is to save scores of little girls from the linguistic patriarchy of the Symbolic Order by freezing them in a perpetual stammer – making each one of them an about-to-speak being in an oral fixation of an impossible kind, because, as Smith puts it, “... the act of photographing renders mute those ‘child friends’ that Carroll courted. . . .” (Smith 98)

The girl child, like the stammerer, exists “as a kind of foreigner in her own language” (Smith 99) – particularly because she is forced into a signifying system that is patriarchal. It is no wonder that Carroll returns to photography again and again. Photography functions as a drug for him – gives him a taste of pre-symbolic *jouissance*, but never really brings to him the quenching of desire. Every photograph silences only one little girl and there are many, many more to ‘save’.
In both, Nonsense, as well as photography, Carroll attained a level of skilfulness that he never could as a mathematician.

His work as a photographer of children – and indeed of adults – would probably, in time, have made him celebrated even if he had never been known as an author, so skilful was he with the camera (Carpenter 101).

It is natural that in 1879 he eventually began to photograph little girls in the nude. The Victorian glorification of the little child as an innocent, sexless fairy supported him in attempting to strip the little girls literally of their symbolic vestments. Nothing was more loaded with signifiers of oppression and constraint than the Victorian woman’s dress. By photographing them without clothes, Carroll captured their very being, pulled away the layers of social hierarchy and ensured that none of civilisation’s frills interfered with his rescue fantasy. Soon, however, (father-) tongues began to wag, gossip spread (Carpenter 101), and Carroll abandoned photography altogether in 1880. Perhaps it dawned on him that the thrill of this jauissance must be abandoned under the phallocentric whip of the Symbolic Order.

On the other hand, perhaps, he realised that he was augmenting the phallic domination by his own male gaze amplified through the camera lens. The neurotic/pervert, after all, is he who allows himself to temporarily enjoy the pleasure of the symptom realising that there is no other to the Other. Nonsense, photography and landscape painting, are mere versions of the symptoms that prevented Lear and Carroll from going over the brink into psychosis. They are the different faces of the fourth ring that holds the rings of the RSI together and prevents them from falling apart. What has been observed in the case of James Joyce can equally be applied to Lear and Carroll:

... through his art, Joyce managed to construct his own supplementary means of securing R.S.I. in order to compensate for a specific mode of failure at the level of
their original knotting – and, as we shall see, he did so by using his own quite singular artistry with the letter to spin a supplementary thread from the jouissance inscribed in lalangue which he then threaded through the gaps and holes of the knot, according to the logic of his symptom and the fault it answers to. (Dravers)

Dravers (22) gives a graphic representation of Joyce’s psyche which I present below:

![Fig. 4.10: “Joyce’s Solution: Two Perspectives on the Knot”: How James Joyce used his art as a fourth knot – the symptom that holds together the three rings of the RSI – from Phil Dravers, “Joyce & the Sinthome: Aiming at the Fourth Term of the Knot”; Psychoanalytical Notebooks of the LSNS 13, Lacan With Joyce. (2005) : Web, 22.](image)

These diagrams seem to be perfectly applicable to the circumstances that prevailed in the case of Lear and Carroll: like Joyce, they constructed a fourth knot (lalangue, landscape painting, photography) to enable the psyche to survive and prevent one of the rings of the RSI from floating away.

**Alice as a Symptom of the Real of the Real**

Some of the revelations in the texts of Lear and Carroll are so remarkably Lacanian that one is led to wonder who dreamed it first. In this section I shall use Lacanian theory to
analyse the Nonsense of Lear and Carroll to derive a deeper understanding of both, the human psyche and the texts themselves.

Let us first begin with Alice – and specifically with Alice’s trans-dimensional movement through the mirror in Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Wonderland, without the rude intrusion of Alice, is placid and peaceful. The characters of *Through the Looking Glass* – and, for that matter, several of the eccentrics of Lear’s limericks – are a contented lot, smug in their drug, the stupor of Nonsense.

There was an Old Person of Philæ
Whose conduct was scroobious and wily’
He rushed up a Palm, when the weather was calm,
And observed all the ruins of Philæ. (Lear 167)

There was an Old Person of Harrow
Who bought a mahogany barrow;
For he said to his wife, ‘You’re the joy of my life!
And I’ll wheel you all day in this barrow!’ (Lear 381)

There was an Old Man of the Nile,
Who sharpened his nails with a file;
Till he cut off his thumbs, and said calmly, ‘This comes –
Of sharpening one’s nails with a file!’ (Lear 102)

We forget that, if the “unconscious is structured like a language,” (Lacan *Sem. XX* 15) the intra-psychic mechanisms work both ways: the Symbolic Order is as threatening to the Real as the surfacing of the Real is to the Symbolic. The Id has its own code of organisation: the Pleasure Principle. The Symbolic is the one big hindrance that crops up every time the Real aims at omnipotence. The Super-ego is the Id to the Id, the one big threat that has a single-
point agenda: to restrict the drives of the Id, the pulsions of the Real and, if possible, quarantine them into a lifetime of ‘utter’ silence.

