THE NONSENSE LITERATURE OF
EDWARD LEAR AND LEWIS CARROLL

DISSERTATION

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By
Lisa Susan Ede, B.S., M.A.

* * * * *

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Reading Committee:

Cordon Grigsby
James Kincaid
Christian Zacher

Approved By

James C. Kincaid
Advisor
Department of English
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VITA

September 9, 1947 Born - Findlay, Ohio

1969 B.S. cum laude, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1969-1970 Research Assistantship, Department of Public Instruction, Madison, Wisconsin

1970 M.A., The University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin

1970-1973 N.D.E.A. Fellowship, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1973-1975 Teaching Associate, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

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'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on. 'I do,' Alice hastily replied, 'at least--I mean what I say--that's the same thing you know.' 'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter.

*Alice in Wonderland*, "A Mad Tea-Party"

As Alice discovered in both Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land, "saying what you mean" can be difficult indeed, especially when others seem to adhere to personal and eccentric rather than shared logical, linguistic, or social codes. It is hard to play when everyone knows the rules of the game but you. The problem of miscommunication is central to the nonsense of Lear and Carroll, who both expose and exploit man's mishandling of language, and who ultimately question the possibility of valid linguistic communication at all. This concern with language is one of the major links between Victorian nonsense and modern art and philosophy, for in a time when many feel that "no words are entirely right any more,"¹ even nonsense begins to make sense, or at least it offers a potential explanation of why sense is no longer available to us. For these and other reasons, certain recent critics have examined nonsense with a seriousness and intensity which most Victorians, including Lear and Carroll, would have found absurd.²

This is not to imply that there is a unified body of criticism about nonsense, for there is not. Instead, one comes across suggestive references in widely differing fields--art, literature, philosophy, linguistics--references which imply that nonsense involves radical transformations without
indicating very clearly the nature or causes of that change. Most Victorians would have been amazed at the following surprisingly typical statements:

This need to counteract ruthlessly the depreciation of language, a need which was felt in France by Lautreamont, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and at the same time in England by Lewis Carroll, has not ceased to be just as imperative since that time... 3

André Breton

Nonsense is how the English prefer to take their pure poetry. 4

Elizabeth Sewell

Verbal nonsense is in the truest sense a metaphysical endeavor, a striving to enlarge and to transcend the limits of the material universe and logic. 5

Martin Esslin

L’œil scie a vu apparaître trois grands vérificateurs des Poids et Mesures du langage: Marx, Lewis Carroll et Freud. 6

Claude Roy

For although Victorians were fascinated by Lear's and Carroll's work few considered it to be anything other than a particularly successful and rather sophisticated form of children's literature. The history of how such a major shift in emphasis took place is complex, but it provides a valuable context within which to analyze nonsense.

Nonsense is unusually difficult both to define and to delimit, but the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the term indicates its main elements. Denotationally, nonsense is "that which is not sense," a statement which sounds clear and simple until one realizes that it depends on the very slippery term "sense," which implies even more slippery concepts. Nonsense also carries the following connotative meaning: "spoken or written words which make no sense or convey absurd ideas; also, absurd or senseless actions." The basis for the definition is thus subjective, depending on a
judgment most people make constantly and with unthinking ease in their
daily lives. Finally, there is literary nonsense, which might be defined
casually as verse or prose which is presented by the author so as to
emphasize illogicality or even irrationality. For centuries hardly even
considered a form of literature, nonsense has long been the happy property
of children and the common man. Thus did nonsense mean different things
to different people; while philosophers argued about one aspect of nonsense
in terms of the limits of rational knowledge, storytellers and rhymesters
enthralled less analytic audiences with nursery rhymes and riddles.
Neither side looked to the other for enrichment or enlightenment; in fact,
the gulf between the two was as broad and deep as that between work and
play, or seriousness and frivolity—of which more later.

The bridging of this gulf began with the epistemological studies
of Immanuel Kant. In his Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant attempted
to distinguish between what man can assert with certainty (sense) and
what is beyond his rational powers (non-sense). In the process, Kant
radically altered the direction and methodology of philosophy. Kant's
denigration of the casual and associative "understanding" and his elevation
of the imaginative faculty is crucial. So is his belief that "thinking
becomes truly philosophical when it turns back and examines itself."7
Such statements can be seen as one starting point in the evolution of
modern thought toward self-examination and the increasing abandonment of
absolute standards. Continued questioning of what man can say with cer-
tainty that he knows has resulted in a "general movement everywhere in
modern philosophy from positive content, and from the various dogmatisms."8
Instead, many contemporary thinkers concern themselves with language alone,
as an independent structure. Two such movements are linguistic philosophy
and structuralism.
The essential figure in linguistic philosophy is Ludwig Wittgenstein, author of *Tractatus* (1921) and *Philosophical Investigations* (posthum., 1953). In these two works, Wittgenstein presents his philosophy of language and linguistic reality. Starting from Kant's position that the philosopher should examine his own assumptions and language in order to avoid meaningless metaphysical speculation, Wittgenstein set even tighter bounds for man than had Kant. Wittgenstein believed that the limits of the knowable world and the limits of language are the same, and that "the logical limits of language are the limits both of what can be said and what can be thought, and therefore all that can be said to exist."  

This belief in the necessity of discussing reality in terms of language is shared by Structuralism, an increasingly significant movement which originated principally with the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure, but which has spread to related fields, such as anthropology (Levi-Strauss), psychology (Jacque Lacan), and literary criticism. Although structuralists at times use the term "language" loosely, and often in a slightly different sense than linguistic philosophers, they share Wittgenstein's belief that what is knowable about "all manifestations of social activity . . . may be reduced to the same set of abstract rules that define and govern what we normally think of as a language."  

Whether language can bear the weight of such significance is a moot question, but it should come as no surprise that there is another, more negative, side to the twentieth century's preoccupation with language. Many modern artists view language neither as reality nor as the representation of reality, but as its distorher, a mass of dead words which
inhibits man from perceiving his essential condition. One sign of this concern is the unprecedented preoccupation of modern literature with its own methods and with the form and function of language. One reaction has been to attempt to make the literary work self-sufficient, self-reflexive, its reality being nothing more than what it is, the sum of its parts. In an article discussing the relationship of Lewis Carroll's nonsense to modern literature, Michael Holquist describes this impulse: "the most distinctive feature of modern literature [is] . . . the attempt of an author to insure through the structure of his work that the work could be perceived only as what it was, and not some other thing; the attempt to create an immaculate fiction, a fiction that resists the attempts of reader, and especially those readers who write criticism, to turn it into an allegory, a system equatable with already existing systems in the non-fictional world." One result of this emphasis is that much of modern literature is a comment on itself; style has become subject.

An alternate reaction takes a much more antagonistic view of language. The artist may continue to rely heavily on language, all the while asserting that he is saying nothing, as does Beckett in his novels and short stories. He may try to jar language, to reorganize its elements, and hope for a fortuitous meeting of chance and desire, as do the dadaists and Surrealists. Or he may turn predominantly to extralinguistic means, as do many of the absurdist dramatists, using language minimally and then only to reveal its inadequacies. In between these extremes one can find a broad range of authors and styles. Not all are as obsessed with language as are Mallarmé, Joyce, Beckett, Ionesco, and Robbe-Grillet, but no serious artist can escape confronting the matter entirely.
How does the world of nonsense, of the Quangle-Wangle and the Snark, relate to this complex philosophical and literary maze? Part of the answer involves the fact that nonsense is, in a unique and special way, a world of words come to life, a world whose insistently self-defined reality is almost completely linguistic. In nonsense, words often exercise a creative power similar to that granted to language in some primitive cultures. Lear's nonsense botanies and Carroll's Looking-Glass insects, for example, represent objects created from attributes of language itself. Thus what is in Alice's world a butterfly becomes in Looking-Glass Land a "Bread-and-Butter-Fly," whose wings are made of bread and butter, while its body is a crust and its head a lump of sugar. At times language itself seems to become animated, to assume an independent reality. In Through the Looking-Glass, for example, the word "nobody," which serves in normal usage as a kind of negative marker, almost expands into a positive though still absent character: "'I wish I had such eyes,' the King remarked in a fretful tone. 'To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too.'" (TLG, VII, 170).12

More significantly, in both Lear's and Carroll's nonsense language exerts an influence over events quite outside the bounds of normal usage. This is perhaps most clear with the nursery rhyme characters of Looking-Glass Land, such as Humpty Dumpty and Tweedledum and Tweedledee, who are forced to repeat the action of their verses against their will. Similarly, in Lear's limericks, the fate of his characters depends mainly upon chance linguistic encounters of rhyme and rhythm:

There was an Old Person of Tartary,  
Who divided his jugular artery  
(BN, 50)13
There was an Old Person of Gretna,
Who rushed down the crater of Etna
(8N,52)

Both Lear and Carroll reveal an acute awareness of the way in which language as a system can trap man, while at the same time allowing him to deceive himself that he is free and in control of his own life.

Precisely because it is so important, language is also a prime subject for debate among nonsense characters, particularly in the *Alices*. Carroll's characters argue incessantly about the meaning of words and poems with a sense of urgency typified by the White King, who constantly makes memoranda of his feelings, lest he forget them. In fact, perhaps because language is so important in the world of Victorian nonsense, just as in some ways it is in the twentieth century, here too one finds a certain pessimism, an awareness that language never can do all that is asked of it, and the nagging suspicion, shared by so many contemporary authors, that one might do better not to speak or write at all: "Alice thought to herself 'Then there's no use in speaking.' The voices didn't join in, this time, as she hadn't spoken, but, to her great surprise, they all thought in chorus ... 'Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!'" (TLG,III,130).

Recent developments in play theory have also heightened critical interest in nonsense. Since the nineteenth century, as a result of the work of Johan Huizinga, Eugene Fink, Roger Caillois and others, the function and significance of play has been reevaluated and expanded to such an extent that Huizinga, for one, argues that the most appropriate designation for man may be not *Homo Sapiens*, Man the Thinker, but *Homo Ludens*, Man the Player. Because of this important shift in perspective, many
who in the past would have considered nonsense to be "mere child's play"
now accept it as relating in basic ways to current cultural and literary
phenomena.

Finally, the mad, fantastic world of nonsense no longer seems to
many any more deranged or absurd than contemporary life. Agreeing with
the Cheshire Cat that "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (AW,
VI,51), many artists, both literary and visual, often choose to convey
their sense of this predicament through black humor, grotesque fantasy,
and other experimental forms that emphasize association. Kafka, Joyce,
Ionesco, Beckett, the dadaists and Surrealists, Thomas Pynchon, Donald
Barthelme--these are only a few of the artists whose work seems in some
way to share in or extend the world view established by Lear and
Carroll's nonsense.

No matter what the current intellectual situation, it is my belief
that Victorian nonsense is intrinsically a fascinating, worthwhile study.
But, given the philosophical, literary, and artistic concerns I have
described, the importance of examining Victorian nonsense and reevaluating
its significance and position in literature becomes even more apparent.
Criticism is never easy, but nonsense presents unique difficulties in
(to recall Alice's dialogue with the Mad Hatter) "saying what you mean."

Because its literal meaning often eludes exact formulation, non-
sense presents a ripe hunting-ground for symbol-hunters and systema-
tizers of all sorts. Thus at various times nonsense (particularly the
Alices) has been bent to the will of Freudian, political, allegorical,
and just plain eccentric critics with results that should politely be
called varying. The problem with such criticism lies not so much with
the systems themselves, but with the way in which they are used and
presented. For although critics of nonsense usually mean they say,
too often they fail to say, overtly, all that they mean. And when implications carry the weight of hidden assertions, the reader not only is often confused, because part of the rules of the critical game are being withheld from him, but also may be lead gradually to accept what are in fact arbitrary hypotheses and unquestioned assumptions as inherent qualities of the work itself. Such is clearly a potential problem with Louis Aragon's analysis of Alice in Wonderland, written while Aragon was still involved with the Surrealists, but was becoming increasingly involved with Marxism: "Dans les chaînes honteuses de ces jours de massacres en Irlande, d'oppression sans non dans les manufactures où s'établissait l'ironique comptabilité du plaisir et de la douleur préconisée par Bentham, alors que de Manchester se levait comme un défi la théorie du libre-échange, qu'était devenue la liberté humaine? Elle résidait tout entière dans les frêles mains d'Alice ou l'avait placée ce curieux homme." 14

The distortion involved in Aragon's interpretation is only more exaggerated than, not different from, that of many other critics. In an effort to insure that the reader will not be forced, like Alice, to spend his time attempting to penetrate and come to terms with my own critical assumptions and hypotheses, I will attempt to make these as clear as possible. This cannot, of course, guarantee objectivity, but if it allows the reader to participate in the formation of the argument as a fellow-player, rather than a mere onlooker, it will serve the purpose. In order to clarify my own position, however, it is first necessary to review past critical approaches.

Much of the criticism of Victorian nonsense as a genre takes the view expressed by Emile Camphaerts, who calls the nonsense world "Dreamland." 15
Because such critics assume no serious intent or formal organization is possible in nonsense, they rarely achieve more than impressionistic renderings and intuitive flashes. Thus, although such writers as Cammaerts and G. K. Chesterton often hint at the fundamentals of the nonsense experience, their methodology is too haphazard, deliberately so, to create a unified sense of its form and function.

A much more useful approach is that taken by Elizabeth Sewell in her major study, *The Field of Nonsense*. Although she is correct in noting that the "order-disorder dialectic . . . may be the defining characteristic of the game of Nonsense,"[^16] Miss Sewell is less convincing when she attempts to prove, through the use of formal logic, especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas, that nonsense consists of "the mind's employing its tendency towards order to engage its contrary tendency towards disorder, keeping the latter perpetually in plan and so in check."[^17] Her underplaying of the role of disorder in the nonsense dialectic has the effect of making nonsense both a simpler and more comforting form than most readers have found it to be.

Both the writings and personal lives of Lear and Carroll have attracted much psychologically-oriented criticism, particularly in the 1930's and 40's, although this kind of analysis remains popular still. Several problems may arise when this technique is applied rigidly to nonsense; in his article "Alice in Wonderland Psychoanalyzed," A. M. E. Goldschmidt unwittingly reveals a basic difficulty: "no critic upon whom the Freudian theory has made even the slightest impression can refrain from recognizing sexual symbolism in any medium, when it is clearly manifested."[^18] The dispute, of course, arises from differing interpretations of "clearly manifested." Psychological critics have achieved some interesting insights concerning nonsense, but too often they base assertions about a work on their
interpretations of Lear's and Carroll's lives, only to turn around and then make judgments about Lear's and Carroll's lives by interpreting their works. The only constant frame of reference is clearly the critics' own interpretations, not the works themselves. Such analysis, which is, as Rackin describes "simple (in its practice and results), attractive, and within its own self-defined system rather foolproof--like plane geometry,"¹⁹ often fails to do justice to the complexity of either the work or the man.

Edmund Miller's recent article on Edward Lear's Nonsense Songs typifies many of the excesses of psychological criticism of nonsense. Accepting as a given that "Serious attention to Lear's sexual obsessions is helpful in understanding his poetry,"²⁰ Mr. Miller not too surprisingly discovers that his "suspicion that there is sex everywhere in Lear is readily rewarded."²¹ In some ways more reticent than other critics, Miller devotes only a paragraph to vague hints about Lear's own personal sexual peculiarities, but such self-restraint unfortunately does not carry over to his analysis of the Songs themselves. When the Pobble protects his toes by wrapping up his nose in scarlet flannel, for example, Mr. Miller solemnly announces: "The suggestion of displacement becomes at this point inescapable. The male genitalia are at the root of the Pobble's problems."²² Now it is one thing to present Lear, as Miller at one point does, as "a man with a narrow range of rather explicit obsessions--noses, beards, eating, growth, age"²³; It is quite another to draw conclusions such as the following from this basic information: "But there is such a thing as a runcible spoon, a kind of fork with two short blunt prongs and one long, curved pointed one--a virtual sculpture of the male genitalia, something never far from Lear's mind."²⁴
When it takes up mind-reading along with relentless sexual symbol-hunting, psychological criticism goes too far. It is simply too easy and too smug to assert of a great and complex author, as Mr. Goldschmidt does of Lewis Carroll, that "Had he lived today, he might have undergone analysis, discovered the cause of his neurosis, and lived a more contented life. But in that case he might not have written Alice in Wonderland."\(^{25}\) It is not easy to talk about nonsense; its apparently simple surface masks a literature of great complexity and power, a literature with a built-in resistance to analysis. Most psychological criticism to date has failed to meet the challenge nonsense presents.

As Elizabeth Sewell notes, "If Nonsense is an art, it must have its own laws of construction."\(^{26}\) I agree with this, and would further argue that nonsense is, if not a genre, then a sub-genre or type of literature with definite thematic and structural characteristics, a form whose methods are not isolated and erratic, but can in fact be related to a major tradition of modern art and thought. Like most narrative art, nonsense concerns itself with such problems as the nature of reality and of personal identity, and the relation of the individual to society. What is unique about the themes of nonsense is not the questions themselves but the striking and unusual way in which they are posed.

I would define nonsense as a self-reflexive verbal construction which functions through the manipulation of a series of internal and external tensions. The basic dichotomies involve illusion and reality and order and disorder, with such further contrasting pairs as fantasy and logic, imagination and reason, the child and the adult, the individual and society, words and their linguistic relations (language as designation and language as expression), denotation and connotation, and form and content. Victorian nonsense ranges from Lear's phonetically oriented alphabets--
A was once an apple-pie,  
Pidy  
Widy  
Tidy  
Pidy  
Nice insidy  
Apple-Pie.  
(NSB,138)

to such complexities as the Berkeleyan dialogue of Tweedledum and Tweedledee and Humpty Dumpty's speculations on the nature of language. These structural and thematic extremes, which at first seem to be opposites, are actually, as are all polarities, parts of a continuum. The power and fascination of nonsense arise from the successful maintenance of these tensions, and from the wide range of emotions, ideas, and attitudes it is thus free to explore. The complexity of nonsense, its power to disturb intellectually and emotionally, results in part from the constant redefinition and sudden jarring illuminations inherent to the dialectic technique. At perhaps its most profound, nonsense re-forms its terms to reveal the non-human nightmare of logic, and the surreal logic of dreams.

Play theory provides a useful model to clarify how this dialectic functions in nonsense. Although play may at first appear formless and of little import, just as nonsense may appear to some as "Dreamland," major theorists agree that play is in fact a highly structured and central cultural phenomena. Huizinga's definition, formulated in 1938 and still generally accepted today, presents its basic characteristics: "Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having an aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'."27
One result of play is that it "produces a play world . . . an enigmatic realm that is not nothing, and yet is nothing real."\textsuperscript{28} The nature of this play world is by no means fully clear, yet it is significant that another major play theorist, Eugen Fink, has chosen to describe it in terms of "objectively existing images,"\textsuperscript{29} such as mirror images, or the reflections of objects in water. Such images are both real and unreal: an image of a tree is a real reflection of the original tree, but the image itself exists only as a result of the reflection of light and not in reality. Fink also asserts that: "The ontic illusion (mirror images and the like) is more than a simple analogon of the play world--in fact, most of the time it occurs as a structural element of the play world itself."\textsuperscript{30}

If Fink's thesis is accepted, then Lear's and Carroll's use of mirror images appears remarkably appropriate, as indeed it is. And in fact, the self-defined world of nonsense does constitute a play world. Within this world, nonsense operates according to its own unique rules of order and logic. Much of the pleasure of voluntarily choosing to play, or in this case, to enter the world of nonsense, arises from the resulting intense absorption in oneself and one's own world: "The mode of play is that of the spontaneous act, of vital impulse. Play is, as it were, existence centered on itself."\textsuperscript{31} In nonsense the satisfaction of such absorption is represented in events ranging from the simple and relatively unconscious abandonment of oneself to the phonetic and serial pleasures of Lear's alphabets, to the highly sophisticated, self-conscious delight involved in appreciating the complex ways the reversals and chess plays are manipulated in Carroll's Looking-Glass world.

