INTRODUCTION

OF CHILDREN AND LESSER GODS

Children are, today, among the most common motifs of the popular media and childhood is presented – and frequently misrepresented – in innumerable advertisements, ‘reality’ shows on television, adolescent romances etc. Critical texts, however, have, by and large, ignored literature written for children. I have chosen to analyse Children’s Literature because of this comparative marginalisation within the critical field. When we use the term *literature*, it is generally accepted and assumed that the reference is to adult literature. *Childhood* is the stage in which the human being is most malleable and can be empowered or scarred for life; it is, therefore, about time that the books children read are given a serious look. Childhood – like old age – is the weaker, voiceless stage of a human lifetime; this dissertation is an attempt to give it some kind of voice.

Within the genre of Children’s Literature is the doubly marginalised sub-genre of *Nonsense Literature*. *Nonsense* is a term usually used by adults to dismiss anything that does not fit within the current rational, logical, social, political and hierarchical framework. It is also frequently used as reproof, to dismiss what a child says. Every branch of knowledge is driven by an obsession with empirical verification, logical consistency and assimilability of perceived entities into the structures of ‘sense’. However, in spite of our best efforts to exclude the nonsensical from our lives, it returns eternally to invade our safe havens of sensibility in the form of puns, limericks, jokes, surrealism, cartoons, parodies, caricatures and nonsense rhymes and stories. Our worlds are precariously and intensely dependent on a specific formulisation of *Nonsense*, and for this reason, the genre warrants a deeper analysis.

Nonsense has existed in many forms but may be said to have begun in the Victorian Age in England. Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, within a single era, produced several epochal
texts that have yet to lose their magnetism for readers all over the world. This is evident from
the numerous times one comes across quotes from the *Alice* books and the frequency of the
appearance of Lear's rhymes such as *The Owl and the Pussycat*, and "There Was an Old Man
with a Beard" in school textbooks. Their popularity in the twenty-first century is evidenced
by *Alice in Wonderland*'s being made into a Hollywood movie by Tim Burton in 2010. In
Burton's version, Alice, now nineteen years old, returns to Wonderland to slay the
Jabberwock and save its inhabitants from the cruel rule of the Red Queen. The continuous
interest in the lives and works of Nonsense writers is also evident in the fact that Vivien
Noakes' 1968 biography of Edward Lear was reprinted in 2004 in paperback.

Readers, writers, critics, and teachers of literature generally -- as well as psychologists,
political scientists, and historians -- now realize that the study of children's literature can no
longer be restricted to specialists in the field -- inestimable as their contributions have been
and are. For, what children either have chosen or have been forced to read, not only reveals
much about our societal and cultural attitudes but also discloses to us a forgotten and often
maligned body of literature that ultimately cannot be conceived of as separate from our most
important aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual concerns.

But, even today, while books are regularly published for the education and entertainment
of children, they all seem to fall outside the purview of our concept of *Literature*. By
*Literature*, it is assumed, one talks of *adult* literature. The study of English Literature -- even
literature by Indian writers -- is a high-brow exercise. The object of study is exalted. After all,
who would be proud to say, for example, "I'm doing my M.A. in Children's Literature"? It
must be admitted that literature of children, for children and by children, is not greatly valued

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1 *The Owl and the Pussycat* has been used as a title for a 1970 romantic film starring
Barbra Streisand -- a film which has very little in common with Lear's poem, from which its
title was borrowed.
in our universities. One purpose of this study therefore is to attempt to give to Children's Literature the serious attention that it deserves, especially in India.

The relevance of Nonsense is evident from the numerous times one comes across quotes from Lear and both Alice books, in reference to anything from Physics and Logic to Politics and Management. Lear's The Owl and the Pussycat is often used for political satire (Manning 42). In a text on Strategic Management, Pankaj Ghemawat finds it necessary to refer to the second of Carroll's classics to explain why the above-average performance of businesses tends to collapse quickly into the average:

Perhaps the most obvious evolutionary analogy is with the "Red Queen" effect named after the character in Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass, who explains to Alice that "Here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place." The business version of the Red Queen effect is the idea that, as organizations struggle to adapt to competitive pressures, their fitness levels improve, raising the baseline against which competitive advantage has to be measured. (Ghemawat 83)

The Red Queen effect has been used in innumerable books to demonstrate facts about Physics (Casimir 244, Bogg 57), Management (Forsyth 87, Faulkner 941), Information Technology (Brooks 93, Ghanaea-Hercock 116) and even Genetics (Fagot-Largeault 75). The Alice books are also replete with lines and situations that are used by physicists – especially when attempting discussions on the theory that completely transformed the

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2 To put things into perspective, a search on Google Books tells us that this passage from Through the Looking Glass "appears in 858 books from 1817-2008" (Google Books. Web. 22 Mar. 2011). I give the URL (which includes the search terms I used in Google Search) below for reference:
<http://books.google.com/books?id=UeWDivqKcm0C&dq=management++it+takes+all+the+running+you+can+do,+to+keep+in+the+same+place&source=gbs_navlinks_s>.