It is Alice, then, who functions as the threatening force, the symptom, the site of potential collapse into the world of Nonsense. The planet that Nonsense inhabits knows only fullness. Alice plops into the lives in Wonderland with a whole lot of Symbolic Logic, if-then arguments, grammatical rules and social etiquette – all of which remind the inhabitants of the Nonsense World of the thing that they lack: the phallogocentric centre and the phallus as the pivot of their social hierarchy. Manners and Logic are nothing but gobbledygook to the people of the world of Nonsense. Even in his ‘mournful’ mood of resentment, the Hatter has it all figured out:

“Yes, that’s it,” said the Hatter with a sigh: “it’s always tea time, and we’ve no time to wash the things between whiles” (AA 99).

The Hatter’s placid resignation owes itself to the fact that he has found a quilting point: six o’ clock, tea-time, is his point-de-capiton and he can live with it in his humble neurosis, sliding around the table from chair to chair as any self-respecting signifier-in-the-field-of-the-other should. The Unconscious, as dreamwork has shown us, is only navigable using metaphors and metonymies.

Alice, however, appears. She jumps out like a nasty shock, a rude awakening, a symptom, questioning the operative rules of the Hatter’s Real existence, thrusting at him the parameters of the Symbolic in the form of questions:

“Then you keep moving round, I suppose?” said Alice.

“Exactly so,” said the Hatter: “as the things get used up.”

“But what happens when you come to the beginning again?” Alice ventured to ask.

(AA 99)
Alice is tugging at the one thread that links her to the fabric of the world as she knew it. Faced with no other choice, the March Hare must take quick remedial action: “Suppose we change the subject,” he says, “... I’m getting tired of this. I vote this young lady tells us a story.”

Alice is the symptom of the Symbolic breaking into the Real. The symptom must be dealt with and the March Hare chooses to (a) stop its insistence (“change the subject”) and (b) ensure that the symptom speaks differently, (“tells us a story”), being the psychoanalyst who forces the symptom to re-present itself in a more acceptable and negotiable form for the disturbed psyche. Since repetition and insistence are in the very nature of the symptom, it cannot be silenced. But at least it can tell its own story differently. For the world of Nonsense, Alice is the most dangerous of entities because, for the Real Order, the Symbolic is a sort of Real Order too. The Reality Principle has despatched a little girl as its secret agent. Eventually, she must be made to shut up:

“Then you shouldn’t talk,” said the Hatter. (AA 103)

Each time Alice recounts a rhyme or attempts to recite a poem, it must, forcibly, come out all wrong. Every animal or character that asks her to speak seems to be on a mission to remind her that here, in the world of her (or the king’s) dream, the world of the Unconscious, she must stop holding on to the strictures of the Symbolic. The White Queen too has the rules of Nonsense clear in her head:

“The rule is jam to-morrow and jam yesterday — but never jam to-day.” (AA 247)

The White Queen screams before she is pricked by her brooch, and Alice still doesn’t comprehend. Her persistent questioning is the one action that will reduce all Nonsense to sense, make ruins and rubble of the lawless laws and amorphous conveniences that masquerade as rules in this world. The Queen even tries to explain:
“That accounts for the bleeding, you see,” she said to Alice with a smile, “Now you understand the way things happen here.” (AA 250)

But Alice pops another question:

“But why don’t you scream now?” (AA 250)

Alice’s persistence is the persistence of the symptom of the Real. She doesn’t know how right she is when she plaintively tells Tweedledum and Tweedledee:

“I am real!” (AA 239)

The italics, however, could have well been used to stress the final word.

**Lear’s Leers**

Lear was primarily leering at himself. He was the Dong who wandered “lonely and wild” all night looking for his “Jumbly Girl” and the Mr. Lear whom he described in the following manner:

- His mind is concrete and fastidious –
- His nose is remarkably big;-
- His visage is more or less hideous;-
- His beard resembles a wig. (Lear 428)

Lear boldly went where no Carroll had gone before, to the forbidden territory of self-directed laughter which Carroll barely touched upon with his self-embodiment in the character of the White Knight which is famously known to be modelled on himself. Lear saw himself as lacking and needed no fantasy to cover up the fact. As Wullschlager puts it, “it is clear that already in these early limericks, Lear was drawing fantastical self-portraits” (76).