Play can be both an exploration, a statement of personal freedom, or a withdrawal, an attempt to deny upsetting realities and problems. Nonsense
does not make an explicit choice between these two, but maintains them in constant tension, as part of its dialectic structure. A unique expression of this interplay in nonsense involves a basic ambivalence between the desire to present emotion, with its concomitant pain and confusion, and the tendency to refuse to admit that such discomforting realities exist. This dualism is most commonly exemplified in the tension between form and content, where ordered surface structures such as rhyme, alliteration, and number series distract attention from material which is often quite alarming. Lear's limericks, for example, often present cases where physical violence, death, and madness are at least partially contained within and mediated by the framework of rhyme and rhythm:

There was an Old Person of Buda,  
Whose conduct grew ruder and ruder,  
Till at last, with hammer, they silenced his clamour,  
By smashing that person of Buda.  
(BN,14)

Carroll's use of game structures to organize and thus partially control frightening materials and experiences serves a similar function. Even the disclaimer of "nonsense" itself has an influence over the response of the reader to the material.

It is important to note that these protective devices do not destroy the "dangerous" aspects of nonsense; they merely pit their force against them in constant interplay. In fact, they provide their own kind of protection, which then allows nonsense to present ideas, emotions, and images often unacceptable to more serious literature, especially that of Victorian England. This is very important for an understanding of the mechanics of the violence and death jokes in the Alices and "The Hunting of the Snark," or the scenes of general annihilation in Lear's "History of the Seven
Families" and "Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos." This delicate balance must be maintained between all the antitheses of nonsense, for successful nonsense requires the same rigorous honesty as does other literature, and if the tension between any two forces is allowed to slacken, nonsense loses its power. (Lewis Carroll's lapse into sentimentality in Sylvie and Bruno represents just such a failure of integrity.)

I do believe, however, that underlying these series of antitheses a basic orientation can be established. This attitude is one that is subversive of a social perspective; in fact, it is most commonly anarchic and individualistic. Because the nonsense world is a play world, it exists apart from society. Centered in itself, it does not so much actively antagonize the "real" world (although Lear and Carroll's work contains much that is explicitly anti-social) as ignore it; worse yet, it sometimes even questions the "reality" of the "real" world itself.
FOOTNOTES


2 This was their attitude, at least, when questioned about their work. In an undated letter to the Lowry children in America who had written him about the meaning of "The Hunting of the Snark," for example, Lewis Carroll replied: "As to the meaning of the Snark? I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense" (Evelyn Hatch, ed., A Selection of the Letters of Lewis Carroll to his Child-Friends [London: Macmillan & Co., 1933], p. 242-3).


13 All quotations from Edward Lear's Nonsense are from *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: Dover Publications, 1951). All subsequent references will be cited in the text by book and page number, and will utilize the following abbreviations: BN, *Book of*
Nonsense (1846); NSB, Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets (1871); MN, More Nonsense (1872); LL, Laughable Lyrics (1877).


17 Sewell, p. 48; my emphasis.


19 Donald Rackin, "What You Always Wanted To Know About Alice but Were Afraid To Ask," The Victorian Newsletter, 44 (Fall 1973), 2.

20 Edmund Miller, "Two Approaches to Edward Lear's Nonsense Songs," The Victorian Newsletter, 44 (Fall 1973), 8.

21 Miller, 7.

22 Miller, 7.
23 Miller, 6.

24 Miller, 7; my emphasis.


26 Sewell, p. 6.


29 Fink, 27.

30 Fink, 28.

31 Fink, 20.
It is quite ironic that Edward Lear's best known poem should be the "The Owl and the Pussycat," for it is in fact most atypical of his nonsense. The union achieved by this happy pair, for instance, contrasts sharply with the isolation endured by most of Lear's other characters. Nor do the owl and the pussycat meet the violence found in the limericks and stories, where men and animals are beaten, boiled, drowned, burned, and strangled—to name but a few of the punishments arbitrarily meted out to them. Instead of the simple cause-effect logic of "The Owl and the Pussycat," where engagement inevitably results in marriage, much of Lear's nonsense takes place in a world of radical uncertainty, where ordinary principles of casualty no longer apply. And the owl and the pussycat, drawn with a precise and delicate grace, do not fit this incoherent, and often even frightening world, perhaps best represented by the dynamic, crude, distorted figures of the limericks.

The traditional narrative structure and conventional drawings of "The Owl and the Pussycat" are a logical expression of the poem's optimistic vision. Much of Lear's work rejects this position in favor of a more sombre recognition of the senselessness of life and the inadequacy of rational thought. It is not so much these perceptions, however, as the forms into which they are cast, that make Lear's work uniquely satisfying and effective. Lear's nonsense might best be described as paradoxical, even subversive, for its apparent naïveté and simplicity mask an underlying design of great force. And nowhere is this clearer than in his limericks.
Interestingly enough, most modern enthusiasts, although they acknowledge his role in establishing the form, view Lear's limericks as inferior to later verses. This in part results from their concentration on formal aspects such as rhyme and rhythm. For them the most accomplished limerick is the most original technically, with the most clever forced rhymes and final lines. Thus Langford Reed in The Complete Limerick Book asserts, "The essential constituents of a good Limerick, surely, in the order of their importance are as follows: (1) A good last line; (2) Ingenuity of rhyme; (3) Plot." According to Reed, "The Young Monk of Siberia" represents all that is best in a limerick:

There was a young monk of Siberia,
Who of fasting grew wearier and wearier,
Till at length, with a yell,
He burst from his cell,
And devoured the Father Superior.

Here plot and structure are designed for one purpose, to build up to a successful climax. At this point, the limerick's energies, wittily and meticulously resolved, are dispersed. The main satisfaction of such limericks involves the reader's awareness and appreciation of the technical mastery involved in the verse's construction.

This satisfaction, the sense of control, of succeeding at a skilled game, is a major element in Lear's limericks, but it does not adequately account for their complexity or significance. In judging Lear by their own standards, subsequent limerick writers and critics have unfairly disparged his work. It is true that Lear's limericks generally won't build up to a climax, that his rhymes, though often masterful, are not exceptionally ingenious, and that his last lines tend to force the energies of the limerick back upon itself. But such devices, far from indicating failure, serve a complex and unified art:
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!'

FIGURE 1. (BN,4)

The illustration for this limerick portrays a typical Lear "Old Man"—large head, round body, arms flung back like a bird, one foot off the ground—with an even more typical disfiguration, a tremendously long nose. It is important to note the contradiction between the verse, which presents the old man rather defensively answering charges about his nose—"... If you choose to suppose/That my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong"—and the drawing, where he appears to be rather gleefully attacking his detractors with that very same nose. Such discrepancies, drawings that depict events that differ from the action of the verse itself, generally add to the limerick's complexity, usually clarifying a few elements while rendering others more ambiguous. Here, for example, the illustration explains just how extraordinarily long the Old Man's nose is, and it shows that the "you" of the verse are three young boys. The drawing seems reminiscent of a child's rope game, where one person swings the rope evenly but at increasingly higher levels, while the others try to jump above it as it twirls around; only here the rope is a nose, and the boys appear surprised and upset at being
included in such strange sport. The Old Man's feelings are less clear, but the intensity of his gaze and his somewhat malicious smile seem to indicate that he is taking great pleasure in revenging himself against those who maligned him. The effect of the illustration is to give considerable ironic force to the meek "you are certainly wrong" of the verse.

The repetitive final line, which later limerick writers find so tedious, actually fulfills several important functions. Rather than effecting a climax, it causes the limerick to double back upon itself, often ironically. Such is the function in this limerick, where the final line raises some interesting questions. Why is the Old man "remarkable"? Is it merely the length of his nose, or the vigorousness with which he defends it? Even the generally stable notion of "nose," now that illustration and verse have had a chance to interact, becomes strangely ambiguous.

"Regular" limericks seldom leave the reader with such questions; their whole force is directed toward neatly tying together the loose ends of rhyme, rhythm, and plot as compactly as possible. Lear's limericks resist, and at times even parody this impulse, and in the resulting complex interplay they often raise subtle yet serious questions about man's perception of himself and of his place in the universe, and his relations with his fellow men. After one has learned that the "young monk of Siberia" has "devoured the Father Superior" there is nothing more to know, but the "Old Man with a nose" and his young tormentors/tormented, subtly frozen in the midst of action, cannot be explained away. The verse and the drawing maintain a perfect balance; drawing evokes verse, verse evokes drawing, and the intentionally ambiguous whole is more than either part alone.
Lear's limericks succeed in creating what might be called "significant ambiguities," such as that involving the "Old Man with a Nose," in part because they apprehend and exploit an essential, unresolvable ambiguity in language itself. Language is at once objective and subjective, denotative and connotative, a means of social communication and of self-expression. It derives its meaning both from individual words, which in their denotative function are by convention relatively fixed, and the relations between words, which are much less definite. If this duality is at times problematic, it is because of a conflict within man himself involving the use of language, a conflict ultimately based on two opposing desires--man's urge to be master of his own deliberately isolated world, to make language mean what he wants it to mean and thus to make reality conform to his wishes, and the impulse to find a place in the essential reality of others, to achieve social communication.

The impossibility of reconciling these desires is manifested in numerous ways in Lear's nonsense. Diverse as his work is, one unifying element characterizes all but the early songs--the total isolation of the inhabitants of Lear's self-created universe. There are a few occasions where animals form a harmonious community, as in "The Quangle Wangle's Hat," and even rarer instances of men and animals living happily together, though even here some kind of physical separation from the rest of society is generally required:

There was an old person of Hove,
Who frequented the depths of a grove;
Where he studied his books, with the wrens and the rooks,
That tranquil old person of Hove.
(MN,177).

This isolation is, apparently, the price one must pay for the freedom achieved, for example, by the "old person of Wick,:
Every artist pays his own price, establishes a balance in his work between the impulse to adhere to his own subjective vision, to create his own world and endow it with meaning, and the impulse to recreate and often to comment upon what is considered to be "everyday reality."
The dadaists probably represent the most extreme subjective, individualist position thus far taken, though their refusal to communicate implicitly constitutes a statement in itself. One might locate at the opposite extreme literary naturalists such as Zola and John Dos Passos, authors whose prime concern is to make a strong social statement and who attempt to be as "realistic" as possible.

In a very real sense, Lear's limericks barter right to assert their significance (but not their significance itself) in exchange for the freedom to avoid overtly making the choice between art as self-expression and art as social communication. They thus appeal both to man's desire to manipulate formal elements, here language, to create a complex, satisfying order out of disorder, and to his urge to defy normal relations, to refuse to make sense. The limericks achieve this by carefully balancing a series of related structural and thematic tensions. Relieved in part of the responsibility of consciously responding to the content of the limericks--this is all "just nonsense" after all--the reader is able to experience the broad range of emotions and actions they present. This is particularly significant when one considers the individualistic, even anti-social bias evident in so many of these verses, the concern with madness, death, and alienation. And although one might speculate that
the nonsense of Lear and Carroll arose in response to specifically Victorian needs, it is certain that changes in social and literary attitudes have not lessened the impact of their works.

The most obvious tension in the limericks is probably that between form and content, between the often explicitly serious subject matter and those structural aspects such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter which tend to trivialize or desensitize it. Their opposition reflects a central thematic concern in the limericks, the conflict between the individual and society. This was essentially Aldous Huxley's perception in his essay on Edward Lear in On The Margin. Although Huxley narrows the conflict to that between the genius and a stupid populace, he effects the right general division: "The Nonsense Rhymes are, for the most part, nothing more or less than episodes selected from the history of that eternal struggle between the genius or the eccentric and his fellow-beings. Public opinion universally abhors eccentricity." Structurally, social regularity seems to be expressed by the limerick's "frame," the rigidly prescribed, monotonous pattern of rhyme, rhythm and meter which tend to cause the words themselves to glide unobtrusively by. The content of the limericks often implicitly or explicitly opposes this restriction, without offering a reasonable way out. The tension between form and content in the limericks is neither simple nor static, however. Even the limerick's formal valuation of sound over sense, its external emphasis on rhyme, rhythm and alliteration, while in one sense restrictive and perhaps repressive, is at the same time a refusal to make "regular" sense at all, and hence also an expression of the self, of the individual's right to manipulate his own environment for his own purposes. The important point is thus not that these two manifestations of the self and society are opposed, but that they are able to be maintained as a series of internal and external
tensions, whose interplay is a major source of the limerick's (and nonsense's) unique appeal.

Lear's limericks consist of four anapestic lines. The first, second and fourth of these contain three feet and share the same end rhyme; while the third, with four feet, uses a different internal rhyme. This verse form is quite rigid, the only acceptable modification being the use of forced rhymes. The following limerick illustrates the way in which this intentionally monotonous frame works to reduce and flatten out the reader's response, to lessen his involvement, and to enclose potentially serious content in the carefully "unreal" world of nonsense:

There was an Old Man of Calcutta,
Who perpetually ate bread and butter;
Till a great bit of muffin, oh which he was stuffing,
Choked that horrid old man of Calcutta.
(BN,37)

Here, as in most of Lear's limericks, the anapestic meter, with its quick, sing-song, lilting movement, urges one to read quickly and to become closely involved in the total rhythmic pattern, rather than in the content. This effect is heightened by the use of rhyme, which temporarily and rather abruptly interrupts the meter, but substitutes its own form of emphatic repetition. When forced rhymes occur, as they do in this limerick with "Calcutta" and "butter" and "muffin" and "stuffing," the reader's attention is focused even more strongly on the form itself. The reader's appreciation of the technical ingenuity of these rhymes (which are often based on fantastic place names) distracts him from fully considering the event they describe, a man choking to death. Also, the artificial, strongly patterned system of stresses deemphasizes, in this instance, the word that most "threatens" the limerick's stability, "chokes." At the same time,
however, such forced rhymes, by emphasizing the form's inflexibility, also constitute a kind of self-parody. Thus, although the structural forces of rhyme and rhythm do not negate or overwhelm the situation presented, they do tend to delimit the reader's immediate intellectual or emotional depth of response.

Equally as significant as rhyme and rhythm, though generally more complex and diversified in terms of effect, are the limericks' final lines. The least common type of fourth line in Lear is that which completes the action of the poem. Even these generally resist the impulse to work up to a climax, however, as the following quite typical verse illustrates:

There was an old person of Bree,
Who frequented the depths of the sea;
She nurs'd the small fishes, and washed all the dishes,
And swam back again into Bree.
(MN,166)

The use of this "return" motif appears frequently in the limericks and seems related to their non-climatic structure. Infrequently limericks with a stronger climax do occur; interestingly enough, these generally involve some degree of violence, the intensity of which is heightened by their contrast with most other limericks:

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.
(BN,14)

The most common type of fourth line is that which repeats the first line, but with the addition of an adjective. At times these adjectives relate with some degree of direct appropriateness to the preceding lines:
There was an Old Man of the Isles,
Whose face was pervaded with smiles;
He sung high dum diddle, and played on the fiddle,
That amiable Man of the Isles.
(BN,14)

but more often they are either ambiguous, ironic, or nonsensical.

While the last line of the previous verse seems to trivialize the
limerick, by reducing description to an easily catalogued and hence
easily forgotten expression, the final lines of others may add greatly
to their significance:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
% Add your TikZ code here
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\begin{quote}
There was an Old Person of Rhodes,
Who strongly objected to toads;
He paid several cousins, to catch them by dozens,
That futile Old Person of Rhodes.
\end{quote}

FIGURE 2. (BN,28)

Here, a full recognition of the ironic significance of "futile"
depends upon the illustration. There are several dissimilarities between
verse and drawing, contradictions which are both clarified and given
added significance by the final "futile." "Several cousins" turns out to
be a long line of women, drawn in outline to emphasize their frightening
conformity. Rather than being in the service of the "Old Person of
Rhodes," they seem to have taken the initiative; in fact, they almost
seem to be attacking, or at least threatening him, as they march toward
him shoving the toads he so strongly dislikes closer and closer. But it is not until the last line that the irony of the situation is made clear; not only did this "futile" Old Man's plan fail; it greatly worsened his situation—a "futile" endeavor indeed! In this kind of limerick, and also those whose final lines contain neologisms, the reader is compelled to return to the preceding lines, as well as to the illustration, for a further understanding of the sense of the final adjective. This contrasts sharply with the "average" limerick's urge for a climactic structural and thematic resolution and in part explains why Lear's limericks are so much richer and more complex than those of his successors.

The most "modern," and also possibly the most disturbing, of Lear's limericks are those which seem to incorporate the limerick's tendency to double back upon itself into the action of the plot:

There was an Old Man on some rocks,
Who shut his wife up in a box,
When she said, 'Let me out,' he exclaimed, 'Without doubt,
You will pass all your life in that box.'

(BN,36)

The repetition of "box" in the fourth line is strangely powerful; it seems to verify the inevitability of the wife's situation, but without giving any reason why this should be so. This absence of plot points toward the underlying absurdity of the world of limericks, for in a world without causes, without explanations, nothing makes sense—and man is chance's toy. Viewed thus, the position of the old man's wife, condemned for no reason to "pass all her life in that box" seems to represent the common fate of Lear's nonsense characters: happy or sad, their life is still beyond their control.

This is not to imply that all Lear's limericks present an absurdist vision of life; innocent and delightful ones occur throughout his work
and play an essential part in it:

There was a Young Lady of Bute,
Who played on a silver-gilt flute;
She played several jigs, to her uncle's white pigs,
That amusing Young Lady of Bute.

(BN, 22)

It is important to realize that when one treats Lear's limericks as totally discrete units, as I have been doing in my analysis, one is in a very real sense distorting both their intent and effect. Lear's limericks were meant to be read quickly, moving rapidly from verse to verse. And although "dark" limericks do frequently follow one another in a series, they are often interspersed between more whimsical, playful verses. The following sequence of limericks is fairly typical of the way Lear often patterns his work:

There was an Old Man who said,
'How, --shall I flee from this horrible Cow?
I will sit on this stile, and continue to smile,
Which may soften the heart of that Cow."

(BN, 38)

There was a Young Lady of Hull,
Who was chased by a virulent Bull;
But she seized on a spade, and called out --'Who's afraid!'
Which distracted that virulent Bull.

(BN, 39)

There was an Old Man of Whitehaven,
Who danced a quadrille with a Raven;
But they said--'It's absurd, to encourage this bird!'
So they smashed that Old Man of Whitehaven.

(BN, 39)

There was an Old Man of Leghorn,
The smallest as ever was born;
But quickly snap up he, was once by a puppy,
Who devoured that Old Man of Leghorn.

(BN, 40)

Such an arrangement establishes a series of important contrasts, which heighten the effectiveness of both comic and ironic verses; the resulting
tension between the individual verse and the larger body of limericks functions similarly to that between form and content within a single limerick. The Young Lady of Hull and The Old Man of Leghorn, for example, each face animal attacks, and the comic success of the former in distracting "that virulent Bull" only intensifies the effect of the latter's abrupt death. Similarly, the powerful depiction of the violent aftermath of the attempts of the Old Man of Whitehaven to communicate with another creature—even just a bird—accentuates the tenuous, hazardous nature of other more successful animal-human unions:

There was an old person of Skye,
Who waltzed with a Bluebottle fly:
They buzzed a sweet tune, to the light of the moon,
And entranced all the people of Skye.
(MN,189)

For those same people that are pleased by the old person of Skye one day could suddenly and incomprehensibly turn on him the next.

Although there is no reliable system of causal relationships in the limericks, this function is in part assumed by language itself, for it is the arbitrary encounter of rhyme and rhythm that most clearly determines the fate of Lear's characters:

There was an Old Lady of Chertsey,
Who made a remarkable curtsey;
She twirled round and round, till she sunk underground,
Which distressed all the people of Chertsey.
(BN,7)

Here, for example, although other rhymes for "Chertsey," "Curtsey," "round," and "underground" are of course possible, their presence in the completed limerick and the way in which rhyme and rhythm coalesce to form a strongly patterned whole, gives the appearance of inevitability. It is almost as though once the original line has been established, the rest of the limerick is fated to occur. And though this in one sense reassures the reader, by giving a false sense of order, it also constitutes
a bitter parody of the senselessness of human life. For, as Martin Esslin asks in his analysis of Lear's nonsense in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, "is the arbitrariness of a world determined by the assonance of names less cruel than the real world, which determines the fate of its inhabitants by the accidents of birth, race, or environment?"\(^4\)

This sense of determinism in part explains what is surely the most marked attribute of the characters in the limericks--their extraordinary detachment. The clearest examples involve the unconcerned reaction of these characters to the pain and violence that so frequently threatens them. Characters are eaten by puppies, baked, boiled, and stoned; they fall from horses, are "smashed" by their peers, shut up in boxes, and threatened by bears and bulls. As if this were not enough, they also do themselves harm; they cut off their thumbs, choke on too many muffins, fish, or rabbits, and rush blindly into craters. Their poise, like that of the "Young Lady of Norway," mediates the emotional impact of (though it in no way alters) their unfortunate situation:

There was a Young Lady of Norway,
Who casually sat in a doorway;
When the door squeezed her flat, she exclaimed 'What of that?'
This courageous Young Lady of Norway.
(BN,18)

A significant exception to this general detachment involves mental suffering, often referred to in the limericks as "despair." Here Lear presents his characters' plight simply and clearly, the illustrations directly and strongly supporting the verse:
There was an Old Man of Cape Horn,
Who wished he had never been born;
So he sat on a chair, till he died of despair,
That dolorous Man of Cape Horn.