But I was thinking of a plan
To dye one's whiskers green,
And always use so large a fan
That they could not be seen. (*AA* 311)

While Russell (29) uses these lines to support the Lorentz - Fitzgerald contraction hypothesis, another physicist, Arthur Stanley Eddington uses these lines in Chapter 2 of *The Nature of the Physical World*, to refer to the apparent habit nature has of concealing its basic nature from us. “Surely,” he writes, “it is absurd to suppose that the universe is planned in such a way as to conceal its plan. It is like the schemes of the White Knight,” – and then Eddington proceeds to quote the same lines as Russell (Eddington 28).

If Carroll's work can be a source for theories that came much later, it could well find its own relevance in theories to come. The works of Carroll and Lear, as a whole, or in part, will never go out of fashion or fall out of contemporary relevance. Since their works are written in the Nonsense genre, they are plural in their nature and signification. As a result of this plurality, they are capable of becoming texts of any age; they have the potential of being assigned meanings relevant to any culture or time. Besides, the stories of Alice and her encounters underground (in Wonderland) or behind the Looking Glass, are in essence, fantasies. The study of fantasy could not be more relevant today. Hollywood's biggest revenue grossers of the twentieth century were the *Star Wars* trilogy – science fiction

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3 “According to this hypothesis, when a body is in motion, it becomes shortened in the direction of the motion by a certain proportion depending on the velocity . . . A foot-rule placed in the line of the earth’s motion would be shorter than the same rule place at right angles to the earth’s motion. This point of view resembles nothing so much as the White Knight’s ‘plan to dye one’s whiskers green, and always use so large a fan that they could not be seen’. The odd thing was that the plan worked well enough.” (Russell 28-29)
fantasies. The first decade of the twenty-first century experienced a wave of obsessive attraction to fantasy in Children’s Literature, with the high-profile publishing of the Harry Potter books – stories of magic, witchcraft, the supernatural and child-heroes. J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* stories successfully combine the fairy tale, medieval and Gothic Romance, and Carrollian effects with twentieth century modifications. The success of the *Harry Potter* books and films has made Rowling one of the richest women on earth⁴.

The fantasy wave also led to the revival of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (which had waned in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s) with the filming of the hugely successful and spectacular trilogy: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002) and *The Return of the King* (2003). Fantasy, therefore is still the most popular form of text, for adults as well as children (in the West at least). The study of fantasy texts, then, holds considerable relevance at this point in time.

The importance of Nonsense cannot be underestimated in the language-learning process. “We understand why the nonsense of nursery rhymes is so useful to young children: they learn language by learning to manipulate its sounds. Thus, they learn what no rules can teach them – that there is a music specific to the English tongue” (Lecercle 37). Recent studies by Proulx and Heine (2009) have shown that Nonsense disorients the brain, making the subject more alert and “more motivated to look for patterns” (qtd. in Carey n.p.). Nonsense, thus, is an integral aspect of our lives. Studying Children’s Literature – and Nonsense Literature in particular – may reveal facets of our socio-linguistic existence that we have been quite unaware of. The works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, besides, have a precognitive quality about them for they seem functioning embodiments of the philosophical theories of

post-World War II western thinkers almost a century before those theories were propounded.

The time, then, is ripe for an in-depth study of Nonsense Literature -- a study I attempt in this dissertation. For this, a general understanding of the lives of these two authors may be a good way to start -- especially because several biographical facts impinge on points I make in the chapters that follow. These facts need to be delineated at the outset. In the next section, therefore, I present a brief history of the lives of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll.