However, these are all characters who are pretty much at peace when it comes to their own eccentricities. Vivien Noakes identifies two themes in Lear’s later works: “... the
rewards that may come if you have the courage to dare and the need for tolerance and sympathetic understanding of oddities and social outcasts (Noakes *Introduction* xxx). Some, like the Derry Down Derry could live in society in spite of his oddities. Most of the odd ones in Lear’s poetry are pitched against “them” or “they” who are the ones who declare the dysfunctional member a misfit in the first place, often removing him entirely or causing his death:

There was an Old Person of Chester,
Whom several small children did pester;
They threw some large stones, which broke most of his bones,
And displeased that Old Person of Chester. (Lear 74)

There was an Old Man of Berlin,
Whose form was uncommonly thin’
Till once, by mistake, was mixed up in a cake,
So they baked that Old Man of Berlin. (Lear 77)

Several other of the oddball characters meet miserable ends solely on account of their difference. Seeing them as lacking, the people – the omnipresent and omnipotent “they” of his limericks decide to try and stamp out these eccentric symptoms that threatened to disrupt their fantasy of a cohesive, coherent, social order:

There was an Old Person of Buda,
Whose conduct grew ruder and ruder;
Till at last, with a hammer, they silenced his clamour,
By smashing that Person of Buda. (Lear 93)
There was an Old Man who screamed out
Whenever they knocked him about;
So they took off his boots, and fed him with fruits,
And continued to knock him about. (Lear 342)

Occasionally, the eccentrics do manage to save themselves from the tyrannies of the symbolic, and sometimes even manage to subdue the powerful "they":

There was an Old Man with a poker,
Who painted his face with red okre;
When they said, 'You’re a Guy!' he made no reply,
But knocked them all down with his poker. (Lear 167)

Thus it can be seen that, like most of the characters in Carroll’s fantastic dream-worlds, Lear’s weird and bizarre personalities also exist in their own private bliss of acute otherness and are therefore perceived as aberrant intrusions into a Symbolic Order that prides itself in sameness.

Doing it With Mirrors

The intertextual connections between Alice’s passage through a mirror and Lacan’s concept of the Mirror Stage are so evident that it is surprising that the clamouring critics/hysterics have failed to pursue these to their analytical conclusions. In this section I
would like to discuss several Lacanian concepts which help elicit profound layers of meaning from the second of Alice’s adventures.

In the initial pages of *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice is intrigued and enchanted by what she sees in the mirror, just as the infant is during the Mirror Stage. She presumes a completeness in the image that is beyond her reach:

“I can see all of it when I get upon a chair – all but the bit just behind the fireplace. Oh! I do so wish I could see that bit!” (*AA* 181)

Unfortunately, just as every imaginary identification functions, Alice soon realises that once she has become one with her reflection, she feels herself as lacking as she had before. The other which she felt was complete, feels lacking too. In fact, she finds that once she ‘becomes’ the other, she amounts to nothing at all. Tweedledee breaks the shocking news to her, “Why, you’re only a sort of thing in his dream!” and Tweedledum drives the nail into her coffin, reminding her that “If that there King was to wake, . . . you’d go out – bang – just like a candle!” (*AA* 238).

Other textual facts support the observation that the Looking-Glass World is the realm of the Imaginary. Most characters are not named at all: the goat is ‘A Goat’ (*AA* 218), the man in white is ‘the gentleman dressed in white’ (*AA* 219), and there is ‘the Horse’ (*AA* 220), ‘the Lion’ (*AA* 277), the White Knight (*AA* Ch. VIII), etc. In fact, the proper nouns are few and far between (Humpty Dumpty, Tweedledum, Tweedledee, Jabberwock, Haigha, Hatta, etc.).

Besides, the Mirror Stage is the stage of Demands. Typically, their world is populated by non-desiring subjects. Alice is the only character who moves forward with the aim to be a Queen.
According to Lacan, the psychotic is one who believes that the Other has an other – that the phallus is not the pivot of this society, but there is something bigger, stronger, more powerful than it – aliens, spirits, the FBI, etc. – controlling the world. Lacan equates the task of the psychoanalyst with that of Humpty Dumpty:

... we analysts have to deal with slaves who think they are masters, and who find in a language whose mission is universal the support of their servitude, and the bonds of ambiguity. So much so that, one might humorously put it, our goal is to restore in them, the sovereign freedom displayed by Humpty Dumpty when he reminds Alice that after all he is the master of the signifier, even if he isn’t the master of the signified in which his being took on its form (Lacan Ecrits 88–89).