**FIGURE 3.** (BN,31)

There are limericks whose verses seem to declare the possibility of a cure; in the majority of these instances, however, the illustration clashes with the verse and implicitly contradicts any such hope:

There was an old man of Three Bridges,
Whose mind was distracted by midges,
He sate on a wheel, eating underdone veal,
Which relieved that old man of Three Bridges.

**FIGURE 4.** (MN,162)
The illustration for this limerick makes it clear that the old man is more than just "distracted by midges;" he is mad. Whether he has just eaten, or is preparing to eat the veal is relatively unimportant. The forceful visual portrayal of his madness, which is emphasized by the fixed expression of his eyes and through the use of dark lines in his face and hat, is sufficiently intense to call into question, or at least to counterbalance, the verse's statement. Also, the absurdity of these cures, contrasted with the powerful visual depiction of madness, seems to indicate either that there really are no cures for such as the old person of Fife:

Who was greatly disgusted with life;
They sang him a ballad, And fed him on salad,
Which cured that old person of Fife.
(MN,159)

or that all such cures are pretty much the same, mere panaceas.

The frequent occurrence of madness or "despair" in the limericks seems related to both the violence and the extreme isolation that are basic elements in Lear's nonsense. There are limericks which function as comic statements of individual freedom, picturing a character fulfilling a personal desire in spite of social opposition, successfully refusing to enact an expected social role, or outwitting natural forces, though even here a degree of defensiveness is apparent:

There was an Old Man with a poker,
Who painted his face with red oker;
When they said, 'You're a Guy! he made no reply,
But knocked them all down with his poker.
(BN,24)

More frequently, however, the aggressive actions of the "Old Man with a poker" are directed by society against the non-conforming individual, and it doesn't take much to be considered dangerously eccentric, as the "old person of Sark" discovers:
There was an old person of Sark,
Who made an unpleasant remark;
But they said, 'Don't you see what a brute you must be!'
You obnoxious old person of Sark.

FIGURE 5. (MN,179)

As is often the case, this verse's illustration clarifies the true
nature of the situation; the old person will pay heavily for his
unpleasantness by being beaten by "them."

A different response to the violence, unreasonableness and un-
certainty of existence in the limericks is the attempt to leave society.
This is generally at best only partly successful:

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.

(MN,200)

Ultimately, the only way to avoid trouble and pain is to isolate oneself
completely. The image of man's condition—the perception that no com-
munication is possible and that all actions are equally senseless—in the
following limericks is quite similar to that described frequently in modern
literature, especially by the absurdist dramatists:
There was an old man of Hong Kong,
Who never did anything wrong;
He lay on his back, with his head in a sack,
That innocuous old man of Hong Kong.
(MN,159)

There was an Old Person of Spain,
Who hated all trouble and pain;
So he sate on a chair, with his feet in the air,
That unbrageous Old Person of Spain.
(BN,47)

Here Lear goes beyond a statement of the problems of social alienation to describe a more acute form of estrangement—alienation from the self. The body distortions which occur so frequently in the limericks may be a reflection of the characters' confused perceptions of their identity, of their awareness of their isolation. Even when they take advantage of their disfigurement—use their enormous nose to support a light or to play a harp, there is often a sense of underlying insecurity:

There was an old person of Dutton,
Whose head was so small as a button:
So to make it look big, he purchased a wig,
And rapidly rushed about Dutton.
(BN,41)

What Lear appears to recognize is that extreme self-autonomy, the creation of one's own world, is a mixed blessing. The sense of individual power and independence undeniably exhibited in many of the comic limericks reflects the satisfactions of living in such a world. But the more general bleakness of the limericks' vision, their aggressive violence, and the characters' frequent alienation and melancholy are the inevitable result of the isolation such a position requires.

Lear's illustrations play a unique role in establishing and clarifying the nature of the world of the limericks. Because Lear's characters are drawn in roughly the same crude yet expressive style and share certain
basic body distortions, for example, they immediately seem to belong to a world of their own. In this world, size is often less a natural or hereditary function than an indication of who has control or power, as the following limerick indicates:

There was an Old Man of Peru,
Who watched his wife making a stew;
But once by mistake, in a stove she did bake,
That unfortunate Man of Peru.

FIGURE 6. (BN,28)

The larger size of the Old Man of Peru's wife is just one way that the illustration contradicts the "by mistake" of the verse; other clues include the expression on her rather frighteningly animalistic face and her forceful gesture, as well as her husband's obvious attempts to throw himself out of the pot. Without its illustration, this limerick would differ little from Langford Reed's favorite "young monk of Siberia," where the final action completes and then disperses the structural and thematic forces of the limerick. Lear's illustration however, fights against this urge for completed action by pitting itself against the verse. Although one function of this interplay may involve an ironic comment on marital affairs and domestic accidents, the limerick's total significance remains intentionally ambiguous.
This shifting relationship between verse and drawing is a necessary part of the delicate balance between form and content that allows the limericks to explore such an unusually broad range of images and ideas. Often, the drawing simultaneously intensifies the limerick's overall meaning, while at the same time acting as a "safety valve" to restore order so that balance is maintained. The aggression in the illustration for "The Old Man of Peru," for example, is nowhere indicated in the verse. It does not call attention to itself, but it is there--and the more one allows verse and drawing to interact, the more importance it assumes. This is one way that the limericks manage to articulate a content that is often pessimistic, individualistic, even anarchic and subversive, within a form that implies opposite values.

It is wrong to view Lear's drawings as "illustrations" in the modern sense--appendages to the word, slavish visual imitations of a literary event. One of the simpler functions of the drawings in this complex interrelationship is to clarify the size of something mentioned in the verse, often causing a "shock" which considerably intensifies the limerick's effect. This occurs with the "Old Man of Leghorn":

The smallest as ever was born;  
But quickly snapt up he, was once by a puppy,  
Who devoured that Old Man of Leghorn.  
(BN,40)

whose illustration reveals that the "puppy" is at least five times larger than the man. The following limerick is an even more interesting example of this technique:
There was a Young Lady of Troy,
Whom several large flies did annoy;
Some she killed with a thump, some she drowned at the pump,
And some she took with her to Troy.

FIGURE 7. (BN,46)

The contrast between the young woman, who is drawn with complete, though undetailed anatomical precision (the only undistorted character in all of Lear's nonsense) and the grotesquely large flies (note the fly walking before her like a tame dog) conflicts with the expectations raised by the verse. The resulting tension cannot be resolved; the question as to why the flies are as big as crows can never be answered.

Lear's illustrations often expose basic processes or organizational principles at work in the limericks. A most interesting example of this occurs when Lear draws characters so that they look like the animals with which they are involved, though no such similarity is mentioned in the verse itself. Lear's training as a naturalist is evident here, but the ingenuity and wit of these drawings results from his skill as a nonsense artist. He does not merely change the character from a human to an animal state, but instead shows him in what appears to be the very process of metamorphosis. In so doing, he relies upon techniques of distortion that he uses consistently in his drawings.
There was an Old Man with an owl,  
Who continued to bother and howl;  
He sate on a rail, and imbibed bitter ale,  
Which refreshed that Old Man and his owl.

FIGURE 8. (BN, 51)

Lear generally creates his "doubles" by manipulating facial features and general body position, and the illustration for the "Old Man with an owl" is no exception. In this case, Lear perches man and owl on the rail, stiffening the Old Man's coattails and shortening his legs so that his body mimics that of the owl. But the major alterations involve the man's face; his eyes are deepened and made rounder; his nose is lengthened so that it resembles a beak; he even has two tufts of hair which approximate the owl's ears. Lear's distortions of these features do more than make him look like the owl however; they also give the Old Man a mad, frenzied look--one which contrasts markedly with the limerick's last line, "Which refreshed that Old Man and his owl," and may lead the reader to question the efficacy of "bitter ale" as a means of alleviating the old man's troubles. At any rate, metamorphoses such as these are important, not only because they tend to increase the limericks' complexity, but also because they serve to convince the reader that he has entered a
new, often surreal world—a world of constantly changing forms and relationships, where, if you continue to "howl" like an owl, you may just turn into one.

The fact that the potential for abrupt, unanticipated change always exists in the limericks may explain why Lear draws his characters as he does, freezing them ambiguously in the midst of action, as if to say that things might not be—or become—quite what they appear to be. In the following limerick, for example, is the old Person caught in the act of eating a rabbit, or is he about to "turn green" from just having "eaten eighteen"?

There was an old Person whose habits,  
Induced him to feed upon Rabbits;  
When he'd eaten eighteen, he turned perfectly green,  
Upon which he relinquished those habits.

FIGURE 9. (BN,19)

The confusion arises because of the expression and position of the rabbit rather precariously wedged in the old man's mouth. Although sketchily drawn, the rabbit's face clearly betrays a smirk, as though it knows what will either immediately or eventually happen to one of such intemperate habits. With its front paws extended, the rabbit could just as easily be preparing to jump into the man's mouth as to fight against being eaten. The old man, partly because of his position, which conveys horror or at
least surprise, and because of his facial expression, seems to be more unhappy about his situation than the rabbit perhaps about to be eaten. The rabbits playing carelessly about the man add to the mystery; indeed, the rabbit perched on its hind legs before him looks ready to leap into his mouth. Clearly, the situation is much more complex than the verse or a first glance at the drawing might indicate. Perhaps much of the appeal of this particular limerick lies in the possibility, subtly revealed in the illustration, that the predator has become a victim of those he feeds upon.

Lear's style varies considerably throughout the limericks. At times his drawings are extremely simple, even crude; others are more elaborately developed and rather realistically presented. Generally, however, Lear uses a minimum of lines to outline figures and shapes, adding details such as shading and hatching when further definition seems necessary. He uses bold, expressive lines to create a strong sense of spontaneity, even naivety, and it is a sign of his success that his illustrations are often compared to children's drawings. Lear was an accomplished natural history and landscape draughtsman, however, and the spontaneity he achieves through intentional simplification and distortion should not be confused with carelessness.

Some of Lear's most powerful illustrations are those in which he blends different styles in one drawing. The introduction of the second attendant in the following limerick, for example, is both mysterious and disquieting:
There was an Old Person of Rheims,
Who was troubled with horrible dreams;
So, to keep him awake, they fed him with cake.
Which amused that Old Person of Rheims.

FIGURE 10. (BN, 33)

The miserable-looking old man and the woman feeding him are fairly standard nonsense characters, but the second, a man, is a most perplexing figure. This is so essentially because his face is flattened out and as round as a pie pan, so that he seems to be of a spatial dimension different from that which contains the other two figures. He is staring out towards the reader, his wide smile contrasting heavily with the concerned expressions of the man and woman. The juxtaposition of this character with the others is most disturbing; it is almost as though he is a figment of the old man's (or perhaps the reader's) troubled dreams. The ambiguity of this situation is further increased by the way in which Lear has stopped the action in mid-stream, so that it is impossible to tell whether the Old Person of Rheims has already begun the "cure," or is about to take his first bite. In either case, the efficacy of the cure is, I think, called into question. Certainly the old man hardly appears "amused" and, even if he has yet to take his first cake, the sly expression on the male servant's face, combined with the forceful depiction
of the Old Person's suffering, makes the proposed treatment's success appear doubtful. Because this situation is so ambiguous, the reader is free, in part, to formulate its significance for himself. Nevertheless, the power of this limerick and its illustration seem to derive mainly from their recreation of the inexplicable, frightening, even mad logic of "horrible dreams."

Another effective and rather unusual technical innovation involves the way in which Lear often draws groups of people:

![Illustration of a man and a gong](image)

There was an Old Man with a gong,
Who bumped at it all the day long;
But they called out, 'O law! you're a horrid old bore!
So they smashed that Old Man with a gong.

**FIGURE 11. (BN,6)**

By arranging the Old Man's assailants in a line and drawing them as mirror images, Lear emphasizes their tedious conformity, which contrasts sharply with the obvious joy of the Old Man, whose independence from them is further stressed by his buoyant position. At the same time, the threat of endless proliferation implied by the mirror images makes "them" appear even more menacing. This technique is employed often in the limericks, usually to emphasize the frightening conventionality of a group of people who are attacking (often physically) one individual. A
variation of this that occurs frequently in *More Nonsense*, however, presents one man or woman trying to educate (and perhaps thus control) a potentially endless long line of animals:

> There was an old man of Dumbree,  
> Who taught little owls to drink tea;  
> For he said, 'To eat mice, is not proper or nice,'  
> That amiable man of Dumbree.  
> (MN, 184)

In both cases, the illustration clarifies and sharpens the anti-social attitude which is often only implied in the verse.

It is often necessary to examine Lear's illustrations quite closely, for small details can be quite significant. The drawing for the following limerick, for example, at first appears to be a straightforward rendering of the verse:

![Illustration of a woman climbing a tree](image)

> There was a Young Lady of Portugal,  
> Whose ideas were excessively nautical:  
> She climbed up a tree, to examine the sea,  
> But declared she would never leave Portugal.  
> (BN, 10)

FIGURE 12.

A second glance reveals, however, that the spyglass is not aimed out towards the sea (although the woman's head and eyes are inclined in that direction) but down to the end of the branch on which she is sitting. No wonder she "would never leave Portugal"! Here, Lear in effect uses the illustration to create a joke. At other times, however, the reason for a particular detail or technique is less apparent:
There was a Young Lady of Ryde,
Whose shoe-strings were seldom untied;
She purchased some clogs, and some small spotty dogs,
And frequently walked about Ryde.

FIGURE 13. (BN,3)

In this case, the "small spotty dogs" of the verse are presented in the illustration as being strange indeed; one is suspended in the air like a flying squirrel; two are apparently mad; one is having a fit on its back; and the last is reared on its hind legs, barking belligerently at the woman, perhaps preparing to attack. Hypotheses about the connection between the "Young Lady of Ryde" and the dogs could be made--walking above the ground because of her clogs and looking upward, she is certainly oblivious to what surrounds her--but the conflict arising from this visual encounter remains intentionally unresolved. Although surprising, often grotesque details such as these do add to the complexity of Lear's nonsense, they seem to be mainly a manifestation of the exuberant richness of his fantasy. This is one reason why the limericks never become stale, why one can read them time and again and still find something surprising, something that challenges and enriches one's notions of reality.
It is no accident that Lear's characters are frozen ambiguously in the midst of action; in fact, their tenuous poise may be paradigmatic of the precarious balancing of tensions necessary for successful nonsense. Lear's limericks maintain this balance, and in few other nonsense works are the structure and basic processes so clearly exposed. Playing the visual against the aural, the explicitly stated against that only suggested, the desire to find freedom against the desire to find security, Lear raises significant questions about the nature of man—his desires and experiences. The maintenance of these tensions implies that these important questions are both inescapable and unanswerable, that we must confront them, but that they cannot be resolved.

Lear's "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures" are an excellent example of what happens to his nonsense when the rigorous maintenance of tensions illustrated in the limericks is relaxed. These verses and drawings, first published in the 1872 More Nonsense, seem to represent only one side of Lear, that part which delights in fantastic invention and in pure sound pleasure:

![Image of a vulture with a book]

The Visibly Vicious Vulture, who wrote some Verses to a Veal-cutlet in a Volume bound in Vellum.

FIGURE 14. (MN,219)
Charming as the above may be, there is really little to hold one's interest. The main cause of this is that the only organizing principle, the requirement that all nouns begin with "v," fails to provide a sufficiently complex form. Thus, the verse is "one-sided"; there is nothing for either Lear or the reader to play with, so that the poem does not attain the technical interest, the satisfaction of participating in a skilled game, of even the most traditional limerick. It is also important to note the conventional, almost purely illustrative nature of the designs. Lear's drawings often provide an important guide to his work; when they seem to be ordinary recreations of the verse, when they add nothing, but act merely as visual cues, most often the work as a whole is of minor significance.

Lear's penchant for bizarre details and his fascination with sounds is typical of all of his nonsense, from his first limericks to the final songs. It is only when this aspect is unchecked by structural or thematic forces that his work becomes at best only charming; and at worst, boring. Boredom surely results from "Teapots and Quails," a series of verses and drawings unpublished during Lear's lifetime, perhaps because he too recognized their problems. They are interesting, however, because they show him struggling to create a form that will achieve the economy of the limericks:

Thistles and Moles,
Crumpets and Soles,
See it a rolling
and see how it rolls! 5

The illustration for this verse merely depicts the objects mentioned in a diagonal line across the page. The repetition of the final line is
externally somewhat similar to that frequently employed in the limericks, but in this case the device serves no vital function. The final lines of the limericks often comment ironically on the preceding verse, or upon the interaction between verse and drawing, and tend to draw the reader back into the limerick. Here, however, there is no interaction between verse and drawing, and so little is said that no ironic play on ambiguities is possible. These verses lack even the interest of the alphabets, which are at least partially sustained by the structure the form provides.

Most of Lear's alphabets are, in fact, fairly conventional examples of the genre. Generally they follow the "A was a . . . " formula, there being no connection between verses other than the order of the letters:

A was an ant
Who seldom stood still
And who made a nice house
In the side of a hill.
    a!
Nice little Ant!
(NSB,131)

The drawings for all of the alphabets are quite ordinary, and could have been penned by any of a large number of Victorian illustrators. The general simplicity of these alphabets is highlighted by the tension created when there is a stronger connection between the verses, as occurs in two cases. In both alphabets, a link between the individual verse and the work as a whole is established, as well as a degree of plot:

A was an Area Arch,
    Where washerwomen sat;
They made a lot of lovely starch
    To starch Papa's cravat.

B was a Bottle blue,
    Which was not very small;
Papa he filled it full of beer,
    And then he drank it all.
(LL,263)
Perhaps these are more successful because they involve game strategy; the reader appreciates the difficulties to be met and wonders how they will be managed throughout the series:

A tumbled down, and hurt his Arm, against a bit of wood.  
B said, 'My Boy, O! do not cry; it cannot do you good!'  
C said, 'A Cup of Coffee hot can't do you any harm.'  
Z said, 'Here is a box of Zinc! Get in, my little master!  
'We'll shut you up! We'll nail you down! We will, my little master!'  
'We think we've all heard quite enough of this your sad disaster!'  
(LL,270-271)

At any rate, it seems clear that even in the simplest forms of nonsense, some degree of plot and structure are necessary if any sustained interest, much less meaning, is to be achieved.

Lear's nonsense stories are more successful than his alphabets and early songs largely because their more complex form offers opportunities for parody and ironic self-comment. This occurs in the limericks, for example, where Lear resists the conventional limerick's impulse for completed action, and at times even seems to parody the requirements of the form. A similar process takes place in the 1871 "The History Of The Seven Families Of The Lake Pipple-Popple." This work begins conventionally enough as a type of story written to teach young children numbers: "There was a Family of Two old Parrots and Seven young Parrots. There was a Family of Two old Storks and Seven young Storks. There was a Family of Two old Geese, [sic] and Seven young Geese" (NSB,107-108). Each of these seven statements is illustrated in a fairly conventional manner.