**Lives of Poets**

The “practically undisputed father of English ‘Nonsense’” (Tigges 6) is Edward Lear (1812 – 1888) – who “was born a Londoner, his parents’ twentieth child” (Levi 1) – and was mainly brought up by Ann, one of his sisters, twenty years his senior. By the time he was four, his father suffered an acute financial crisis (Carpenter 305) and, although they had their own house, the family was in a state of penury for most of Lear’s childhood. He rarely saw his father and Lear grew up “a sad, lonely little boy grasping happiness when it came, and savouring every bit of it – and broken-hearted when it had slipped beyond his grasp again” (Noakes *Wanderer* 8). It is a fact that, early in the 1830s, he had a sexual encounter that led him to contract syphilis. However, it is has been a matter of much debate among biographers and critics whether Lear had a suppressed homosexual need which he could never really sublimate.

Like Carroll, he indulged in doggerel from adolescence (Carpenter 305). His verse was usually of the comic type and written, like Carroll’s, “for the amusement of a family” (Carpenter 305):

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5 Lear is known to have been in love with at least two young men, in his lifetime: Franklin Lushington in the 1850s, and Hubert Congreve in 1876, but neither of them returned his affections.
Who art thou – sweet little China Man? –
Your name I want to know
With your lovely face so pale and wan –
With a high diddle diddledy do. (Lear qtd. in Carpenter 305)

His lucky break came when he was called by Lord Stanley (heir to the Earl of Derby) to Knowsley Hall, close to Liverpool, to sketch the different birds and animals in their little private zoo. Although he started off there "virtually as a servant" (Carpenter 305), his funny drawings and poems amused the children of the house greatly. It was there that a friend first introduced him to the limerick form – a book titled *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* – and, to use a cliché, the rest is history. This book and another titled *The History of the Sixteen Wonderful Old Women* were the only two collections of limericks existing in England at the time (Carpenter 305). Lear took up the limerick form and made it his own, writing scores of these for the rest of his life, and leaving a unique mark in the history of English Literature, as the now respected and revered father of Nonsense Literature.

In 1846, Lear’s *Book of Nonsense* was published – a book that was quite popular and went through several reprints during his lifetime – but he made precious little by way of profit. Lear’s success as a poet was not planned – he wrote for the amusement of little children (and for his own) – and was quite pleasantly surprised by his own success. “It is queer (and you would say so if you saw me) that I am the man as is making some three or four thousand people laugh in England all at one time,” Lear wrote after the publication of *More Nonsense* in 1871 (Noakes *Wanderer* viii) and to his great delight, when he visited India (1872 – 75), a little girl asked him to make a sketch of *The Owl and the Pussycat* –

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6 See Chapter Two of this dissertation for details regarding the controversial deals that Lear struck with his publishers, who, were soon laughing all the way to the bank.
because “she & all the school she went to had been taught that remarkable poem!!” (Lear qtd. in Noakes *Wanderer* 239)

Lear’s true ambition was to be a landscape painter. However, the “Victorian taste was for tame, sentimentalised English landscapes, but Lear was drawn to stunning foreign views” (Wullschlager 78). If it hadn’t been for the deep fondness that the Derby family had for Lear, it is possible that several of his paintings would have remained unsold, because “Lear’s paintings were never as popular as those of fashionable Victorian artists such as Millais” (Wullschlager 78) – a painter whom he considered his “artistic uncle” (Strachey xl) – but whose success, Lear felt, was grossly undeserved (Byrom 25). Two things worked greatly in his favour throughout his life: (a) “Royal notice” and (b) “the extensive network of British influence in southern Europe” (Wullschlager 78 – 79). No doubt, though, his triumph as a writer for children probably made up for his lack of success as a painter of landscapes (Carpenter 305). Lear spent his life, largely, out of England, travelling mainly in Italy, and later, India, painting landscapes wherever he went. During one of his excursions (in 1847), he heard someone call him “nothing but a damned dirty landscape painter” and decided to use the term to refer to himself for the rest of his days.

The *Book of Nonsense* was a book of limericks – short poems based on a rhyming form which he had come across in two volumes published in the 1820s: *The History of the Sixteen

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7 Lear had a brief association with the Pre-Raphaelite painters between 1849 and 1853. In 1852, he accompanied the famous Pre-Raphaelite painter, Holman Hunt (1827-1910) to the hills to watch and learn his style of landscape painting and “a deep and lifelong friendship grew between them” (Noakes *Wanderer* 98). Lear “christened Holman Hunt ‘Daddy’, and Millais and Woolner were then his uncles” (Noakes *Wanderer* 98).