The last few words of the quote show that Lacan knew that Humpty Dumpty was a part of the Imaginary Order – the “signified in which his being took on its form.” It seems to me, though, that Humpty Dumpty is less the masterful psychoanalyst and more the quintessential psychotic, believing that he is the master of the signifier. He is convinced that the language does not have the phallus, that there is an other to language, another who is more powerful than the Symbolic itself – who, in this case, is represented by the King. Humpty boasts about this fantasy to Alice:

“Why, if ever I did fall off... the King has promised me – ah you may turn pale, if you like! You didn’t think I was going to say that did you? The King has promised me with his very own mouth – to – to-”

“To send all his horses and all his men,” Alice interrupted, rather unwisely (AA 263–64).
Humpty's fantasy, however, is the fantasy of the psychotic who believes that he is not lacking at all, that he has full power over signification and make 'slithy' mean 'lithe and slimy' or 'Brillig' mean 'four-o-clock in the afternoon (AA 270–271)

Consequently, Humpty literally has a breakdown and the shell of his narcissistic fantasy is shattered along with his own psychic identity. The King actually receives his position of precedence on account of the Symbolic hierarchy, not outside of it. Humpty Dumpty's belief that the King has the power to piece together his fantasy of linguistic supremacy is a fallacy. The King is lacking too. All he can do is send another battalion of signifiers while sitting around with his little notebook and feeling grand:

... she found the White King, seated on the ground, busily writing in his memorandum-book.

"I've sent them all!" the King cried in a tone of delight, on seeing Alice. "Did you happen to meet any soldiers, my dear, as you came through the wood?"

"Yes I did," said Alice: "several thousand, I should think."

"Four thousand two hundred and seven – that's the exact number," the King said, referring to his book. . . ." (AA 278).

For the King it is enough that he sends all his horses and all his men because in the Symbolic Order it is essential to continue to use signifiers – whether they mean something or not. It really doesn’t matter if they put Humpty Dumpty together again because the primary motive is fulfilled – the signifiers (words/soldiers/horses) have been despatched and language has been set in motion, the illusion of a phallic fullness at the centre of power is sustained – and that is adequate for the Symbolic to perpetuate itself. As long as the King can maintain his image of being all-powerful, the structure of society remains undisturbed. After all, a
body may shatter like an eggshell but the body politic must preserve its fantasy of cohesion at all costs lest the Real reveal itself and unleash its reign of chaos and anarchy.

**Summing Up**

The principal observations that I have tried to establish in this chapter are as follows: (a) Nonsense is a form of babble – the *lalangue* of Lacanian theory, and it is this promise of pre-symbolic *jouissance* that has drawn generations of readers towards it. (b) Nonsense is the zero of language for it serves as a placeholder – it points out the site of the lack in language, functions as the symptom that must be sustained and negotiated so that the Symbolic continues to exist. (c) The *jouissance* of Nonsense is always elsewhere. It is neither entirely Symbolic, nor fully Imaginary, nor completely positioned in the Real. In fact, it is always elsewhere for it points out the lack in the Symbolic Order (giving us the access to the Real Order pleasure of babble), it allows the reader to play on the surface of language (a Symbolic pleasure) and sticks to the formal consistency of poetry while subverting the very structures that it uses (an Imaginary *jouissance*). The pleasure of Nonsense is thus, always elsewhere – a *plus de jouir* that pervades all the psychic registers and yet none of them at once. (d) Nonsense as babble is not the same as the speech of the schizophrenic because the utterances of a schizophrenic are characterised by incoherence and a lack of organisation while Nonsense has its own functional and consistent set of rules and sticks to basic grammatical and generic principles. (e) We, as critics, turn to Nonsense again and again, looking, ironically for new meanings each time – an activity that could be called ‘hysterical’ in Lacanian terms, since it is the hysteric that looks to the other as an ‘other-supposed-to-know’, hoping to be told what he or she desires. However, all we get is more signifiers, for the open-endedness of Nonsense never allows us to arrive at a fixed meaning. (f) Lear and Carroll perceived themselves to be misfits in the Social/Symbolic Order of the Victorian Age. Thus,
they both turned to pre-linguistic activities such as painting, photography and Nonsense as forms of legitimate and permissible sublimation.

Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll then were both products of and reactions to their socio-cultural environment. The reasons why they turned to Nonsense, and why they could write in a fashion so uniquely their own, I have attempted to trace (in this chapter) to the nature of their personalities and the inner workings of their minds. What they achieved was a sort of writing that was entirely different from the genres that existed at the time—a sort of language and style that were non-linear, subversive and transgressive. This is the kind of writing that twentieth century feminists have called "écriture féminine" (Cixous 27). This and other feminist perspectives, I demonstrate in the following chapter.