The reader's first response, that he has stumbled upon an illustrated story written to be read to two-year olds, is rapidly challenged, however.
"The History of the Seven Families" is divided into fourteen brief chapters, each one continuing the series established in the first chapters. This seems harmless enough in the third chapter, where Lear luxuriates in fantastic details as he describes "The Habits of the Seven Families": "The Parrots lived upon the Soffsky-Poffsky trees,--which were beautiful to behold, and covered with blue leaves,--and fed upon fruit, artichokes, and striped beetles" (NSB,110). But the influence of the series becomes more serious in the fourth chapter, where each set of parents in turn gives their offspring advice as they "set out to see the world":

"If", said the old Parrots, "you find a Cherry, do not fight about who should have it."
"And," said the old storks, "if you find a Frog, divide it carefully into seven bits, but on no account quarrel about it."
And the old Geese said to the Seven young Geese, "Whatever you do, be sure you do not touch a Plum-pudding Flea."

(NSB,111)

Because of the expectations raised by the already strongly established series, the reader knows from the first that the only possible outcome is the orderly, inevitable disregarding of this advice by the children. The next seven chapters describe how each group of animals goes out and faces its preordained fate, each section ending with the same refrain: "And that was the end of the ______." (NSB,113) By the time the fish have met their special doom, Lear has succeeded in depicting the inexplicable power artificial ordering systems can exert on lives and events. There is no other reason why the story should end as it does, with the destruction of all seven families (the original seven sets of parents pickle themselves in seven bottles which they will to the town museum), except for the power and distorted logic exerted by its serial organization, which has taken the story with numerical precision to the point of general
annihilation. Lear concludes the story with a marvelous bit of distancing that further emphasizes the absurdity of the preceding events, particularly the tyranny of number: "And if you ever happen to go to Gramble-Blamble, and visit that museum in the city of Tosh, look for them on the Ninety-eighth table in the Four hundred and twenty-seventh room of the right-hand corridor of the left wing of the Central Quadrangle of that magnificent building; for if you do not, you certainly will not see them." (NSB,121)

Thus what starts out as a children's illustrated "counting out" story ends as a much more complex, ambiguous, and perhaps even frightening experience. Lear structures his work by relying heavily upon the repetition of number and the establishment of a strong series, and these devices do create a sense of inevitability and control that tend to balance the nihilistic content. At the same time, however, they are also the only cause for the orderly and meticulous destruction of the seven families, and the reader is aware that behind the series there exists only an absurd pseudologic based on number and abstract progression.

It may not be accidental that Lear's only other published nonsense story, "The Story of Four Little Children Who Went Round the World," precedes "The History of the Seven Families" in the 1871 volume and contrasts sharply with it in both theme and technique. For the former is as exuberant and gay as the latter is ordered and pessimistic, and they balance each other well. They are similar in one respect, however, for in both the narratory assumes a matter-of-fact tone that indicates his acceptance of the conventions of the nonsense world: "the Boat was drawn up to the shore and they proceeded to make tea . . . but as they had no tea-leaves, they merely placed some pebbles in the hot water, and the Quangle-Wangle played some tunes over it on an Accordian, by
which of course tea was made directly, and of the very best quality."

(NSB, 99) This perspective does not, however, inhibit the narrator from subtly ironizing the children themselves, whom he presents at times as being surprisingly greedy, hypocritical, and unfeeling. In the following instance, Lear's compact but expressive "notwithstanding which" conveys perfectly their very human ability to use abstract language to rationalize their desires:

And I am sorry to say that the Pussy-cat and the Quangle-Wangle crept softly and bit off the tail-feathers of all the sixty-five parrots, for which Violet reproved them both severely.

Notwithstanding which, she proceeded to insert all the feathers, two hundred and sixty in number, in her bonnet, thereby causing it to have a lovely and glittering appearance.

(NSB, 94)

A fairly common ironic technique is to lend the reader to expect that the children will respond conventionally to a situation, and then to present an entirely different outcome. Thus, after they part from the Blue-Bottle Flies, whose visit the children will recall "In many long-after years . . . as one of the happiest in all their lives" (NSB, 100), the narrator states: "Overcome by their feelings, the Four little Travellers instantly jumped into the Tea-Kettle, and fell fast asleep" (NSB, 101). Here, Lear not only ironizes the children, but the reader--whose sentimental expectations are so easily predicted--as well. Although such subtle attacks are infrequent, it may be significant that Lear chooses to end the story on this note, as he describes what happens upon the return of the children and of the rhinoceros who transported them during a large part of their trip: "As for the Rhinoceros, in token of their grateful
adherence, they had him killed and stuffed directly, and then set him outside the door of their father's house as a Diaphanous Doorscraper" (NSB,106).

The only structure for the story is provided by the journey, which is, of necessity, episodic. Lear does seem at times to parody the excesses of nineteenth-century travel literature, but this perspective is not developed fully enough to provide a consistent frame of reference. He seems most intrigued with the possibilities for word play that parody offers, rather than with making a comment about the original form:

At this time, an elderly Fly said it was the hour for the Evening-song to be sung; and on a signal being given all the Blue-Bottle Flies began to buzz at once in a sumptuous and sonorous manner, the melodious and mucilaginous sounds echoing all over the waters, and resounding across the tumultuous tops of the transitory Titmice upon the intervening and verdant mountains, with a serene and sickly suavity only known to the truly virtuous. The Moon was shining slobaciously from the star-bespringled sky, while her light irrigated the smooth and shiny sides and wings and backs of the Blue-Bottle-Flies with a peculiar and trivial splendour, while all nature cheerfully responded to the cerulaean and conspicuous circumstances.

(NSB,100)

Although the words in the above passage at first might appear to be chosen mainly for their aural value, closer analysis reveals that more than sound is being played with. Consider Lear's practice of linking two unrelated adjectives, a technique he uses throughout his work. When he describes the sound of the flies' song as "melodious and mucilaginous" (mucus-producing), Lear not only slyly comments on the quality of the
song but also creates an opposition between sound and sense that cannot be resolved. "Mucilaginous" sounds as though it should fit—perhaps because of a similarity to mellifluous—but it does not. A more obvious example where the combined adjectives undercut that which they modify occurs when Lear describes the "serene and sickly suavity only known to the truly virtuous" (NSB,100). Isolated from the sentences around it, whose fluid, almost hypnotic pattern tends to de-emphasize meaning, the surprisingly forceful attack on "the truly virtuous" needs no further explication to make its intent clear. A similar undercutting occurs when Lear describes the flies "peculiar and trivial speandor" (NSB,100).

The conflict between the general movement of the above paragraph, whose smooth, flowing sounds and lengthy sentences urge the reader to pay little attention to particular details, and the individual words and phrases within that paragraph is quite similar to that between form and content in the limericks. In both cases, external aspects such as sound and rhythm distract the reader from stressing the literal meaning of the words. The meaning remains, however. At times one's attention is repaid merely by a joke, but often Lear uses this technique to make more biting comments, as when he refers to the "perfect and abject happiness" (NSB,99) of the Blue-Bottle-Flies.

In "The Four Little Children," Lear often plays the reader's syntactic expectations against individual words that fit the grammatical structure but violate the context of the sentence as a whole. This happens, for example, when he describes the Quangle-Wangle as exclaiming "softly in a loud voice", (NSB,102) or when he speaks of the "incredibly innumerable numer of large bottles" (NSB,98). A more interesting variation of this technique occurs when Lear in one paragraph introduces the children to "a large number of Grabs and Crayfish—perhaps six or seven hundred—"
sitting by the waterside" (NSB,101) and then in the next paragraph describes their response to the children's offer of help: "Thank you kindly,' said the Crabs, consecutively" (NSB,101). If one recalls the number of crabs and crayfish from the preceding paragraph, the idea of each one thanking the children consecutively, instead of collectively (the adverb I believe we are led to expect), is ludicrous indeed.

Incidents such as the above are satisfying not merely because they are humorous, but also because they make one aware of the conventions of language that most people unconsciously expect to be followed, such as that two contiguous adjectives, especially those that begin with the same letter, will automatically coincide. By straining the tension between a word's syntactic position and its context, Lear emphasizes how powerful the idea of "adverb," for example, is. Thus, when one reads "softly with a loud voice," one tries to fit "softly" into the position that another adverb like "slowly" properly fills because it seems that the former should fit, since it ends with -ly. Similarly, Lear's description of the "enormous Seeze Pyder, an aquatic and ferocious creature" (NSB,104), is humorous because one's perception of the types of adjectives that can be meaningfully grouped has been violated. In both cases, Lear exposes linguistic "rules" that most people generally grasp intuitively through practice and use unconsciously every day. The surprise, the pleasure in having language "made new" again is similar, though less intense, than that achieved in poetry.

More than any other of his works, "The Story of the Four Little Children," with its impulsive accumulation of nonsensical details and almost obsessive playing with language as sound, seems to express most
fully that part of Lear that delights in pure fantasy. For fantasy to sustain the reader's interest, however, it must have a framework to give its details coherence, and the loosely constructed journey in the story fulfills this function. More important, though much less obvious, are the subtle ironizing of the four children by the narrator and the sophisticated manipulation of linguistic structures, both of which provide substance and meaning to the story.

Although I think that "The Story of the Four Little Children" is fairly successful, it does illustrate the difficulties involved in writing prose nonsense, difficulties which Lear possibly recognized, since he published only two stories during his long career as a nonsense writer. Nonsense seems to require a "tight," very precise form, one that will both control and add interest to its subject matter. Verse functions admirably in this capacity, and it is interesting to note that "The History of the Seven Families," with its serial repetition, seems more like poetry than prose. Carroll solved this problem through the Wonderland reversals and chess moves, but such techniques seem more self-conscious and sophisticated than Lear might comfortably employ. Lear creates interest in "The Story of the Four Little Children" through the manipulation of narrative tone, with its subtle ironizing of the children, but the story as a whole lacks the impact that a more forcefully structured work might attain.

In his last two volumes, More Nonsense (1871) and Laughable Lyrics (1877), Lear returned essentially to verse forms. More Nonsense consists mainly of limericks, with several pages of nonsense botany and the series, "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures." The limericks differ little
from those in the 1846 *Book of Nonsense*, except that more melancholy themes begin to predominate, a foreshadowing of the tone that will pervade many of the later songs. The first four limericks of the collection present in rapid succession, for example, images of regression and despair, madness, physical deformity, and social repression:

There was an old man of Hong Kong,  
Who never did anything wrong;  
He lay on his back, with his head in a sack,  
That innocuous old man of Hong Kong.  
(MN,159)

There was an old person of Fife,  
Who was greatly disgusted with life;  
They sang him a ballad, And fed him on salad,  
Which cured that old person of Fife.  
(MN,159)

There was a young person in green,  
Who seldom was fit to be seen;  
She wore a long shawl, over bonnet and all,  
which enveloped that person in green.  
(MN,160)

There was an old person of Slough,  
Who danced at the end of a bough;  
But they said, 'If you sneeze, You might damage the trees,  
You imprudent old person of Slough.'  
(MN,160)

Such concerns are not new to the limericks, but their increased occurrence is of significance. More *Nonsense* also contains an unusual event in Lear's work, an instance where an individual aggressively attacks those who are disturbing here. It may be precisely because such directness is so rare that the illustration is unusually dynamic, as though the idea, once expressed, is all the more explosive due to its pent-up force:
There was an old person of Stroud,
Who was horribly jammed in a crowd;
Some she slew with a kick, some she scrunched with a stick,
That impulsive old person of Stroud.

FIGURE 15. (MN, 169)

Few of Lear's characters react with "the old person of Stroud's" vigor; in fact, retreat is the most common means of dealing with both individual and social problems in Lear's work. Even in his early songs, he allows his mismatched couples to achieve happiness only after they have left their original society. Thus, for example, the owl and the pussycat "went to sea/In a beautiful pea-green boat" (NSB, 61), while Mr. Daddy Long-legs and Mr. Floppy Fly solve their problems, that--

One never more can go to court,
Because his legs have grown too short;
The other cannot sing a song,
Because his legs have grown too long!  
(NSB, 70)

by a similar escape:

Then Mr. Daddy Long-legs
And Mr. Floppy Fly
Rushed downward to the foamy sea
With one sponge-taneous cry;
And there they found a little boat,
Whose sails were pink and gray;
And far off they sailed among the waves,
Far, and far away.  
(NSB, 70)
The threat of estrangement is most clearly emphasized in "Calico Pie,"
with its refrain:

    But they never came back to me!
    They never came back!
    They never came back!
    They never came back to me!  
    (NSB,79)

In most of these works, however, any potential concern for the characters'
isoaltion is balanced by the union they achieve with one another, so that
the reader's strongest impression is, for example, of the daddy long-legs
and fly living happily on the "great Gromboolian plain" where "they play
for evermore/At battlecock and shuttledoor." (NSB,70)

There is a marked shift of tone between the earlier and later songs.
One way to chronicle this is with "The Jumblies," Lear's 1872 poem about
the travels of a band who "went to sea in a Sieve, they did/In a Sieve
they went to sea" (NSB,71). Although the refrain is slightly melancholy--
"Far and few, far and few/Are the lands where the Jumblies live" (NSB,71)--
the poem's general mood reflects the Jumblies' optimism:

    And when the Sieve turned round and round,
    And every one cried; 'You'll all be drowned!'
    They called aloud, 'Our Sieve ain't big,
    But we don't care a button! We don't care a fig!'
    (NSB,71)

The next time the Jumblies appear is in "The Dong with a Luminous Nose,"
one of Lear's final songs published in the 1877 Laughable Lyrics. Lear
uses the Jumblies to explain the cause of the Dong's grief:

    Long years ago
    The Dong was happy and gay,
    Till he fell in love with a Jumbly Girl
    Who came to those shores one day
    (NSB,226)

He then repeats the same refrain that appears in "The Jumblies," only
here the melancholy aspects already noted verge on sentimentality, as
the Dong is presented:

Gazing--gazing for evermore,--
Ever keeping his weary eyes on
That pea-green sail on the far horizon,--
Singing the Jumblly Chorus still
As he sate all day on the grassy hill,--
'Far and few, far and few. . .
(NSB,227)

This sentimentalism is balanced, however, by the parodic aspects of the verse. The first two stanzas of "The Dong" illustrate how Lear uses parody to ironize the reader's response to conventional romantic verse:

When awful darkness and silence reign
Over the great Cromboolian plain,
Through the long, long wintry nigts;--
When the angry breakers roar
As they beat on the rocky shore;--
When Storm-clouds brood on the towering heights
Of the Hills of the Chankly Bore:--
Then, through the vast and bloomy dark,
There moves what seems a fiery spark,
A lonely spark with silvery rays
Piercing the coal black night,--
A Meteor strange and bright:--
Hither and thither the vision strays,
A single lurid light.
(LL,225)

The poem begins with a rather haunting, but nevertheless quite typical, evocation of a dramatic landscape. The only indications given the reader that this is nonsense are the strange place names (perhaps a parody of Milton's use of unusual names in Paradise Lost), but these are so little emphasized that their influence is minor.

Lear continues the romantic emphasis in the second stanza, as he describes the yet unidentified lonely figure moving through "the vast and gloomy dark" as "a lonely spark," "a fiery spark," and "a Meteor strange and bright." These interrelated images may be an ironic reference to Matthew Arnold's "Scholar-Gypsy," first published in 1853. There are, indeed, interesting similarities between these two poems. Both present
an individual who has isolated himself from his fellowman, and both characters are described in terms of fire imagery. Thus Arnold repeatedly describes the Scholar-Gypsy, who symbolizes a unified existence no longer possible for modern man, as "waiting for the spark from heaven to fall." Like the Dong, the Scholar-Gypsy's appearance seems strange to observers, who "Mark'd thine outlandish garb, thy figure/ spare,/ Thy dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted/ air--" But where Arnold's attitude toward the Scholar-Gypsy is fairly clear—he represents the lost possibility of an unfragmented, meaningful life ("Thou hadst one aim, one business, one de/sire")—Lear's point of view is deliberately ambivalent.

Whether or not Lear intentionally parodies "The Scholar-Gypsy"—and such evidence as I have presented is admittedly quite tentative—he clearly draws upon standard nineteenth-century poetic conventions, which he at first uses to engage the reader's sympathies, but then suddenly and brilliantly burlesques as when, for example, he concludes his description of the Dong, until now seen in positive terms, with the phrase, "A single lurid light." Here, the word "lurid" stands in startling contrast to the previous description, forcing the reader to reevaluate his original response, and also preparing him for the revelation that the "fiery spark" is but the Dong's nose, woven from "the bark of the Twangum Tree" (LL,227)—

Of vase 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 night.
   (LL,228)
It is important to recognize that the parodic elements of "The Dong with a Luminous Nose" are neither fully nor consistently enough developed to qualify the poem as a conventional parody. Lear's technique is similar to that employed in the limericks, where he balances form and content, the latter subtly undercutting but not negating the repressive force of the former. In "The Dong", however, the tension involves the opposition of the sentimental or romantic and the ironic. Lear parodies the conventional responses of the reader, but at the same time he also asserts their validity. The reader is not allowed to sympathize fully with the Dong, but he cannot totally dismiss or avoid responding to his situation. The position forced upon the reader, his uncertainty of response, is similar to that achieved in certain modern works such as L'Etranger, where one is both attracted and repulsed by the protagonist.

This conflict is less strongly felt in "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo," mainly because the diction and meter lack the solemnity of the former poem. Even so, in passages such as the following, Lear creates images that compel the reader to react seriously to an otherwise absurd situation:

Through the silent-roaring ocean
Did the Turtle swiftly go;
    Holding fast upon his shell
Rode the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo.
With a sad pramaeval motion
Towards the senset isles of Boshen
Still the Turtle bore him sell.
    Holding fast upon his shell,
'Lady Jingly Jones, farewell!'
Sang the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo,
Sang the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo.
(LL,241)

In both poems, Lear carefully avoids "favoring" either the narrative or those elements that parody it. Instead, he plays one against the other, so that the only one "offbalance" is the reader, who is denied the ease
so that the only one "offbalance" is the reader, who is denied the ease of a stable response.

Lear takes an entirely different approach in "Mr. and Mrs. Discobolos," certainly his most nihilistic poem. Here he uses the repetition of a series, "Oh! W! X! Y! Z!" (LL, 247) to force the reader to recognize the terrible power that supposedly logical systems can exert on human events. The first section of this two-part poem begins with the recognition of Mrs. Discobolos, who with her husband has "climbed to the top of a wall" (LL, 247), that life is full of danger--"Suppose we should happen to fall!!!!!!" (LL, 247). Their solution to this problem, which is essentially that of man's inability to predict the results of an action, is to stay precisely where they are:

So Mr. and Mrs. Discobolos
Stood up, and began to sing,
'Far away from hurry and strife
'Here we will pass the rest of life,
'Ding a dong, ding dong, ding!'
(LL, 248)

In the second section, the reader sees Mr. and Mrs. Discobolos "twenty years, a month and a day" (LL, 249) later, the proud parents of six boys and six girls. Again, Mrs. Discobolos poses a problem, this time involving the children:

'Surely they should not pass their lives
'Without any change of husbands or wives!'
And Mrs. Discobolos said,
'O, W! X! Y! Z!'
'Did it never come into your head
'That our lives must be lived elsewhere,
Dearest Mr. Discobolos?
(LL, 249-250)

The nonsense refrain "O, W! X! Y! Z!" appears in all nine stanzas of the poem. At first it seems insignificant, but repetition gives it added
import. The connection between the letters, which is arbitrary and yet nevertheless quite compelling, since it is based on the much recited alphabet, comes to stand for the twisted logic of the poem and the characters' fear of becoming trapped in a preordained sequence of events. It is this linguistic series, plus the emphasis provided by dividing the poem into two parts, that makes the conclusion seem at once inevitable and frightening:

Suddenly Mr. Discobbolos
   Slid from the top of the wall;
   And beneath it he dug a dreadful trench,
   And filled it with dynamite, gunpowder gench,
   And aloud he began to call-
   'Let the wild bee sing,
   'And the blue bird hum!
   'For the end of your lives has certainly come!'
   And Mrs. Discobbolos said,
   'O, W! X! Y! Z!
   'We shall presently all be dead,
On this ancient runcible wall,
     Terrible Mr. Discobbolos!'
(II,250)

The reader is given no reason for Mr. Discobbolos' action, which can be viewed both as a response to the hen-pecking of his wife, and also as an expression of his frustration at finding himself trapped in a situation which offers no reasonable solution. Certainly, the "Pensively" which begins the final stanza seems to stress the latter interpretation:

Pensively, Mr. Discobbolos
   Sat with his back to the wall;
   He lighted a match, and fired the train,
   And the mortified mountain echoed again
   To the sound of an awful fall!
And all the Discobbolos family flew
In thousands of bits to the sky so blue,
   And no one was left to have said,
   'O, W! X! Y! Z!
   'Has it come into anyone's head
   That the end has happened to all
of the whole of the Clan Discobbolos?'
(II,251)
It is a surprisingly short step from "Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos" to the grim death jokes and ontological dialogues of the Alices.
FOOTNOTES


2 Reed, p. 46


4 Esslin, p. 243.


7 Arnold, p. 250.

8 Arnold, p. 259.
CHAPTER THREE: ALICE IN WONDERLAND

There are many distinctions that need to be made between the nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, distinctions which need to be placed in perspective before one can arrive at an accurate description of the essential structural and thematic unity available to each writer. The most conspicuous of these distinctions involves their choice of literary genres, for while Lear's most characteristic work is in verse, Carroll's is in prose. Poetry is generally considered to be more concrete, intense, and "economical" than prose, which often differs from poetry in its greater emphasis on the development of abstract ideas and the precise elaboration of logical connections. Poetry, traditionally, is vertical, metaphorical, and associative; prose is horizontal, metonymic, and sequential. Just so for Lear and Carroll.