8 “Millais was the most popular painter of his day” and, although Lear claimed that his dislike for Millais “cannot be envy”, when Millais’ “Apple Blossoms” was sold for 450 guineas, Lear felt he deserved more than 700 pounds for his painting titled “Cedars” – a fact that indicates, perhaps, a feeling of bitterness for his own lack of success as a painter (Noakes *Wanderer* 155).
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Wonderful Old Women and Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen. This has made him so famous that his name is now inextricably associated with the limerick and humour in rhyme. Two of the most popular of these limericks are given below:

There was an old man with a beard
Who said it is just as I feared!
Two owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard. (Lear 157)

There was an Old Man in a tree
Who was horribly bored by a Bee;
When they said, 'Does it Buzz?' he replied, 'Yes, it does!'
It's a regular Brute of a Bee!' (Lear 61)

Lear's brand of Nonsense made him extremely popular with children during his lifetime.

“Lear's rich narrative convincingly transports us to his land of Nonsense through the evocative lyricism in the longer poems on the one hand, and the compactness of the limericks on the other. The essence of his language is to be found in the rhythm of his verse and the melodic use of words which manage to convey a sense of real feelings and an idea of nonsense at the same time” (Lord xvi).

While Lear's skill in verse was pure talent, his “real feelings” sometimes surfaced in his poetry, stemming from a life that was not free of miseries. The pain of his lifelong bachelorhood and loneliness are quite evident in these lines from one of his longer poems, "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy Bo":

'I am tired of living singly,--
'On this coast so wild and shingly,--
'I'm a-weary of my life:
'If you'll come and be my wife,
'Quite serene would be my life!'—
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bô, (Lear 325)

Perhaps a reflection of his eternal restlessness may be seen in one of the old men of his limericks:

There was an Old man whose despair
Induced him to purchase a hare:
Whereon one fine day, he rode wholly away,
Which partly assuaged his despair. (Lear 329)

Lear's achievement is, however, overshadowed, if not ignored, in regular courses of English Literature by the more serious works of Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson of the same period. Browning's *Bells and Pomegranates*, written and published in 1841 – 46, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* published in 1851 have gone down in history and are studied with meticulous care even in the beginning of the twenty-first century in colleges and universities all over the world. In ironic contrast, Lear's poetry is rarely, if ever, included in college curricula for serious study, probably because it does not fall into the category of serious literature.

There have been several accounts of Lear's life⁹, but, by far, the best biographers of Edward Lear are Peter Levi (1995) and Vivien Noakes (1968, 1986, 2004) – the acknowledged expert on Lear studies. Levi and Noakes delve into the hundreds of letters and works of Lear to construct a personality of the poet for us.

⁹ See *Bibliography* for book and publication details.
Levi’s *Edward Lear: A Biography* painstakingly documents his life and gives a chronological account of Lear and his family. Levi indicates, for example, that Lear’s best years were spent with his sister Ann in Sussex: “Life with Ann gave Edward as a boy happy security and a source of fun, and the life and the landscape of Sussex and the friends he made there offered a thrilling liberation just when he needed it” (*Levi Biography* 11). He documents Lear’s various meetings with Franklin Lushington – a young man “with whom Edward became particularly deeply entangled” (*Levi Biography* 88) – and adds details of the lives of Lushington and other friends.

Peter Levi notices that, behind the veil of self-deprecation and comic play, lies a hidden reality of emotion that occasionally becomes visible in Lear’s poetry. He seems to see that Lear’s “songs, his comic lyrics, were parodies of the deepest emotions they expressed, but they were at least as sad as they were funny, and when they were in perfect balance, the emotion overcame the parody” (*Levi Art of Poetry* 183). He points out that Lear’s parodies show that he had “an acutely good ear for the texture of Tennyson’s verse” (*Levi Art of Poetry* 175). Levi’s analysis of Lear’s limericks, one of the most comprehensive, studies several of his popular ones and reiterates the fact that, of the characters that Lear creates, “very few are beatifically happy” (*Levi Biography* 59). His critical study of Lear’s works and life, identifies a stream of pathos that runs through them – “the sadness of his limericks” (*Levi Biography* 6) and the “sadness because the sun will set” (*Levi Biography* 123). However, he also shows us how Lear found joy in the smallest of things. He mentions that Lear was extraordinarily easy to make happy (*Levi Biography* 186). One of his hobbies was music and he spent the last few years of his life trying to put the poems of Tennyson to music. Lear revelled in beauty and during most of his last days “he was happy at his piano and happy with his garden” (*Levi Biography* 327).
Noakes gives a chronological account of Lear’s life, with a specific focus on his travels. She supplements each account of his travels with quotes from his letters and interesting facts about his journey – his encounter with belligerent Arabs on the way to Jerusalem, (Noakes *Wanderer* 135–36) is one such instance. Noakes makes several pertinent points about Nonsense, interspersed between her biographical facts. She reminds us that “Nonsense is a universe of words” (193), and “one of the characteristics of pure Nonsense is detachment – neither the writer, nor the reader is to be involved with the characters” (194). She points out that Lear’s illustrations are unique because they are “fresh and clear and almost crude in their simplicity” (58).