Lear's work is both simple and concrete, with very little dialogue appearing even in the longer poems or stories. In contrast to the Alices, where conversation provides the characters' favorite and most serious pastime, Lear presents a world of almost silent action. This is most evident in the limericks, where the brevity of the verse and the constraints of rhyme and rhythm preclude the complex, sequential articulation of ideas. Instead, Lear relies upon the subtle interaction of verse and illustration, as well as the balanced tension between form and content within the verse itself, to establish his meaning.
Because Lear makes few explicit connections in his nonsense, preferring to juxtapose objects and events with little comment, his work is more consistently surreal than that of Carroll. Both authors employ mirror images, for example, but with strongly differing results. Lear uses this device frequently in the illustrations for the limericks:

![Image of a limerick illustration](image)

There was an Old Man of Apulia,
Whose conduct was very peculiar
He fed twenty sons, upon nothing but buns,
That whimsical Man of Apulia,

**FIGURE 16. (BN, 24)**

This limerick and its illustration are quite typical in that there is nothing in the verse itself that either requires or comments upon the long line of identical, mirror image sons. Their precise significance is thus difficult to define, but, as is the case with most such illustrations, they seem to emphasize the monotonous conformity of society—perhaps clarifying why the Old Man of Apulia's response to them was so "very peculiar." The threat of uncontrolled proliferation implicit in the drawing is equally powerful, and equally difficult to delimit. This mystery or opacity is a major source of the limerick's ability to influence the reader, to jar him out of his narrow world of "dead" concepts and force him to examine himself and his society afresh.
In Through the Looking-Glass, Lewis Carroll also makes extensive use of mirror images, but in a much more logical and meticulously developed fashion. The story begins with Alice playing a game of "Let's pretend" with her kitty: "Oh, kitty, how nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-Glass House! ... Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow, Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare!" (TLG, I, 111).

Once Alice has penetrated the Looking-Glass world and the principle of reversal is established, much of what follows can easily be predicted, at least in principle. Because the reader realizes long before Alice that she must walk backwards to reach the garden, or pass the cake around before cutting it, for example, he has a sense of control not provided by Lear's more ambiguous and disjointed nonsense. But though Carroll's nonsense generally lacks the potential for the almost lyric intensity of the limericks, it is capable of more fully and explicitly developing its themes.

The world of Lewis Carroll's nonsense is more concerned with ideas than with action. The Queen of Hearts' threats to behead her subjects appropriately thus turn out to be merely her "fancy": "they never executes nobody, you know" (AW, IX, 74). The Alices are filled with grotesque, often surreal objects or events--Alice's changes of size, the Cheshire Cat's vanishings, the metamorphoses that occur when Alice "jumps" a square in Through the Looking-Glass--but these are finally less threatening to both Alice and the reader than the characters' attacks against her reason. Carroll's nonsense achieves its force mainly through its relentless
examination of the weak intellectual barriers man sets up between himself and reality, and the more expanded form provided by prose is best suited to achieve this purpose. Conversation is an essential weapon in Carroll's nonsense. During Alice's lengthy conversation with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, for example, she tries a series of verbal maneuvers to deflect their attack, that she is only a "sort of a thing" (TLG, IV, 145) in the Red King's dream. They continue to chip away at her flimsy defenses, until she can bear it no longer and dismisses them with a pert, "nonsense" (TLG, IV, 145). Whether Alice accepts it or not, however, the Tweedle brothers have made their point.

For all this, Lear and Carroll vary mainly in that they lead us by different (but related) means to the same conclusion, or at least to the same world. Both present a fractured universe, one where "normal" casual relations are dislocated, where time and space fail to conform to ordinary expectations. A few of their characters do form social bonds, but these are almost always problematic; the majority exist in isolation, either literal or psychological. Although real or threatened violence plays an important role in their nonsense, the strongest threat to their characters involves mental suffering, despair, and the fear of the loss of identity. Ultimately, by questioning the adequacy of rational thought, Lear and Carroll challenge the possibility of meaning itself.

Lear and Carroll are obviously not unique in this vision of man; many modern artists have made similar statements. Lear and Carroll are unique, however, in the rhetorical strategy they employ to present their ideas. Central to the work of both is the recognition that a chief cause
of man's dilemma is internal. As Lear and Carroll see it, man is a creature of strongly conflicting desires; he is drawn towards both order and disorder, acceptance and rebellion, illusion and "reality," fantasy and logic. In order to get through life, each individual makes an uneasy, and generally unconscious, truce with these forces. In their nonsense, Lear and Carroll shatter this truce and allow these conflicting pressures full expression.

Nonsense both reflects and exploits man's fundamental ambivalence about himself and his role in society. Rather than arguing overtly for one position or another, Lear and Carroll present these conflicting claims, balancing them so that neither side of the order/disorder dialectic overwhelms the other. The resultant tension is deliberately unresolved and creates the peculiarly uncomfortable effect often associated with these works. Even the use of the label of "nonsense" can be seen as an attempt to cover up the subversive nature of much of their work. In fact, Lear and Carroll do seem to have been divided within themselves. Both consistently denied that their work signified anything at all, yet the texts themselves clearly belie their ingenuous assertions. Thus the tensions in their work seem in part to derive from a similar conflict within the authors between the desire to present emotion, to attack man's distorted self-perceptions, and the desire to refuse to admit that such frightening realities exist. Nonsense apparently provided Lear and Carroll a means of simultaneously attacking and defending society, of arguing much and claiming responsibility for little.

If their nonsense did nothing but reflect their own confusion, Lear's and Carroll's work would be of little interest, except perhaps to
psychologists or historians. It is fascinating to speculate upon the psychological forces that impelled Lear and Carroll to write nonsense, or to identify nonsense as a means, for example, of coping with Victorian social repression, although such theories are of necessity conjectural. Their work is important, however, because it successfully incorporates Lear's and Carroll's ambivalence as part of its rhetorical strategy.

Nonsense protects the reader from direct attack, only to challenge him all the stronger indirectly. This is perhaps most simply exemplified in the limericks, where Lear's use of rhyme and rhythm offsets, but does not limit, the implications of the content of the verses and their illustrations. Carroll's use of chess as a structural device in Through the Looking-Glass serves a similar function. In both cases the reader, freed from the defensiveness and anxiety that a more directly subversive approach might kindle, is able to experience an unusually broad range of emotions and ideas. At the same time, however, he is placed squarely in the crossfire, is made to feel the claims of both order and disorder. In the Alices, for example, the reader understands that Alice must abandon her dream if she is to survive, but he also recognizes that she is rejecting much that is of real value. This knowledge denies the reader a comfortable or stable viewpoint, forcing him to experience emotionally that which the work articulates intellectually--the frustrating impossibility of man's ever reconciling his own opposing desires, of ever escaping from the limitations, both real and self-imposed, of his imagination.

Although the Alices share the same rhetorical strategy, their specific emphases and techniques do vary somewhat. Both works take their reader on a frightening journey into a world of madness and confusion,
and both must insure that he is not so overwhelmed by that which he encounters that he rejects the world and its vision. But the protection, the "cover" that each work offers differs. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll relies upon external structural devices to give the reader a sense of control and safety. Because the reader knows from the very start that Alice will succeed in becoming a queen, for example, he is less concerned for her physical well-being and happiness as she proceeds on her way. By partially turning the work into a game and giving the reader the illusion of control, an illusion that is gradually destroyed as the work progresses, Carroll is free to question the very foundations of man's sane and "normal" existence--"Life, what is it but a dream?" (TLC,209)

Alice in Wonderland differs from its sequel in that its own episodic structure exerts a less direct influence over the reader. Although Alice does have a goal, to enter the garden, she is much too involved with her attempts to make sense of what is going on to recall her original purpose. Thus while in *Through the Looking-Glass* Carroll manipulates the tension between order and disorder mainly through the balanced opposition of an insistent external form and a subtle content, much as Lear does in his limericks, in Alice in Wonderland this dialectic is internalized and presented as a split in Alice's own character.

Even though Alice is only six months younger in Alice in Wonderland than she is in *Through the Looking-Glass*, the difference is crucial. For in the first work Alice is, as James Kincaid argues, "both child and adult--and a person in transition. She is not only the steady innocent but the adolescent continually asking, 'Who in the world am I?' and the
corrupt adult as well.\textsuperscript{1} By the time of her second journey, however, Alice is much further on the road to becoming an adult. Much less curious than before and concerned only with becoming a queen, she betrays impatience whenever anyone retards her progress and tries to avoid lengthy discussions with others, wearily asking both Tweedledum and Tweedledee and the White Knight if their poetry is long. All this is in marked contrast to Alice's behavior during her first adventure, where she spends most of her time looking for someone with whom to have a satisfactory conversation. But then in Alice in Wonderland Alice is searching for something more elusive than a title; she is seeking knowledge, both of herself and of the world she so impetuously entered. In Through the Looking-Glass she thinks she knows, so she and the reader are--or seem to be--much more secure.

Alice's quest, her confrontation with chaos and anarchy and her instinctive, self-preserving rejection of it, provides the essential structure for Alice in Wonderland, and her role in the novel is surprisingly complex. Alice is in part the reader's surrogate on her journey, but the narrator's emphasis on her smugness, her self-absorption, and her devotion to rules and regulations all tend to force the reader to maintain a more distant or guarded perspective. And yet because the reader lacks her safeguards, most notably her inability to imagine that she must die, he responds more strongly to the threats made against her, particularly those which attack her language and logic, than she does herself. Alice is thus both the reader's protector, for as long as she is safe so too is the reader, and the assassinator of his most cherished notions.

When Alice fell down the rabbit hole, she entered a world wholly different from that from which she came, but she did not leave her past
behind her. The Alice that the reader meets in the first chapter of *Alice in Wonderland* is in many ways herself a parody of the adults in the world she so precipitously left. Despite this fact, most critics have tended to argue that she represents a favored perspective, some even going so far as to agree with W. H. Auden, who asserts that Alice is "an adequate symbol for what every human being should try to be like."\(^2\) But as Kincaid has noted, this view "has oversimplified both Carroll's rhetoric and his vision."\(^3\) In fact, both the narrator's and the reader's attitude toward Alice is strongly ambivalent.

Alice's virtues are those of a child, her defects those of an adult. Her most positive characteristics are undoubtedly her honesty, curiosity, impetuosity, and her common sense, all of which are clearly established in the first few paragraphs of *"Down the Rabbit-Hole."* From the very start, however, the narrator takes care that the reader perceives her more negative qualities as well. Alice is, for example, quite typically bourgeois; she dreads the thought of being Mabel, for she would "have to go and live in that poky little house, and have next to no toys to play with" (*AW*,II,17). She is also both vain and pedantic, always ready to dazzle the company (or even just herself) with her small store of knowledge and large "vocabulary":

"I must be getting somewhere near the center of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think--"(for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the school-room, and though this was not a very good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over)"--yes, that's about the right distance--but then I wonder about Latitude or Longitude I've got to?" (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.)

(*AW*,I,8)
Although only seven, Alice is clearly as firmly committed to pointless social and intellectual conventions as many adults. Her identification with society and the forces of order is all the more striking because she often fails to understand the maxims she happily parrots. When Alice tries to devise a plan that will allow her to enter the garden, she wishes for "a book of rules for shutting people up like telescopes" (AW, I, 10). In many respects, Alice's journey through Wonderland can be viewed as her search for a "book of rules" that will clarify its inhabitants' bizarre behavior. When she realizes that none exists, she falls back upon her previous conception of reality and abandons her dream.

If one were to level a single charge against Alice, to represent the implications (or source) of her occasional vanity, pedantry, class-consciousness, and false sentimentality, one might simply describe her as self-absorbed, a trait which often expresses itself through a failure of imagination. And yet it is this limitation that protects Alice; and through her, the reader, from being overwhelmed by the full impact of that which she encounters. It is important to note, however, that though Alice can deal fairly well with physical threats, she is much less able to protect herself from intellectual attacks against her logic and language.

Much has been made of the death jokes, those most obvious of the numerous assaults upon Alice's continued existence. An examination of Alice in Wonderland reveals, however, that Alice herself almost always responds to these threats with remarkable aplomb, as do the characters in Lear's limericks. Similarly, in the first chapter, when Alice succeeds at "shutting up like a telescope" (AW, I, 12), and is faced with the sudden possibility that if she continues to shrink "it might end ... in my going out altogether, like a candle" (AW, I, 12), she is curious, in an
abstract, speculative fashion: "'I wonder what I should be like then?' And she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out, for she could not remember ever having seen such a thing" (AW, I, 12). She does not seriously connect herself with this analogy, however—an indication perhaps that here, as well as when she admonishes herself—Alice uses words to evade, rather than to penetrate, meaning. For despite all the attacks directed toward her, Alice's sense of identity, her sense of "uniqueness," keeps her from fully comprehending the personal significance of what for her is a mere abstraction, death. Thus, in the second chapter, after Alice slips and falls in her own pool of tears, she again faces death with remarkable equanimity: "'I wish I hadn't cried so much!' said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out. 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears! That will be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer today.'" (AW, II, 19) Here, as elsewhere, Alice responds as if it were all a game ("Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle" [AW, II, 15-16])—a game over which she feels she can exercise at least a degree of control: "'No, I've made up my mind about it: if I'm Mabel, I'll stay down here. It'll be no use their putting their heads down and saying 'Come up again, dear!' I shall only look up and say 'Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else.'" (AW, II, 17)

Alice does at times become upset by what she encounters; in fact, immediately after the preceding show of control, she suddenly bursts into tears, crying: "I do wish they would put their heads down! I am so very tired of being all alone here!" (AW, I, 17). Emotion tends to threaten the balance required by nonsense, and the technique Carroll uses in this
situation is fairly common in both works—he distracts Alice’s (and the reader’s) attention. Notice how, in the paragraphs which follow her outburst, he deflects the reader’s concern for Alice’s loneliness by introducing the white glove, only to reintroduce and even heighten this anxiety when Alice barely manages "to save herself from shrinking away altogether" (AW,II,18). But all is forgotten with the mere mention of the garden:

As she said this she looked down at her hands, and was surprised to see that she had put on one of the Rabbit’s little white kid-gloves while she was talking. "How can I have done that?" she thought. "I must be growing small again."
She got up and went to the table to measure herself by it, and found that, as nearly as she could guess, she was now about two feet high, and was going on shrinking rapidly: she soon found out that the cause of this was the fan she was holding, and she dropped it hastily, just in time to save herself from shrinking away altogether.
"That was a narrow escape!" said Alice, a good deal frightened at the sudden change, but very glad to find herself still in existence. "And now for the garden!"

(AW,II,18)

Perhaps Carroll is implying that Alice feels she can always "find herself," whether "in" or "out of" existence.

The limitations of Alice’s logic also often protect her from comprehending potentially devastating consequences. In Chapter Four, for example, when the white rabbit throws pebbles to try to force her to leave his house and the pebbles turn to little cakes, Alice has the following "bright idea": "'If I eat one of these cakes,' she thought, 'it's sure to make some change in my size; and, as it can't possibly make me larger, it must make me smaller, I suppose' " (AW,II,32). In this instance Alice is lucky, for the cakes do have the desired effect, and she goes on her way, never realizing how close she had come to disaster.
After some experimentation, Alice eventually learns how to control her changes in size. Thus, her potentially frightening experience with the pigeon, where her neck grows so long that "it kept getting entangled among the branches, and every now and then she had to stop and untwist it" (AW, V, 43), is balanced by her first truly successful, self-directed change of height: "After a while she remembered that she still held the pieces of mushroom in her hands, and she set to work very carefully, nibbling first at one and then at the other, and growing sometimes taller, and sometimes shorter, until she had succeeded in bringing herself down to her usual height" (AW, V, 43). It is interesting to note that Alice has no problems in recognizing her "usual height." How little all her previous metamorphoses have affected Alice is exemplified in her reaction when she finally does achieve her correct size, as well as in her willingness to "shrink" herself to nine inches so quickly after her return to "normalcy":

It was so long since she had been anything near the right size, that it felt quite strange at first; but she got used to it in a few minutes, and began talking to herself, as usual, "Come, there's half my plan done now! How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another! However, I've got back to my right size: the next thing is, to get into that beautiful garden--how is that to be done, I wonder?" As she said this, she came suddenly upon an open place, with a little house in it about four feet high. "Whoever lives there," thought Alice, "it'll never do to come upon them this size: why, I should frighten them out of their wits!" So she began nibbling at the right-hand bit again, and did not venture to go near the house till she had brought herself down to nine inches high. (AW, V, 43-44)

Just as Alice's calm acceptance of her frequent physical changes influences the reader's response to what has gone before (for if one
were frightened at the time, Alice's subsequent control over her size renders that fear baseless), so too does Alice's response when she enters the Queen's croquet-ground subtly decrease his concern for her future safety. When she tells herself, "Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all, I needn't be afraid of them!" (AW, VIII, 63), she frees the reader from anxiety over her fundamental well-being, opening the way for a fuller, more sophisticated (because less immediately engaged) response to the events and ideas she encounters.

But though Alice in one sense protects the reader, enticing him to continue with her on her journey by reassuring him that she can withstand the threats of chaos and anarchy, she also robs him of his chief defenses against these same forces. For by the end of the work her self-absorption, her inability to grasp the reality of her own death, and her unconscious yet highly developed faith in logic and language all stand exposed as sham constructions. Because Alice has understood so little of the import of her encounters, she can run off happily to tea, recalling only "what a wonderful dream it had been" (AW, XII, 98). The reader's position is more complex, and much more frustrating. Having identified with Alice throughout most of her journey, he feels the emotional and psychological necessity of her reactions to Wonderland's madness. But though he recognizes that she must return to her own world, which is not less mad, but only mad in different ways, he has learned too much to be able to accept her position for himself. Thus he ends, like so many nonsense characters, isolated—caught between two visions of reality, feeling the claims of both, and unable to accept either.

Alice's response to Wonderland thus governs both the form and content of the work. Alice in Wonderland is episodic, but underlying this structure
is a complex dialectic based on Alice's growing self-assertiveness in
the face of increasingly powerful attacks against her. The crucial
motivating force in this process appears to be language, for as the
Wonderland creatures' attacks against her language increase, so too
does her rebelliousness and self-assertiveness.

The most obvious function of language play in *Alice in Wonderland*
is that it provides a means for the creation of humor; the proliferation
of puns in chapters nine and ten probably represent the clearest expres-
sion of this urge. But its chief significance lies in the fact that it
is through the examination of language that Carroll exposes the falsity
of Alice's vision of what life is and should be.

In Carroll's nonsense, language is a means of gaining power, of
achieving social communication, of ordering one's world, and perhaps
most importantly, of establishing one's individual identity. Language
defines the boundaries of the human imagination, and, hence, of the
self. The connection between language, meaning, and identity is estab-
lished early in *Alice in Wonderland* when Alice first tries to solve the
question, "Who in the world am I?" (AW,I,15), by testing to see "if I
know all the things I used to know" (AW,I,16). She begins with Arithmetic
but is not too upset when she gets her numbers all wrong, for "the
Multiplication-Table doesn't signify" (AW,I,17). Her final test, and
the one which convinces her, is her attempt to repeat "How does the
little--." When, instead of reciting Watts' moralistic and tedious
little poem, Alice says "How doth the little crocodile" in a voice "hoarse
and strange" (AW,I,17), she is finally persuaded that she is no longer
herself: "'I'm sure those are not the right words,' said poor Alice, and
her eyes filled with tears again as she went on, 'I must be Mabel after
all" (AW,I,17).
Parodies such as this are one of the ways Carroll uses language to expose the hypocrisy, and ultimately, the incoherence of Alice's world. The original poem, one of Watts' *Divine Songs for Children*, praises the bee for its industry:

> How doth the little busy bee
> Improve each shining hour,
> And gather honey all the day
> From every opening flower!

> How skillfully she builds her cell!
> How neat she spreads the wax!
> And labours hard to store it well
> With the sweet food she makes.

*(AW, I, 17 fn.)*

The assumption underlying this poem is that the universe is both orderly and economical, and that each creature has an assigned role to play in it. Carroll simply extends its application, arguing that the crocodile is no different from the bee; both do their job well and hence both deserve praise:

> How cheerfully he seems to grin,
> How neatly spread his claws,
> And welcome little fishes in,
> With gently smiling jaws!

*(AW, I, 17)*

It is appropriate and quite revealing that Alice should be the one to recite this verse, for throughout her journey she betrays a remarkable interest, not only in matters of eating and drinking, but of violence and death as well. Her constant references to the killing of cats and birds in the second and third chapters frightens away all the creatures she met in the pool of tears. And when the Mock Turtle asks her if she's been introduced to a lobster, all Alice can respond is "I once tasted--" *(AW, X, 73)*, just as her answer to whether she's ever seen a whiting is "I've often seen them at dinn--" *(AW, X, 80)*. The Mock Turtle's reply,
that "I don't know where Dinn may be . . . but if you've seen them so often, of course you know what they're like?" (AW,X,80), indicates that, for all its madness and threats of violence, Wonderland is in many respects a much kinder place than Alice's world.

Thus besides commenting on the original poem and exposing Alice's more predatory characteristics, the parodies also often emphasize what Kincaid calls "the joyous side of anarchy." When Alice meets the gryphon and the Mock Turtle, for example, they offer with great excitement to teach her the lovely "Lobster-Quadrille," a song depicting the traditional expression of social harmony—the dance:

Will you, wo'n't you, will you, wo'n't you, will you join the dance?
Will you, wo'n't you, will you, wo'n't you, wo'n't you join the dance

(AW,X,80)

This poem below, a parody of Mary Howitt's grim "The Spider and the Fly," provides a solid moral to the sad tale of the spider's trickery:

And now, dear little children, who may this story read
To idle, silly, flattering words, I pray you ne'er give heed;
Unto an evil counsellor close heart, and ear, and eye,
And take a lesson from the tale of the Spider and the Fly.

(AW,X,80,fn.)

In the original Alice's Adventures Underground the "Lobster-Quadrille" does not occur; instead, Carroll parodies a minstrel song he heard the Liddell sisters sing the day before their famous river expedition. It is interesting to ponder why he made the change, for although Carroll de-personalized certain references, this would not have been necessary here. Furthermore, the original poem also describes a dance, so Carroll did not
need to change the verses to introduce that element either. Thus it seems relatively certain that Carroll altered the poem as he did to make the contrast between Wonderland and Alice's world clearer. For in spite, or perhaps because of its anarchism, Wonderland is able to convert a poem of entrapment and violence (Victorian social Darwinism?) to a comic celebration of social harmony.

This contrast, the juxtaposition of Wonderland's exuberant freedom and joy with Alice's obsession with social boundaries, violence, and death, is further emphasized by that which follows. Alice is not at all impressed with the "Lobster-Quadrille": "'Thank you, it's a very interesting dance to watch," said Alice, feeling very glad that it was over at last." (AW,X,80). Soon after, and at the specific request of the gryphon, she recites a verse of her own, "Tis the voice of the Lobster." One of the most disquieting and surreal of all the verses in Alice in Wonderland, this poem moves from a scene of generalized fear in the first stanza to murder in the second:

'Tis the voice of the Lobster: I heard him declare
'You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair.'
As a duck with his eyelids, so he with his nose
Trims his belt and his buttons, and turns out his toes.
When the sands are all dry, he is gay as a lark,
And will talk in contemptuous tones of the Shark:
But, when the tide rises and sharks are around,
His voice has a timid and tremulous sound.

I passed by his garden, and marked with one eye,
How the Owl and the Panther were sharing a pie:
The Panther took pie-crust, and gravy, and meat,
While the Owl had the dish as its share of the treat.
When the pie was all finished, the Owl, as a boon,
Was kindly permitted to pocket the spoon:
While the Panther received knife and fork with a growl,
And concluded the banquet by ________________________.

(AW,X,82,83-84)
Alice's poem reverses the image of trust and harmony established in the Mock Turtle's song, substituting for them a bleak picture of competition leading inevitably to violence and death.

The Gryphon and Mock Turtle are confused and even a bit frightened by what they hear:

"What is the use of repeating all that stuff?" the Mock Turtle interrupted, "if you don't explain it as you go on? It's by far the most confusing thing that I ever heard!"
"Yes, I think you'd better leave off," said the Gryphon, and Alice was only too glad to do so.

(\textit{AW}, X, 84)

Their response is similar to that of the Caterpillar in chapter five, who categorically rejects Alice's other verse, "You are old, Father William":

"That is not said right," said the Caterpillar.
"\textit{Not quite} right, I'm afraid," said Alice, timidly:
"some of the words have got altered."
"It is wrong from beginning to end," said the Caterpillar, decidedly; and there was silence for some minutes.

\textit{(AW}, V, 41)

In both instances, the implication seems to be that Wonderland finds Alice's world to be just as frightening and unacceptable as she finds theirs.

These parodies are an ideal technique for nonsense, for they subvert the values of the original work indirectly, rather than through overt criticism. This preference for an oblique rather than a frontal attack is characteristic of both Lear's and Carroll's work. Such a strategy insures that the reader will not become so defensive or anxious that he will close himself to a content which is often quite violent, anti-social, and nihilistic. As with the limericks, where Lear forces the reader himself to relate the verse and its illustrations, Carroll in the parodies requires the reader to determine the significance of the deviations from the original verse. Lear and Carroll present; they seldom
comment. "Order" (the original poem) and disorder (the parody) are balanced; the point is made implicitly, but it is up to the reader to make the explicit connections.

The Wonderland creatures Alice meets are remarkably talkative and disputatious, but then so is Alice. When she is falling down the tunnel, for example, she starts talking to herself because "there was nothing else to do" (AW,1,9). Alice places great importance on using "good English," though in keeping with her personality her goals are essentially practical. Language is like a "book of rules" (AW,1,10) to Alice; if one uses the proper words and follows the appropriate conventions one ought to succeed. Her view of language thus corresponds to her view of reality; she has ultimate (because ignorant) faith in the social and ethical constructs of her society.

As Jacqueline Flescher has noted, "Conversation, or more precisely, argument, is the essential vehicles of nonsense in Alice."\(^5\) Furthermore, much of the conversation is itself about language, with Alice's poems and speech providing a frequent source of debate. For it is chiefly through attacks against Alice's language that Wonderland exposes the absurd foundations of her world. Alice's chief illusion concerning both language and life in general is that they are based on a coherent, consistent, inherently meaningful system which, if followed, allows one to control one's destiny. Carroll blasts this illusion by demonstrating time and again the arbitrary, even chaotic, nature of language. Ironically, he often accomplishes this by having the Wonderland creatures apparently represent the side of logic. By trying to force Alice to make her language logical, they reveal the untenability of her position. Alice comes to
perceive this attack against her language as a threat to her identity and sanity: "It's really dreadful . . . the way all the creatures argue. It's enough to drive one crazy!" (AW,VI,46). And in a final act of incredible irony she uses language to save herself from her dream—"Who cares for you . . . You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (AW,XII,97).

Critics who are fond of comparing nonsense to dreams often argue that the conclusion of Alice in Wonderland is arbitrary, that it ends, not out of formal or aesthetic appropriateness, but simply because it does. Nothing could be further from the truth; all of Alice in Wonderland functions to prepare the reader for the conclusion, which is but the culminating expression of a series of tensions that Carroll balances with great sophistication. Alice in Wonderland can perhaps best be viewed as having a tripartite structure. The first four chapters initiate the reader to Wonderland, establish Alice's essential reliability as a guide, and introduce language as a crucial element in the dialectic between order and disorder. Chapters Five through Seven clarify the relationship between language, identity, and meaning. In this section Alice faces a series of increasingly strong attacks against her language and logic that finally bring about her abrupt departure from the tea party. This act is the true climax of Alice in Wonderland, in that Alice is never again as vulnerable as she was up to this point. The final chapters of the work, which occur inside the long-anticipated garden, elaborate on what Alice has both lost and gained by her rejection of Wonderland; it is here that the joyous side of Wonderland's madness is most clearly and fully expressed. The reader travels with Alice on her journey, separated at times from her intellectually by his awareness of the forces that impel her to act as she does, but ultimately moved by the same pressures, pressures
which often carry both Alice and the reader to the brink of anarchy, only to whisk them back to temporary safety, so that both can play and be played with yet a while longer.

The opening chapters of *Alice in Wonderland* focus primarily on Alice's frequent and confusing changes of size. As has been demonstrated, Alice is never frightened for long by these "metamorphoses," first because she cannot really imagine that she might not exist; and second, because Carroll always introduces some distraction which inhibits both Alice's and the reader's concern. The care with which Carroll establishes Wonderland as a special world also tends to reduce the reader's concern, if not for Alice's happiness, then for her safety. In one sense, as soon as Alice emerges unharmed from her long fall through the tunnel ("Alice was not a bit hurt, and she jumped up on to her feet in a moment" [AW,I,2]), a powerful pattern is established; Alice seems to be somehow exempted from "normal" physical conventions. This does not mean that the reader never fears for Alice, but only that he does not know what to fear. He can but hope that the special protection afforded her in the beginning will continue throughout the journey.

The first significant discussion of language in *Alice in Wonderland* occurs in Chapter Three, "A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale," with the following argument between the Duck and the Mouse, who is attempting to dry Alice and the other animals with "the driest thing I know" (AW,III,22), an excerpt from a history of Briton:

"I beg your pardon!" said the Mouse, frowning, but very politely. "Did you speak?"
"Not I!" said the Lory, hastily.
"I thought you did," said the Mouse. "I proceed. 'Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him; and even Stigand, the
patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable--""
"Found what?" said the Duck.
"Found it," the Mouse replied rather crossly: "of course you know what 'it' means."
"I know what 'it' means well enough, when I find a thing," said the Duck: "It's generally a frog, or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?"
"The Mouse did not notice this question, but hurriedly went on . . ."
(AW,III,22)

In its attempt to specify the meaning of "it," the Duck inadvertently raises an essential issue, the relationship, if there is one, between language and reality, between the word and that which it represents, and the way in which an individual's own experience and inclinations can influence this connection. Lewis Carroll is very modern in his sense of how language, rather than furthering communication between men, more often acts to isolate them. This is certainly the case with Alice who, despite her good intentions, alienates all of the creatures she meets in the pool of tears with her constant references to the killing of animals. Alice simply cannot modify her assumptions and language to fit her audience. This remains her problem, and also perhaps her greatest defense, throughout her adventure.

But though Alice is upset when she offends the mouse by asking it, "Ou est ma chatte?" (AW,II,19), or lonely when she scares away the other animals by talking of how Dinah would "eat a little bird as soon as look at it!" (AW,III,26), she is not threatened in any serious way by her failures. Her attitude changes when Alice meets the Caterpillar in the fifth chapter. Her confrontation with him is different from any interchange she has had up to this point, for he strikes at the heart of the assumptions she uses to block out reality, and it is but the first of a series of strong verbal attacks directed against her in the next three
chapters. These encounters, with the Caterpillar, the pigeon, the Duchess, the Frog-Footman, the Cheshire-Cat, the March Hare, Mad Hatter, and the Dormouse, all challenge Alice's identity, her reason, and her social standards, and they all do so through attacks against her use of language, and the unconscious assumptions which support it.

In some respects, "Advice from a Caterpillar" can be viewed as a transition between the early chapters, with their emphasis on size and body changes, and the later chapters, which focus more strongly on the relationship between language, meaning, individual identity, and social relationships. Although Alice has previously wondered who she is, the caterpillar's abrupt question represents a new challenge to her:

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar.
This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I--I hardly know, Sir, just at present--at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."
"What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar, sternly. "Explain yourself!"
"I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."
"I don't see," said the Caterpillar.
"I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly," Alice replied, very politely, "for I can't understand it myself, to begin with, and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."
"It isn't," said the Caterpillar. (AW,V,35-36)

Although Alice thinks that the reason she can't "explain myself"--define herself in terms that the Caterpillar could understand--involves only her body changes, the problem is more complex. For in her conversations with both the Caterpillar and the pigeon, Alice is confronted with the inability of language to bridge the gap between those whose life experiences lack essential similarities. Had she been more sensitive,
Alice might have avoided offending the mouse and the birds with her constant references to Dinah. But though she is aware of the stages of a caterpillar's growth, she cannot comprehend, much less articulate, that changes much more radical than those she has already undergone might be considered as a normal part of one's development. Thus, Alice's sense of selfhood is fundamentally different from that of the Caterpillar; although they both appear to be speaking "English," their "languages" vary, at least in regard to such important concepts as that of identity. Alice can no more "explain" herself than the Caterpillar can "see" her meaning.

This inability to express herself plus the Caterpillar's contemptuous tone and abrupt questions provoke Alice's first hesitant signs of rebellion against Wonderland's attempts to force her to examine her most cherished assumptions. During their conversation, Alice moves from feeling "a little irritated at the Caterpillar's making such very short remarks" (AW, V, 36), to stronger emotions:

"What size do you want to be?" it asked.
"Oh, I'm not particular as to size," Alice hastily replied; "only one doesn't like changing so often, you know."
"I don't know," said the Caterpillar.
Alice said nothing: she had never been so contradicted in all her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper.

(AW, V, 41)

What causes the problem in the above exchange is the Caterpillar's habit of taking what Alice intends to be a mere idiomatic coloring to her point ("you know") as a substantive statement ("I don't know"). He is not alone in this habit of interpreting language literally, of trying to make language logical; in fact, in the next two chapters Alice meets
even more combative characters. And as their attacks on her language and logic increase, so too does her rebelliousness and self-assertiveness.

In Chapter Six, "Pig and Pepper," for example, Alice is attacked both by the Frog-Footman and by the Duchess, though in somewhat different ways. Surprisingly, the Frog-Footman irritates Alice the most; at least, she reacts more strongly to his maddening logic:

"How am I to get in?" asked Alice again, in a louder tone.
"Are you to get in at all?" said the Footman.
"That's the first question, you know."
It was, no doubt: only Alice did not like to be told so. "It's really dreadful," she muttered to herself, "the way all the creatures argue. It's enough to drive one crazy!"

(AW, VI, 46)

Here the footman raises a linguistic point disguised as a point of logic. True, Alice has failed to ask the "first question," but it is also true that in normal usage this particular first question is implied in the second. As with the Caterpillar, the footman either will not or cannot understand Alice's meaning because of his extremely literal orientation towards language. The Wonderland creatures are chipping away at the illusion of certainty and control that Alice has granted to language, and she cannot stand their examination, for it threatens her individual and social identity. Her response is instinctive, not intellectual; it is important to note that Alice has progressed from thinking to herself to muttering, and that she has begun to view this kind of argument as a threat to her sanity.

Alice really speaks very little with the Duchess at their first meeting, though again what is emphasized is the way in which her attempts
at dialogue are thwarted, though in a less sophisticated manner:

"I didn't know that Cheshire-Cats always grinned; in fact, I didn't know that cats could grin."
"They all can," said the Duchess, "and most of them do."
"I don't know of any that do," Alice said very politely, feeling quite pleased to have got into a conversation.
"You don't know much," said the Duchess, "and that's a fact."

(AW,VI,48)

Her subsequent conversation with the Cheshire-Cat is less overtly aggravating than her previous encounters. When she asks it a question, for example, the Cat responds with a series of qualifications quite similar to those made by the Frog-Footman, yet Alice accepts his corrections. Perhaps she is more impressed by the Cheshire-Cat's "very long claws and a great many teeth" (AW,VI,51):

"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."
Alice felt this could not be denied, so she tried another question.

(AW,VI,51)

Nevertheless, when the Chesire-Cat tries to convince Alice that "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (AW,VI,51) matters become more serious. Alice's diffidence, and her redefinition of terms indicates that, although she doesn't contradict the Chesire-Cat directly, she hasn't accepted his argument as valid:
"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."
Alice didn't think that proved it at all; however, she went on: "And how do you know that you're mad?"
"To begin with," said the Cat, "a dog's not mad. You grant that?"
"I suppose so," said Alice.
"Well, then," the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad."
"I call it purring, not growling," said Alice.
"Call it what you like," said the Cat. "Do you play croquet with the Queen to-day?"
(AW, VI, 51-52)

The introduction of the croquet game takes Alice's mind from the question of madness. The Cheshire-Cat's pronouncement serves, however, to prepare both Alice and the reader for what is to come.

Because Alice is apparently not very upset by the Cheshire-Cat's assertions, their conversation, though it in one sense intensifies and clarifies the pressures that have been building, also provides a brief relaxation of the tensions created in the previous two chapters. One further result of this is the increased force this gives the next chapter, "A Mad Tea-Party," where Alice faces the strongest, most direct attacks in all of Alice in Wonderland.

From the very first, Carroll has emphasized how anxious Alice is to find someone with whom to converse, and it is perhaps this desire, so far almost completely thwarted, that impels her to respond with such unusual stridency when the March Hare, Mad Hatter, and the Dormouse attempt to prevent her from joining their tea-party: "'no room! No room!' they cried out when they saw Alice coming. 'There's plenty of room!' said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table." (AW, VII, 54). Judging by the external situation--
tea is, after all, the one meal most clearly devoted to genteel conversation--Alice might well hope for a little friendly talk. What she receives, however, are a few very severe lessons about language and manners, as well as some rather brutal personal attacks.

The March Hare and Mad Hatter differ from previous characters Alice has met in that they seem to enjoy baiting her, and their hostility extends to all that she says and does. Immediately after Alice's admittedly somewhat rude intrusion, for example, the following interchange occurs:

"Have some wine," the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.
Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. "I don't see any wine," she remarked.
"There isn't any," said the March Hare.
"Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it," said Alice angrily.
"It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited," said the March Hare.
"I didn't know it was your table," said Alice: "it's laid for a great many more than three."
"Your hair wants cutting," said the Hatter.
He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech. (AW,VII,54-55)

When Alice responds to this by primly telling the Hatter, "You should learn not to make personal remarks . . . it's very rude" (AW,VII,55), he makes no immediate response other than to open his eyes wide and propose a riddle. He doesn't forget this slight, however, and is over-joyed when he catches Alice at the same offense later on in their conversation:
"Take some more tea," the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.
"I've had nothing yet," Alice replied in an offended tone: "so I can't take more."
"You mean you can't take less." said the Hatter: "it's very easy to take more than nothing."
"Nobody asked your opinion," said Alice.
"Who's making personal remarks now?" the Hatter asked triumphantly.

(AW, VII, 59)

As with so many of Alice's confrontations in these last few chapters, the cause of this argument involves the correct use of language. Throughout Alice in Wonderland, Carroll has played with the contradictions and ambiguities arising from the differences between language as a system, one which could presumably communicate exact meaning, and language as it is. As has been noted, Alice has become increasingly frustrated by the Wonderland creatures' attempts to make her spoken language function according to the rules of logic. Her arguments with the March Hare and Mad Hatter prove to be most provoking of all, and they finally move Alice to action.

The fact that language provides the first substantive point of argumentation in "A Mad Tea Party" further emphasizes its priority:

"Why is a raven like a writing-desk?"
"Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles--I believe I can guess that," she added aloud.
"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.
"Exactly so," said Alice.
"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least--at least I mean what I say--that's the same thing, you know."
"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'!"