The other Victorian author, who won many more hearts through the genre of Nonsense, was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson\(^\text{10}\) (1832–98), more popularly known by his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll. He was born in 1832, the third of eleven children, and his family gave him a strong “sense of religion and tradition, of loyalty and service; a certain pride in social standing; an innate conservatism that struggled with his own originality of mind” (Hudson 35). He was a precocious boy and very deft with his hands. He devoted himself wholeheartedly to the entertainment of his brothers and sisters, as a boy. His sisters were in the majority and, as a result, he became adept at those skills which amused little girls and which he practised for the rest of his life, whenever he had an audience of little girls before him. Like Edward Lear, he drew well and loved to draw, although his favourite hobby was photography. Again, like Lear, he turned to a visual medium (photography) and, like Lear, his sexuality has been a matter of much debate until today (in Carroll’s case, it was his unusual attraction to little girls). As a boy, he also created several family magazines, the first of which was *Useful and Instructive Poetry*, in 1845. His genius at versification and sense of

\(^{10}\) I shall refer to Dodgson by his pseudonym, henceforth, in my study, for the sake of convenience and clarity.
humour coupled with a touch of pathos can be seen in this poem which – uniquely well
written for a boy of thirteen – he included in the magazine:

MY FAIRY

I have a fairy by my side
Which says I must not sleep,
When once in pain I loudly cried
It said ‘You must not weep.’
If, full of mirth, I smile and grin,
It says ‘You must not laugh’;
When once I wished to drink some gin,
It said ‘You must not quaff.’
When once a meal I wished to taste
It said ‘You must not bite’,
When to the wars I went in haste
It said, “You must not fight.”

‘What may I do?’ at length I cried,

Tired of the painful task.
The fairy quietly replied,
And said ‘You must not ask’.

Moral: ‘You mustn’t’ (qtd. in Hudson 48-49)

The poem reflects the predicament of the child who is surrounded by so many paradoxical
and seemingly meaningless prohibitions, that there seems to be just one rule for the child:
“You mustn’t” do whatever it is you want to do. This feeling of a child is often
communicated by Alice in the two books, through the linguistic and situational dead-ends she
encounters.
The first *Alice* book — *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* — was published in 1865. It was the result of a short trip that Carroll took on a boat with Alice, Lorina and Edith Liddell, daughters of Dean Liddell of Christ Church College, Oxford, on July 4, 1862. During this excursion, Carroll told them the story of Alice, making it up as he went along, purely for their entertainment. Contrary to the account provided by Robinson Duckworth, who accompanied them, Carroll didn't sit up "nearly the whole night, committing to an MS book his recollections of the drolleries with which he had enlivened the afternoon" (Carpenter 16). In truth, Carroll found the children pressing for the story in writing every time they met following the boat trip, which led him finally to start writing down the "fairy-tale" for the first time on November 13, 1862. Carroll later followed it up with *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, in 1871. None of his other works, including *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889, 1893), and *Phantasmagoria* (1869) — which contained that masterpiece of Nonsense, *The Hunting of the Snark* — have been as successful as the *Alice* books.

Several very comprehensive biographies (Collingwood [1898], Bowman [1899], Lennon [1947], Reed [1932], Hudson [1958, 1976], Pudney [1976], Amor [1979], Kelly [1990], Cohen [1995], Leach [1999] etc.), have been published since Lewis Carroll’s death in 1898, many of them contentious and repetitive.

The biography by Derek Hudson may perhaps be called the most meticulous study of Carroll’s life in the twentieth century. Hudson, with the help of several original photographs of and by Carroll, and innumerable letters and authentic reference to the social and political happenings of the time, recreates Carroll’s life with methodical and vivid chronological documentation. His principal objective was to set up a firewall against the one-sided

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11 My primary focus in this dissertation shall be the *Alice* books.

12 See Bibliography for book and publication details.
representations and studies of Carroll and his books, by critics brandishing the tools of psychoanalysis.

While I was writing the book, my principal object was to put in order and reassert the facts of Lewis Carroll’s life, which I felt were being obscured and even distorted by a growing accretion of psycho-analytical and Freudian theory. (Hudson 13)

In large measure, Hudson succeeded. The wave of psychoanalytic studies did not last much beyond *Aspects of Alice* (1971). The biography is a factual encyclopaedia on Carroll. It includes opinions of Carroll’s relatives, students, colleagues, friends and child-friends; quotes from his diaries and letters; photographs and paintings; and illustrations from the *Alice* books. Details of pre- and post-production processes of both books are described. In short, a fairly complete idea of Carroll’s life, nature and times emerges from Hudson’s biography.

The same, however, cannot be said about the biography by John Pudney (1976) which seems to devote more space to illustrations than text. Perhaps for this reason, Pudney’s observations are pithy and succinct, mixing the factual with the contemporary and colloquial. It is a selective yet effective biography from which emerges a clear picture of the many-sided personality of the Oxford don. The two books are very different in treatment. The first is written by a student who wanted to change public perceptions, while the latter biography is written by a fan, keen to share his own studies with the general populace (which is not to say that it lacks seriousness of tone and purpose).

Several interesting attempts to interpret the *Alice* books have been made over the years. Some of these analyses seem quite far-fetched. Critics like Judith Bloomingdale (1971) have seen Alice's whole journey as a pilgrim's progress – a religious quest. When Alice falls through the hole she is representative of mankind falling from God's favour by eating of the tree of knowledge. When she finally joins the other two Queens, she is completing the Holy
Trinity. The Duchess rocking the pig is a symbol of the Madonna rocking the baby Jesus. The White Knight is Christ, the Saviour, who comes in to save Alice. The sleeping Red King is the symbol of God, whose awakening will lead to the destruction of Alice and us all. Shane Leslie (1933) has shown how the *Alice* books are actually “a secret history of the religious controversies of Victorian England” (Gardner *Introduction* 8). In his satiric study, he believes that the Cheshire Cat is actually a representation of Cardinal Wiseman. He draws a parallel between the Red Queen and Cardinal Henry Manning and sees the Jabberwock as an allegorical and “fearsome representation of the British view of the Papacy . . . .” (Leslie qtd. in Gardner *Introduction* 8).

According to Roger Sale, people who write about the Alice books tend to fall into two groups: “The first accepts and even delights in the fragmentary nature of the books, because . . . their pleasure comes from picking up brilliant bits and scraps and writing as though the others did not exist . . . The second group are psychologists, and they seek to explain Lewis Carroll’s bits and scraps by recreating Charles Dodgson, the shy, donnish lover of little girls” (Sale 103).

Critics like Martin Gardner and Roger Sale himself, fall into Sale’s first category of those who focus on the fragmentary nature of the Alice books. The reason why such critics pick *bits* and *scraps* and analyse them as if the rest does not exist, is simple: the nature of the narrative in both books is episodic. There is absolutely no continuity among Alice’s different encounters. And behind the Looking-glass, there is no progression except a forced one – the movement of Alice, the pawn, to the other side of the board, to turn queen. It is impossible to speak of the two books as units because they do not lend themselves to a pattern that is memorable and so identifiable.
Gardner’s *The Annotated Alice*\(^{13}\) is the best sourcebook for the Carroll researcher and the most informative publication of the *Alice* texts for the casual reader and the Carroll-fan alike. What Gardner does with his pertinent and persistent footnoting is akin to what occurs in the reading of the *Alice* books: the reader is constantly forced to refer below – or to the side, constantly back and forth so that in being more complete with the added information, the texts are rendered incomplete (the first step of Deconstruction: the action of the supplement).

At the same time, Gardner’s meticulous enthusiasm subverts the very purpose of nonsense literature – by trying to add information to help the reader “make sense” of the nonsense by telling the reader which poem is a parody of which older poem or which character in the books refers to which character in real life, etc. Gardner does make the reading richer, but the text poorer for it stood quite well before the violence of the supplement was thrust upon it. It stood strong as a pure edifice of Nonsense.

Roger Sale is a conscious analyser of the “scraps” that make the *Alice* books. But he presents a fresh perspective (Sale 100–125) on these unlinked episodes in his profound work, *Fairy Tales and After*. He observes that each of these episodes is an independent narrative unit, a system within itself, only concerned with its own workings. His thesis is that perhaps children are exposed to an episodic world which falls into some system of rules that they come to realize by and by – and the child-view is thus most aptly attained. And perhaps this is the child-view that the adults, dismayed by then-adult worlds, turn to in order to be children again.