(AW, VII, 55)
Alice never really grasps the implications of this dialogue. Thus when the Mad Hatter goes on to discuss his watch, which tells him the day instead of the time, she thinks: "The Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English" (AW, VII, 56). She never realizes that there is no inherent relationship between "meaning" and the English language.

Alice uses language to "deaden" her world, to provide a false sense of stability and order. The March Hare and Mad Hatter challenge this desensitizing, though Alice never understands the true nature of their attack. In this chapter, normally abstract, controllable concepts such as "time" begin to assume a life of their own--"'If you knew Time as well as I do,' said the Hatter, tossing his head contemptuously, 'you wouldn't talk about wasting it. It's him.' (AW, VII, 56) Similarly, the following series of puns on the word "well" create the sense that language is slipping dangerously out of control:

Alice did not wish to offend the Dormouse again, so she began very cautiously: "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 this 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. (AW, VII, 60)

The most serious attack occurs at the close of the Dormouse's story:

"did you ever see such 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.
This piece of rudeness was more than Alice could bear: she got up in great disgust, and walked off"
(AW, VII, 60; my emphasis)
Alice's retreat at this specific point is both inevitable and necessary, and represents her response to the pressures which have been escalating in the previous two chapters. Alice can deal with her strange metamorphoses; in fact, she finally gains control over the process and uses it to further her own ends. For what Alice faces is not only "an almost total destruction of the fabric of our so-called logical, orderly, and coherent approach to the world," as Donald Rackin states, but also complete isolation, and perhaps even the annihilation of the self. Language rules supreme in Alice in Wonderland. It is the chief pastime of the inhabitants, and their constant topic of conversation. In Chapters Five through Seven, and later on in the garden, many of the characters represent words come to life—the Cheshire Cat, March Hare, Mad Hatter, Queen of Hearts, and the Mock Turtle, for example. The Hatter's command, that Alice "shouldn't talk" is the final and strongest threat to her sense of herself. One reason why Carroll does not have Alice abandon Wonderland at this point, perhaps, is that if the story ended now, Alice would appear to have been defeated by Wonderland, and the frightening truth of the situation—the realization that all men are isolated, that language's arbitrariness implies our own radical instability—would be too harshly evident.

Nonsense is a subversive art; Alice goes on to find the door to the garden and has further adventures, which end in her rejection of Wonderland. Much of importance follows "The Mad Tea-Party"; Carroll both enlarges his complex presentation of language and renders more ambiguous Alice's final dismissal of her dream. But in terms of the underlying dialectic, the balancing of the forces of order with those of disorder,
the climax occurs in Chapter Seven. Alice walks away from the Mad Tea-Party, as she must if she is to maintain her sense of identity.

Alice's first sight in the garden is of the card-gardeners painting a white rose-tree red; this deception, the betrayal of her hopes of "bright flower-beds and cool fountains" (AW, VII, 61), aptly introduces her to the Queen's Croquet-Ground, and fore-shadows the nature of future events. It is perhaps this sense of betrayal, combined with the growing self-assertiveness that has manifested itself in Alice's last few encounters, that prompts her immediate recognition and mastery of the situation:

"What's your name, child?"
"My name is Alice, so please your Majesty," said Alice very politely; but she added, to herself, "Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!"

(AW, VII, 63)

This silent rebellion is soon followed by more outward defiance, as she challenges the angry queen, an act of particular audacity for one such as Alice, who is always impressed by titles and regalia:

"And who are these?" said the Queen, pointing to the three gardeners . . .
"How should I know?" said Alice, surprised at her own courage. "It's no business of mine."
"The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, began screaming "Off with her head! Off with--"
"Nonsense!" said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent.

(AW, VII, 63-64)

Later, when the Queen orders that the gardeners be beheaded, Alice takes decisive steps to save them: "'You sha'n't be beheaded!' said Alice, and she put them into a large flowerpot that stood near" (AW, VIII, 65).
It is important to note that the pattern here is essentially the same as that developed in Chapters Five through Seven, where Alice moves from silent dissatisfaction, to muttering rebelliously to herself, to more outright statements of defiance, and finally, to action—except that in Chapter Eight the process moves much more quickly. Again, Alice's chief concern is not for her own safety, the continued integrity of her body, for though she does later in the chapter "feel uneasy" about the Queen's single violent solution to all problems, and briefly looks about "for some way of escape" (AW,VIII,67), she has already illustrated in her first encounter with the Queen that she is more than able to deal with her, when necessary. What does concern her is the continued integrity of her mind.

She is still looking for someone with whom to converse, and is quite pleased when her old friend the Cat appears: "It's the Cheshire-Cat: now I shall have somebody to talk to" (AW,VIII,67). In what is perhaps one of the most significant passages in Alice in Wonderland, she explains to him what really bothers her about life in the garden: "I don't think they play at all fairly,' Alice began, in rather a complaining tone, 'and they all quarrel so dreadfully one can't hear oneself speak— and they don't seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them—and you've no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive" (AW,VII,67). Here Carroll emphasizes several major points: Alice's naive tendency to view life as a game, something at which one can succeed if only one plays fairly, i.e., follows orderly social rules; her frustration at being denied communication with others and the way in which this denial violates her sense of self—"one can't
hear oneself speak"; and her confusion at losing the security of such "dead" or abstract concepts as time. The reader's attention is immediately distracted by the King's frustrated attempts to behead the Cheshire-Cat, who had appeared bodiless, but the criticisms remain, helping prepare the reader for Alice's final rejection of Wonderland at the trial.

Considering the pattern that Lewis Carroll has been developing, that of escalating tensions until Alice can bear them no longer, one may at first be perplexed as to the function of Chapters Nine and Ten, "The Mock Turtle's Story" and "The Lobster-Quadrille." Here, for the first time in her journey, Alice meets characters who are openly sympathetic with her position, who listen to her story and agree with her that "It's all about as curious as it can be" (AW,X,82). Doesn't this destroy the design of the closing chapters, which seem to be leading Alice inexorably to her final action at the trial?

There are in fact several important reasons why Carroll chooses to interrupt temporarily Alice's rush towards the safety of her own world. First of all, he has already clearly established Alice's antagonism towards Wonderland's values and her ability to defend herself when she feels threatened. The reader has seen her walk away from the tea-party and confront the Queen of Hearts; thus he has no serious doubts that she will continue to deal effectively with any situations she meets in the future. The question really is no longer if Alice will reject Wonderland, but when. Viewed in this way, these two chapters provide just enough of a break after the intense pressures of "The Queen's Croquet-Garden" to put the reader slightly off-guard, providing a reasonable degree of suspense during the trial.
More importantly, Carroll uses these chapters to increase the ambiguity of Alice's final act, to insure that the claims of order and sanity have been balanced by those of disorder. For through Alice's encounter with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, Carroll reveals the positive aspects of Wonderland's madness, comparing them effectively with the obsessive concern with death typical of Alice and her world. As I have mentioned earlier, Alice's poem, "Tis the Voice of the Lobster," with its evocation of fear, violence, and death contrasts with bitter irony to the gay "lobster-Quadrille," which is all the more effective because, as Kincaid has noted, the latter "introduces a hint of death only to triumph over it." 7

Although the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle support and sympathize with Alice, she is still unable to communicate with them for, despite the good intentions of all, language is still a barrier. This is also true in the case of the Ugly Duchess, though for a different reason. Alice cannot converse successfully with the Ugly Duchess because the Duchess, in a misconstrued attempt to emphasize the cognitive aspects of language--"Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves" (AW,IX,71)--makes all communication impossible: "Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them otherwise" (AW,IX,72). Alice cannot understand the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, however, because their constant use of puns causes them to overemphasize language as sound. Thus, in these two chapters, language itself begins to fracture into its various components. And though Alice does not consciously perceive this schism as a threat, it adds to her sense of frustration.
Once again, as with the mad tea-party, Alice has met a group with
whom she attempts to communicate, and once again, despite their concern,
she fails. It is interesting to note that Alice herself seems to have
been only half-willing in this exchange. Although she is pleased to see
the Duchess in such good spirits when they first meet again, Alice soon
finds her attempts at friendliness more disturbing than her previous
displays of anger:

"I dare say you're wondering why I don't put
my arm around your waist," the Duchess said, after
a pause: "The reason is, that I'm doubtful about
the temper of your flamingo. Shall I try the
experiment?"

"He might bite," Alice cautiously replied, not
feeling at all anxious to have the experiment tried.
(AW, IX, 71)

And, as has been noted, she is quite impatient when the Gryphon and
Mock-Turtle perform their truly lovely "Lobster-Quadrille" for her
pleasure: "'Thank you, it's a very interesting dance to watch,'
said Alice, feeling very glad that it was over at last" (AW, X, 80).

In a sense, during these two chapters the momentum of Alice's
progression is not so much interrupted, as underplayed. Once in each
chapter, for example, Carroll has Alice express her frustration:

"Everybody says 'come on!' here," thought
Alice, as she went slowly after it [the
Gryphon]: "I never was so ordered about
before, in all my life, never!"
(AW, IX, 74)

"How the creatures order one about, and
make one repeat lessons!" thought Alice.
"I might just as well be at school at
once."
(AW, X, 82)
These remarks, combined with her impatience, assure the reader that Alice has not changed. At the beginning of "The Mock-Turtle's Story," for example, she is still as rule-bound as ever, as she tries to use her experience with the Duchess to devise a formula to explain all human behavior: "Maybe it's always pepper that makes people hot-tempered ... and vinegar makes them sour--and camomile that makes them bitter--and--and--barley-sugar and such things that make children sweet-tempered." (AW, IX, 70).

In these chapters then, Carroll stresses Alice's rigidity by showing that even under friendly circumstances she is unable to relate to others. And even though external attacks against Alice do not occur, the threat to her sanity remains:

"Thinking again?" the Duchess asked, with another dig of her sharp little chin.
"I've a right to think," said Alice sharply, for she was beginning to feel a little worried.
"Just about as much right," said the Duchess, "as pigs have to fly."

(AW, IX, 72)

At the same time, by presenting Wonderland at its most innocent and playful, Carroll emphasizes all that Alice lacks--a sense of joy, brotherhood, and comic freedom--and allows Wonderland its chance to pass judgment on her. And in the view of the Gryphon and Mock-Turtle, Alice's world "sounds uncommon nonsense" (AW, X, 82).

When Alice arrives at the court, having been strangely and abruptly whisked there by the Gryphon, she finds representatives of all those she has met, both inside and outside of the garden: "The King and Queen of Hearts were seated on their throne when they arrived, with a great crowd assembled about them--all sorts of little birds and beasts, as well as the whole pack of cards: the Knave was standing before them ... and near the King was the White Rabbit, with a trumpet in one hand, and a
scroll of parchment in the other " (AW,XI,86). That all these characters are gathered together here is only appropriate, for in fact it is not just the Knave of Hearts who is on trial--at least not in Alice's mind--but all of Wonderland as well. Alice is at first excited to be present; as one might expect, she is especially pleased that she knows the names of the judge, jurors, and jurybox. This satisfaction is short-lived, however, and Alice first begins to realize that the trial may not be like those she had read about in the newspaper when the Gryphon remarks that the jurors are busy writing their names on their slates "for fear they should forget them before the end of the trial" (AW,XI,86). Her response is immediate and indignant: "Stupid things!" (AW,XI,86).

Just as Alice's sense of betrayal when she finally enters the garden encourages her self-assertiveness, so too does her disappointment concerning the absurd legal proceedings embolden her. Alice's practical knowledge of trials is not great; she is certainly both naive and callous when she interprets the meaning of the word "suppressed," for example:

Here one of the guinea-pigs cheered, and was immediately suppressed by the officers of the court . . . They had a large canvas bag, which tied up at the mouth with strings: into this they slipped the guinea-pig, head first, and then sat upon it.)
"I'm glad I've seen that done," thought Alice. "I've so often read [of i] in newspapers"

(YW,XI,90)

Yet she clearly understands such essential concepts as evidence, sentencing, and justice. Authors have often chosen to use a trial as a means of evaluating society. The trial is a perfect conclusion since it implies a lucid definition of words, more than that, a rigorous structure behind them and
an exact match between the word and its object or event. Words are truth in a trial. It is not accidental that the poem recited as evidence in the final chapter is the most senseless in the work, for the trial represents the final destruction of any hope that language might contribute either to truth or to justice.

Early in the trial, Alice begins to grow--this time for no explicable reason: "Just at this moment Alice felt a very curious sensation, which puzzled her a good deal until she made out what it was: she was beginning to grow larger again, and she thought at first she would get up and leave the court; but on second thoughts she decided to remain where she was as long as there was room for her" (AW,XI,88). Alice's rapid growth seems to represent the unconscious forces at play in her ever-increasing inability to "fit" Wonderland, while her lack of control over this emphasizes the inevitability of her return to her own world. It is important to note that Alice is not the only one doing the rejecting; the King also tries to force her to leave the court because of her height: "At this moment the King, who had been for some time busily writing in his note-book, called out "Silence!" and read out from his book, 'Rule forty-two, All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.' " (AW,XII,93). Alice refuses to leave, but Wonderland has had its say; it has found Alice as impossible as she has found it.

Alice's rapid growth parallels, and perhaps even contributes to, her increasing audacity:

"I wish you wouldn't squeeze so," said the Dormouse, who was sitting next to her. "I can hardly breathe."
"I ca'n't help it," said Alice very meekly: "I'm growing."
"You've got no right to grow here," said the Dormouse.
"Don't talk nonsense," said Alice more boldly: "you know you're growing too."

(\textit{AW,XI,88})

It is not until she herself is called as a witness, however, that Alice finally gives vent to her frustration and indignation. She begins merely by refusing to participate, but when the King attempts to insert a set of meaningless verses into the record, she erupts:

"That's the most important piece of evidence we've heard yet," said the King, rubbing his hands; "so now let the jury--"
"If any one of them can explain it," said Alice, (she had grown so large in the last few minutes that she wasn't a bit afraid of interrupting him,) "I'll give him sixpence. I don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it."

(\textit{AW,XII,95})

For with these verses, Alice apparently realizes that language, and all that involves language, is close to the point of disintegration. Interestingly enough, this poem is more incoherent than "Jabberwocky," despite the fact that its words are all "regular" English, while "Jabberwocky" depends heavily on neologisms,

When the Queen attempts to further disorder Alice's normal expectations by pronouncing "sentence first--verdict afterwards" (\textit{AW,XII,96}) the process of Alice's disenchantment is complete:

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly.
"The idea of having the sentence first!"
"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.
"I wo'n'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!"

(\textit{AW,XII,97})
As Rackin has noted, it is both ironic and yet fitting that Alice should accomplish her "liberation" through the act of naming: "By the time Alice and the reader reach this last scene in Wonderland it should be quite obvious to all that language is an inadequate construct. Yet it is by this construct that Alice preserves her sanity and identity."  

Alice escapes the burden of knowledge. As she has all along, she uses a mad concept of language to protect both her ego and her imagination from risking an encounter with the chaos that lies outside her narrow world of social rules. Alice uses language to "deaden" her world, but in Alice in Wonderland Lewis Carroll brings back to life all that she attempts to suppress. And so it is finally the reader, not Alice, who learns "how confusing it is all the things being alive" (AW,VII,67).
FOOTNOTES


3 Kincaid, 93.

4 Kincaid, 97.


7 Kincaid, 98.

8 Rackin, p. 359.
CHAPTER FOUR: THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS, AND BEYOND

When Alice first surveys Looking-Glass Land and realizes that it is "a great huge game of chess, that's being played—all over the world" she is so delighted that "her heart began to beat quick with excitement," for she immediately perceives the game as a means of achieving power—"I wouldn't mind being a Pawn... though of course I should like to be a Queen, best" (TLG,II,125-26). Once the real Queen confirms that her wishes will be fulfilled and outlines her moves to her, promising that "in the Eighth Square we shall be Queens together, and it's all feasting and fun!" (TLG,II,128), Alice never wavers in her attempts to fulfill her destiny. But although she imagines herself to be in control of her actions—"I don't want to be anybody's prisoner" (TLG,VII,181)—the reader comes to realize that she is but rushing into a trap of her own devising.

In Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll shows how man uses language to insulate himself from the chaos that surrounds him. Through the Looking-Glass continues this theme, examining in greater detail the price he pays for the arbitrary order he imposes on the world, and the ploys he uses to give himself the illusion of freedom. The game of chess thus controls both structure and theme, for it organizes Alice's journey, providing an image of order and continuity, while simultaneously exposing its absurdity. The chess-board world that Alice sees controls the surrounding landscape, but is also fragments it, converting the organic into the artificial. Alice becomes a queen, but she is almost destroye
by the players she has imagined she will rule.

Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass can both be
considered subversive, in that in each Carroll at first establishes
a secure position for the reader, encouraging him to relax his
defenses and become closely involved in the story, only to destroy
gradually that which has protected him. In Alice in Wonderland
Carroll does this by compelling the reader to identify closely with
Alice, who at first shields him from Wonderland's threats. But as
Alice is shown to be increasingly less sensitive, as her defenses are
exposed as shams, and as she herself weakens under concerted attacks
against her language and logic, the reader's position is weakened,
leaving him vulnerable to knowledge he might otherwise manage to avoid
facing.

In Through the Looking-Glass Alice's role is less crucial. Alice
is no longer part rebel and part conformist; only seven and a half, she
has stepped almost completely inside the circle of adult experience.
The reader still tends to identify with her, but as Jan Gordon points
out, the relationship differs: "In the first book, the reader is more
interested in Alice's adventures, in what happens to her on a relatively
experiential level. On the second trip, we tend to accept her and look
around with her."¹ Much of the reader's reduced involvement with Alice
can be attributed to the fact that Carroll makes it clear from the start
through the use of chess diagrams and references to the game itself, that
Alice will succeed in achieving her goal.

Even before beginning the story, the reader is forced to recognize
the outcome, for Carroll prefaces Through the Looking-Glass with a chess
diagram and list of the moves:
9. Alice becomes Queen . . . 192
10. Alice castles (feast) . . . 200
11. Alice takes R.Q. & wins . . 204
   (TLG,104)

This information is repeated in full by the Red Queen at the end of
the second chapter, perhaps to insure that those who scorn prefaces and
introductory material will not miss this vital information. The rigidity
of the structure provided by the chess game, the fact that Carroll appears
to be telling the reader all that is to come, is intentionally reassuring.
The chess game functions throughout the work to balance the content,
which is both more specific and extreme in its articulation of nihilistic,
anarchic, and violent ideas and situations than is that of Alice in
Wonderland. Its significance shifts radically, however, as Alice proceeds
on her journey.

A major cause of this shift involves the characters Alice meets,
particularly the nursery rhyme figures. For whether they are trying
to avoid their fate, as do Tweedledum, Tweedledee, and Humpty Dumpty,
or whether they willingly act it out, as do the Lion and the Unicorn,
they are doomed by language to repeat endlessly their particular story.
For in Wonderland, as in a chess game, and perhaps also in life, "When
you've once said a thing, that fixes it, and you must take the con-
sequences" (TLG,IX,195). By the end of Through the Looking-Glass, the
reader realizes that Alice is just as bound as the nursery rhyme figures;
that although, like Humpty Dumpty, she has delusions of grandeur, like
him she is a prisoner of language.

In Alice in Wonderland, Alice at one point muses that "'There ought
to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up,
I'll write one--but I'm grown up now,' she added in a sorrowful tone:
'at least there's no room to grow up any more here!' " (AW, IV, 29).

Despite her age, Alice *really* is grown up in *Through the Looking-Glass*, and it is perhaps not accidental that she is much more actively involved in the creation of her second journey. For rather than falling confusedly into an alien world, here Alice herself consciously creates the elements of her dream, as she indulges in a favorite playtime activity: "Kitty dear, let's pretend--" (TLG, I, 110). Thus, after asserting that "you're the Red Queen, Kitty!" (TLG, I, 110), Alice goes on to dissolve the barriers between her two worlds:

Oh, Kitty, how nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-Glass House! I'm sure it's got, oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow, Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through--"
She was up on the chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.