It should not be surprising that within these units, much is going together, building up and breaking down, that only frequent careful rereading can show . . . there surely is

\(^{13}\) All references to the *Alice* books, in this dissertation, are to the 1970 edition of Carroll’s *Alice* books (*The Annotated Alice*) edited by Martin Gardner.
no harm done if we say that children are more often forced to accept life in bits and scraps than are adults. (Sale 124)

The most interesting recent study is by Julian Wolfreys. Wolfreys presents a Foucauldian-Derridean view of Alice in which he states that: “the relationship between perceptions of identity and the contest within language over identity’s instability and the desire for fixity” (Wolfreys 59) are dissected and demonstrated in the Alice books. He concludes that the language of Carroll's nonsense is the language that questions identities - and therefore healthy reading

A Juxtaposition

The lives of Carroll and Lear were quite different, yet remarkably similar. While Lear spent most of his life quite poor – managing to buy a house only in 1870, towards the end of his life – Carroll’s parents and Carroll himself were never poor. However, similarities exist. They were both bachelors – Lear an unwilling one; they both loved the company of little children (Carroll, only little girls); they are both suspected of “unnatural” sexual predilections: while Lear was plagued by a suppressed homosexuality, Carroll’s fetish for photographing young girls in the nude is said to show a paedophilic urge within him. Lear’s childhood was lonely and painful which led to frequent attacks of depression till the end of his life; Carroll was troubled by a stammer that (supposedly) only left him when he was in the presence of little girls “with whom his shyness and stammer vanished immediately” (Wullschlager 36), revealing a basic insecurity. While Carroll tackled his insecurity by turning into a recluse, Lear tackled his by seeking out company and won much appreciation

\[14\] I shall discuss Wolfreys' views in greater detail in Chapter Three.

\[15\] “Lear probably only partly realized his homosexuality, though in the deeper layers of his mind there was conflict as he fought to suppress it, a conflict which contributed to his constant state of restlessness and depression” (Noakes qtd. in Carpenter 306).
and favour thanks to his jovial disposition and sense of humour. The similarities are quite uncanny. Both of them grew up in families with a large number of female siblings and were quite close to their sisters. Lewis Carroll preferred to refer to his stammer by a more euphemistic term, i.e., his “hesitation” (Leach *Dreamchild* 91) while Lear’s name for his epilepsy was “the Demon” (Noakes *Wanderer* 8). Both were prone to depression (Styles 134) and Lear had a name for that too – the “Morbids” (ibid.). Both remained unmarried and “both developed friendships with children which were important to them” (Styles 134). In terms of their authorship, “the main similarity, of course, is that both Carroll and Lear are playing a game” (Tigges *Anatomy* 82). The following passage sums up the differences between the two authors:

Lear was primarily an artist, while Carroll was a mathematician; though both did some teaching of their subjects, Carroll was a lecturer by profession, apparently rather a dreary one. Lear struggled with poverty all his life and did not go to school until he was 11, whereas Carroll came from a comfortable background, went to public school and spent his professional life with security of tenure and all the privileges accorded to an Oxford tutor. Lear was a *bon vivant* with a great capacity for pleasure whereas Carroll was prim, prudish and abstemious. Carroll was careful; Lear constantly took risks. (Styles 135)

Besides the difference in the kinds of lives they led (Lear, erratic and meandering, and Carroll, steady and fastidious), there was a fundamental difference in the kind of Nonsense they wrote. Tigges claims that if “mathematics was at the heart of Carrol’s Nonsense, then, on this view, art must be at the heart of Lear’s” (148). Carroll tended to dabble more in rational Nonsense (or the irrationality of the rules of “rational” thought) while Lear simply juggled around with words for the fun of it. As Tigges puts it, “it is more useful to take notice of the fact that Carroll makes use of nonsensical reasoning, reasoning which is
nonsensical because it *is* logical, whereas Lear describes nonsensical acts, which are
nonsensical because they are unmotivated" (33).

Over the years, the quantity of critical literature on Nonsense Literature keeps them alive, long after Disney cartoons, comic books and *Harry Potter* have overtaken them in popularity among children. Like a religious book, almost each page of the *Alice* books has a quote that can be used in reference to any field from politics to management. With Shakespeare, the canon and the institutions perpetuate his works and his influence; with Carroll, there is no canon, and he has only recently been institutionalized. To institutionalize Carroll – or his works – is a contradiction in terms and would probably have offended the extremely private clergyman were he alive today. Yet the works merit rereading, because each reading brings to light something new – simply because nonsense can mean so many different things at the same time. It is precisely this sort of study that I have undertaken in this dissertation – an endeavour to reveal facets of Nonsense that are truly revolutionary and revelatory of the nature of language, the psyche, society and societal attitudes towards gender.

The Outline

The present study has been organized as follows:

The first chapter is devoted to defining Children's Literature and presenting an overview of the most influential works in its history and evolution. Apart from the Fairy Tale, which has its roots in the oral tradition, literature that has been written purely with the purpose of providing pleasure to children, is itself in its infancy, when one considers that it is barely a

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16 The Lewis Carroll Society was set up in 1969 in London and has a large international membership. It also publishes journals like *The Carrollian* and *Bandersnatch* and organises activities related to Carroll, his life and works on a regular basis. Its website can be accessed on at <http://lewiscarrollsociety.org.uk/index.html>. Besides this, similar societies have also been set up in Brazil, North America and Japan.
century and a half old. This bird's-eye-view of its origins and development works as a springboard for us to understand the flaws and misconceptions of early Children's Literature; it thus assists in perceiving the inestimable value of the *Alice* books — and the rhymes and tales of Edward Lear — which stand apart when compared with all the literature that has been produced before them, in the name of *Children's Literature*.

Nonsense Literature is the subject of Chapter Two. I shall begin by analyzing the nature of Nonsense literature as a genre, and then make a short study of the critical reception of the genre over the years. I attempt to reveal the mechanics of Nonsense Literature, its influences and effects, and to demonstrate how any attempt to pin it to a particular ideology, fails. In this chapter, I shall also attempt a brief study of the origins of nonsense, using the parameters presented by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* and Marshal McLuhan's theoretical tools for analysing media effects in *Understanding Media*.

In Chapter Three I shall briefly survey the Poststructuralist movement of the latter half of the twentieth century. The study summarizes the theories of Saussure, and the culmination of linguistic philosophy in the theory of Deconstruction; the focus of the chapter is primarily on the work of Jacques Derrida, whose practice of Deconstruction is practically demonstrated by the texts of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, a century before Derrida formulated his tenets. The tales of Lear and Carroll are basically subversive, parodic and disruptive in nature and thus may also be called Postmodern fairy tales which, in a strangely prophetic manner, have implemented the suggestions Derrida propounded, as a means to elude the victimization and traps hidden in the use of all language and signification. I have sub-divided this chapter into two parts (Reversal and Displacement and Strategies of Play) on account of its copious size and with the aim of ensuring a smoother reading experience.
Chapter Four seeks to show how the texts of Lear and Carroll have intuitive insights into the workings of the psyche, through the theoretical precepts of Jacques Lacan. Nonsense is a pre-linguistic entity, an example of the pre-symbolic babble that is the last resort of a social outcast. However, Nonsense is not a linguistic dissolution of the schizophrenic sort. It is a triumph, a *jouissance*, which enabled both Lear and Carroll to sublimate their fundamental social otherness through a socially acceptable channel. Carroll’s hobby of photography and Lear’s (unacclaimed) talent in landscape painting are also evidence of a pre-symbolic urge in them – activities that could be read as being, like Nonsense, parts of an over-determined symptom, in psychoanalytical terms.

Chapter Five is an attempt to look at Nonsense from a Feminist perspective. The works of Lear and Carroll reveal the sort of textuality that twentieth century feminists like Hélène Cixous have called *écriture féminine*. Carroll and Lear were both, in their different ways, marginalised and feminised during their lifetimes and seem to have presented a practical demonstration of a non-patriarchal way of speaking in their Nonsense works. I also study, in this chapter, the kinds of characters that Lear and Carroll have created and show how their characterisation is unique for they seem to represent the various ways in which a patriarchal, biased and one-sided social system tends to address the female, slot the feminine and classify all marginal groups as female.

The Conclusion is a summary of the principal observations I have made in the course of this dissertation and the possibilities that open up on account of these. For the convenience of the reader, I have resorted to footnotes instead of endnotes as I believe that the latter tend to hinder a smooth reading experience when the reader has to turn over several pages merely to refer to a note – and then return to continue reading the main content. I have presented a chapter-wise list of works cited at the end of the document. This will save the reader the trouble of foraging through a copious list to locate the details of a single text that I may have
quoted or mentioned, reducing the number of pages to be turned and the number of names to be surveyed.