(TLG, I, 111)

And though it may be an overstatement to say that Alice creates the chess-board world, it seems clear that it appears to provide precisely the kind of certainty she so desperately craved in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Although the general characteristics of Alice's personality have changed little since her first adventure, subtle but important shifts have occurred. She is still curious, for example, but only until she joins the game and hopes to become a queen. For once inside Looking-Glass Land, she devotes all her energies to achieving her goal, revealing obvious irritation when several of the characters offer to distract her by reciting poems or other such happy trivia. The force of her obsession with achieving power is most clearly established in the eighth chapter, where she callously responds to the White Knight's entreaty that she
"wait and wave that handkerchief when I get to that turn in the road" with the cruel joke—"It won't take long to see him off" (TLG, VII, 190), but the cruelty of her self-absorption is evident throughout her journey.

Still as talkative as ever, Alice is even more priggish than before. When the reader first sees her, for example, she is chastising her white kitten: "Now don't interrupt me! ... I'm going to tell you all your faults" (TLG, I, 108). In fact, she almost seems a parody of the Ugly Duchess, whose moralizing so often offended her in Alice in Wonderland. At the beginning, she sternly admonishes her kitty to learn better manners; later, when the Red Queen bombards Alice with a series of ludicrous "directions"—such as "Curtsey while you're thinking what to say. It saves time!"—the girl responds with complete seriousness—"I'll try it when I go home" (TLG, II, 124).

The Alice who frightens all the animals of Wonderland with her obsessive references to predation is also still in evidence. In the first chapter, the narrator describes another of Alice's "let's pretend" games: "Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyaena, and you're a bone" (TLG, I, 110). Later on in the third chapter, Alice proves to be just as violent as the Tiger-lily, whom she defends from further attacks from the daisies by threatening: "If you don't hold your tongues, I'll pick you!" (TLG, II, 122).

Her response to Tweedledum and Tweedledee's poem "The Wairus and the Carpenter" reveals how closely brutality and sentimentalism are aligned in Alice. As Kincaid notes, "She ignores the victims of the poem, the oysters, and immediately searches for one of the power figures with whom to identify:"
"I like the Walrus best," said Alice: "because he was a little sorry for the poor oysters."
"He ate more than the Carpenter, though," said Tweedledee. "You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took: contrariwise."
"That was mean!" Alice said indignantly. "Then I like the Carpenter best—if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus."
"But he ate as many as he could get," said Tweedle dum. (TLG,IV,144)

Alice concludes by judging them both to be "very unpleasant characters" (TLG,IV,144), as though their chief offense were a lapse in good taste.

An even more interesting example of how Alice uses words to substitute for emotion, or perhaps more accurately to create an artificial emotion, occurs in the first chapter. Alice has been chattering to the kitty about its faults, when suddenly she interrupts her lecture with the following "meditation": "Do you hear the snow against the window-panes, Kitty? How nice and soft it sounds! I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says 'Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.' And when they wake up in the summer, Kitty, they dress themselves all in green, and dance about—whenever the wind blows—oh, that's very pretty!" (TLG,I,109). Here, Alice whips herself into an ecstasy of delight—"oh, that's very pretty!"—over the most blatantly sentimental of images. She manages to convert snow and winter, traditionally associated with death, into smug representatives of maternal love. Although this passage functions perfectly in Through the Looking-Glass to expose Alice's character, it prefigures the kind of sentimentalism that dominates Sylvie and Bruno. Alice's refusal to accept death or unpleasant realities,
ironically portrayed in *Through the Looking-Glass*, is a controlling force of the later work, whose heroine, the insipid fairy Sylvie, wears a locket with the inscription: "Sylvie will love all--All will love Sylvie."³

Alice's thoughts on the snow recall the style and, in part, the tone of the dedicatory poem that introduces the work. It is easy to overlook this verse--Lewis Carroll's conventional poetry is generally banal and uninteresting--but it provides important clues to what is perhaps the major problem of *Through the Looking-Glass*, the sense, sometimes stated and sometimes just vaguely perceived, that the narrator's attitude towards Alice has become distorted in some essential way. Some critics, such as Kincaid, see this distortion as influencing both Alices: "Most adults and, according to several sources, a good many children, have detected the presence of almost uncontrolled aggression in these books. Some of the children who, as the stories go, screamed in fright at the Alice books may well have been reacting not only to the extreme malice but to a sense that a good part of this malice hits directly at their own representative."⁴ But although this perception is no doubt valid, it seems to apply most directly to *Through the Looking-Glass*, where the ironic control generally maintained by the narrator of *Alice in Wonderland* begins to break down into its two opposing tensions, smothering and overt love and partly hidden and bitter anger.

From the very first, Carroll strikes a note of melancholy that bears more than a hint of hostility:

Child of the pure unclouded brow
And dreaming eyes of wonder!
Though time be fleet, and I and thou
And half a life asunder,
Thy loving smile will surely hail 
The love-gift of a fairy tale.

I have not seen thy sunny face, 
Nor heard thy silver laughter:
No thought of me shall find a place
In thy young life's hereafter--
Enough that now thou wilt not fail
To listen to my fairy-tale.

(TLC,103; my emphasis)

In both this poem and the work as a whole, Carroll seems obsessed with time, and the lines emphasized above may indicate one reason why: Alice must grow older, and Carroll apparently, almost necessarily views this as a betrayal. Time serves two important functions in Through the Looking-Glass, neither of which is stressed in Alice in Wonderland. First, Alice is consistently attacked in terms of time, and its inevitable power over all things is emphasized. When she enters the garden of live flowers in the second chapter, for example, they remind her that she is "beginning to fade, you know--and then one ca'n't help one's petals getting a little untidy" (TLG,II,123). Later, when Alice is struggling in vain to gather "dream-rushes," the narrator interrupts the action with the following passage: "What mattered it to her just then that the rushes had begun to fade, and to lose all their scent and beauty, from the very moment that she picked them? Even real scented rushes, you know, last only a very little while--and these, being dream-rushes, melted away almost like snow, as they lay in heaps at her feet--but Alice hardly noticed this, there were so many other curious things to think about". (TLG,V,156) The language employed here directly evokes that used by the flowers in their attack, and seems by implication to include Alice among those earthly objects that "last only a very little while."
Perhaps even more significantly, Carroll connects time to language, adding a new sense of urgency, and also perhaps of futility, to his examination of language's hold on man. When Alice rides on the train in the third chapter, she learns that "time is worth a thousand pounds a minute"; and language, "a thousand pounds a word!" (TLG,III, 130). Through the Looking-Glass is informed throughout with a sense of the necessity of using language precisely, of the power of language over men, and of the final impossibility of ever controlling such an awesome force. When Alice picks up the White King in the first chapter, he tries to describe his fright to his wife: "The horror of that moment... I shall never, never forget." The Queen's reply is correct--"You will, though... if you don't make a memorandum of it" (TLG,I,115)--but Alice foils both by grasping the King's pencil and writing for him. Although here a specific force, Alice, prevents the king from using language for his own ends, the incident itself might stand as a paradigm for Carroll's view of man's relationship with language.

In the dedicatory verse, however, Carroll supposedly endows language, or at least art, with the ability to stop time's movement, if only temporarily. After the first two stanzas, and a third describing the origin of Alice in Wonderland, "A tale begun in other days,/When summer suns were growing--", Carroll presents the future that Alice can anticipate:

Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread,
With bitter tidings laden,
Shall summon to unwelcome bed
A melancholy maiden!
We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near.

(TLG,103)

The ambiguity of this stanza is most interesting, for it could refer both to a child being forced to go to bed and to a young "maiden"
reluctantly being called to her wedding bed, while the last two lines seem to tie death to sexual awakening. Carroll continues this gloomy tone in the first four lines of the following stanza, which describe the appropriately harsh setting of Through the Looking-Glass: Without, the frost, the blinding snow,/ The storm-wind's moody madness" (TLG,103). But then come the last two lines, which in one sense contradict all that has preceded them, as they assert: "The magic words shall hold thee fast:/Thou shalt not need the raving blast" (TLG,103). Although these lines refer specifically to the "frost" and "blinding snow," they also apply with equal force to the "raving blast" of old age.

In essence, Lewis Carroll seems to assert that it is only through his fairy tale that Alice can continue unchanged. It is almost as if Lewis Carroll the artist is taking revenge on Alice Liddell, and on her fictional representative, by arguing that Alice is, indeed, nothing but "a sort of thing in his dream" (TLG,IV,145). For both the Alices are Carroll's "dreams," after all, and if Carroll is represented in Through the Looking-Glass by the White Knight, as is so often stated, he is also in part the Red King: "'If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out--bang!--just like a candle!" (TLG,IV,45).

I present this interpretation, not to add one more to the stack of commentaries on Carroll's life, but to help clarify a problem in understanding both Through the Looking-Glass and also the general development of Carroll's nonsense, which ends so disastrously with the sentimental vagaries of Sylvie and Bruno, with its curiously ill, "heart-affected" narrator."^5 Lewis Carroll was a complex, strange, and utterly fascinating individual. Perhaps his most significant trait was his ability to hold
numerous opposing views at once. Totally independent, bizarre I suppose, in everything that regarded his immediate personal life, he was also completely conventional in his views of how others should live. Thus, he could answer his sister, who had written cautioning him of gossip concerning his numerous child-friends: "You need not be shocked at my being spoken against. Anybody who is spoken about at all, is sure to be spoken against by somebody: and any action, however innocent in itself, is liable, and not at all unlikely, to be blamed by somebody. If you limit your actions in life to things that nobody can possibly find fault with, you will not do much." And yet he could at almost the same time declare in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno* that one of his most urgent projects was a new and more complete prettying-up of Shakespeare. Speaking of contemporary editions, he bemoans that "they are not sufficiently 'expurgated.' Bowdler's is the most extraordinary of all: looking through it, I am filled with a deep sense of wonder, considering what he has left in, that he should have cut anything out!"

So quick in his nonsense to expose the hypocrisy of others, Carroll perceived no contradiction between his faith in his own ability to judge for himself, and his refusal to allow others a similar right.

Carroll's unselfconsciousness, his inability to analyze the implications of his own ideas or actions, is even more apparent in his literary work. If one examines the publication dates of his nonsense, Carroll's development does at first seem to be consistent. *Alice in Wonderland* appears in 1865, followed by *Through the Looking-Glass* in 1872, and "The Hunting of the Snark" in 1876. More than ten years intervene before the next nonsense is published, although in the interim *Rhyme? and Reason?* (1883), *A Tangled Tale* (1885), and *A Game of Logic* (1887), all conventional
mathematical and logical works, appear under the pseudonym of Lewis Carroll. Then finally Carroll again presents Victorian England with nonsense in the misbegotten forms of *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893). It all seems a clear case of a decade of brilliance, followed by long years of weakening control, ending with total failure.

Unfortunately, Carroll's publication dates are deceptive. Another of those apparently indefatigable Victorians, he always worked on numerous projects at once, sometimes extending them over a long period of time. *Sylvie and Bruno*, for example, originated with a short story, "Bruno's Revenge," published in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* in 1867; Carroll worked on the novel intermittently for twenty-two years. At almost the same time that Carroll was writing *Through the Looking-Glass*, he was working on a melodrama, *Morning Clouds*, which was fortunately never performed. The following passage is taken from an entry Carroll made in his diary on January 25, 1866:

> Spent two or three hours in writing out, to send to Tom Taylor, a sketch of a domestic drama for Percy Roselle to play the chief part in . . . The main plot is his being stolen away at the instigation of his father's younger brother--his mother (a widow) to be played by Miss Terry. I drew out two incidental scenes: one a street in a winter night, and the boy wandering by the house where (unknown to him) his mother is, and singing--the scene changing to the interior where they hear the singing and open the window, but too late; the other to be the concluding scene, after the lost child is recovered, and the villain has died in misery--a group of the widow, her old father, and her two children, seen by firelight: the children sing their grandfather to sleep and the curtain falls in silence on the peaceful group. 8

It is indeed difficult to comprehend how the same man could write the *Alices*, imagine these heart ripping scenes, and perceive no contradiction.
But throughout his career, Lewis Carroll indulged himself with banal, tedious, maudlin poetry and extremely humorless, overstrained prose. Never accurate, his judgment about his own work was so flawed by his later years that he felt his greatest poem was Sylvie's love song.

One stanza is probably more than any reader could bear:

Say, what is the spell, when her fledgelings are cheeping,
That lures the bird home to her nest
Or wakes the tired mother, whose infant is weeping,
To cuddle and croon it to rest?
What's the magic that charms the glad babe in her arms,
Till it coos with the voice of the dove?
'Tis a secret, and so let us whisper it low—
And the name of the secret is Love!

For I think it is Love,
For I feel it is Love,
For I'm sure it is nothing but Love!9

In fact, from his earliest childhood writing to his last great failure, Sylvie and Bruno, Lewis Carroll was strung between strongly opposing tensions. A comparison of two of his early poems, both printed in the family magazines he edited as a child, reveal the terms of this split. The first, written when he was thirteen, is called "Rules and Regulations." "A short direction/To avoid dejection," the poem consists of a long list of "don'ts," followed by the simple moral, "Behave."10 The second poem, "The Two Brothers," tells the story of sibling rivalry which ends in one brother hooking the other on a fishing pole and lowering him into the water to be eaten by fish. A much better poem that "Rules and Regulations," it is never quite able to contain its hostility, even sadism, within its comic form:

He has fitted together two joints of his rod,
And to them he has added another,
And then a great hook he took from his book,
And ran it right into his brother.
Oh much is the noise that is made among boys
When playfully pelting a pig,
But a far greater pother was made by his brother
When flung from the top of the brigg.11

The younger brother begs for mercy, asking his tormentor: "Oh hard is your heart for to act such a part; / Is it iron, or granite, or steel?"
The brother merely replies: "Why, I really can't say--it is many a day / Since my heart was accustomed to feel."12

The influence of this tension between order and disorder, love and anger, and the self and society, informs all of Carroll's work, both successes and failures. As Florence Becker Lennon notes, when Carroll's "powers were at their apogee, he maintained the proper tension between sadism and sentimentality, giving his writing a subtlety, a delicacy, an extra twist of perversity, an incomprable flavor."13 In Alice in Wonderland, these forces are balanced perfectly. Through the Looking-Glass also succeeds, but despite its more controlled form, strong traces of uncontrolled hostility, most often aimed at Alice, threaten to upset the delicate workings of the game. They do not, but the reader perceives the threat and feels the resulting tension. In Through the Looking-Glass Lewis Carroll explores the outer limits of the nonsense dialectic--almost, but not quite, straining it to the breaking-point.

Although the structure provided by the chess game is perhaps the major stabilizing force in Through the Looking-Glass, other devices, such as the mechanical and predictable Looking-Glass reversals, also help to counterbalance the threatening or disturbing aspects of Looking-Glass land. Carroll establishes this inversion principle early in the work, when Alice realizes that she must hold "Jabberwocky" up to a mirror before she can read it. In the second chapter, she learns with
great difficulty that to reach one's destination one must walk backwards. By the time she must serve the plum-cake to the Red King, Lion, and Unicorn, the reader knows that Alice must "Hand it round first, and cut it afterwards" (TLG, VII, 177), but Alice does not. Thus, the reader is given the sense of being a privileged member of a special game, while at the same time he is distracted from paying full attention to Alice's frustration at not being privy to the rules.

Lewis Carroll thus uses the chess-game and Looking-Glass reversals to give the reader a sense of control over the future. To further reinforce the reader's belief that he knows in advance all that will happen, Carroll also at times presents the future in terms of the past. He does this most frequently through the use of parenthetical statements which interrupt the immediate action and suggest that the story has already occurred. When Alice meets Tweedledum and Tweedle and suddenly finds herself dancing in a circle with them, for example, Carroll breaks into his description of the inexplicable and slightly unsettling dance with the following comment: "'But it certainly was funny,' (Alice said afterwards, when she was telling her sister the history of all this), 'to find myself singing'" (TLG, IV, 139).

By emphasizing that all that is happening has become "history" to Alice, who has obviously survived her adventures and lived to tell the tale, Carroll clearly reassures the reader, again encouraging him to relax his defenses, to participate freely in the game. These interruptions also have another rather strange effect, however, for by emphasizing the story's artifice they also tend to deny the experiential nature of Alice's journey, to rob her somehow of her own part in the story, or perhaps better, to indicate that she is just a part in the story. If this is the
case, it may relate to the probably unconscious desire of Lewis Carroll as Red King to revenge himself on Alice by stressing that only in his art can she exist unchanged by time. It is interesting to note that, although these parenthetical interruptions occur often in Through the Looking-Glass, the most extreme example of this type of distancing takes place when Alice is with that most clear representative of Lewis Carroll, the White Knight. This is, of course, the encounter that is most highly charged with the melancholy and aggressive emotions of the opening and closing poems. As the White Knight begins to sing to Alice the song that he had felt sure would bring tears to her eyes—but doesn't, Carroll interjects: "Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through The Looking-Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if it had been only yesterday" (TLG, VIII, 187; my emphasis). It is difficult to articulate precisely the effect of this device, but it may be one of the factors that contributes to many reader's sense that their representative, Alice, is being threatened by more than just the characters she meets.

Finally, as in her first adventure underground, Alice herself also acts to reassure the reader by her refusal to be dissuaded from her purpose, her serene self-absorption, and her indifference to attacks against her. But whereas in Alice in Wonderland Carroll tended to "rescue" his heroine, usually by introducing some element to distract either her or her attacker's attention, in Through the Looking-Glass he more often allows her to fend for herself. And this device is, in the end, much more comforting.
Alice manages quite well; apparently she doesn't need Humpty Dumpty to teach her that language is, or can be, played like a game. When she discovers that the flowers in the second chapter can talk, for example, she takes control of the conversation when she doesn't like its direction:

"And can all the flowers talk?"
"As well as you can," said the Tiger-lily.
"And a great deal louder."
"It isn't manners for us to begin, you know," said the Rose," and I really was wondering when you'd speak! Said I to myself, 'Her face has got some sense in it, though it's not a clever one!' Still, you're the right colour, and that goes a long way."
"I don't care about the colour," the Tiger-lily remarked. "If only her petals curled up a little more, she'd be all right."

Alice didn't like being criticized, so she began asking questions. "Aren't you sometimes frightened at being planted out here, with nobody to take care of you?"

(TLG,II,121)

Here Alice not only turns the tables on her accusers, she also introduces a threat of violence and death. It may be this that prompts the flowers' remarks about how Alice is "beginning to fade" (TLG,II,123), but Alice dismisses the attack easily: "Alice didn't like this idea at all: so, to change the subject, she asked 'Does she the Red Queen ever come out here?'" (TLG,II,123).

When Tweedledum and Tweedledee attempt to convince her that "You know very well you're not real" (TLG,IV,145), Alice is so affected that she begins to cry. She remains in control, however, using her good British common sense to talk herself out of her depression. And, as with the flowers, once again Alice deflects their threats by changing the subject: "'I know they're talking nonsense,' Alice thought to herself: 'and it's foolish to cry about it.' So she brushed away her tears, and
went on, as cheerfully as she could, 'At any rate, I'd better be getting out of the wood, for really it's coming on very dark. Do you think it's going to rain?'" (TLG,IV,145-46).

In the fifth chapter, Alice gets a taste of how it feels to be playing a game with language when one doesn't know the rules, as she mistakes the White Queen's rowing instructions for polite conversation:

"Feather! Feather!" The Sheep cried again, taking more needles. "You'll be catching a crab directly."
"A dear little crab!" thought Alice. "I should like that."

(TLG,V,155)

It is not until she visits Humpty Dumpty, however, that she really meets her match. Humpty Dumpty and Alice are similar in that both tend to make a word mean whatever they want it to, and both treat language like a game. Humpty Dumpty has the advantage, though, for he is aware of what he is doing, while Alice generally is not. Although she tries her best to accommodate him, responding with unfailing politeness to his riddles and insults, Alice is unable to manipulate Humpty Dumpty as she has the other Looking-Glass characters. Thus she walks away from him, much as she did from the Mad Tea-Party in Alice in Wonderland, and though she has not been able to use language to master the situation, she does the next best thing: "Alice waited a minute to see if he would speak again, but, as he never opened his eyes or took any further notice of her, she said 'Good-bye!' once more, and, getting no answer to this, she quietly walked away: but she couldn't help saying to herself, as she went, 'of all the unsatisfactory----' (she repeated this aloud, as it was a great comfort to have such a long word to say) "of all the
unsatisfactory people I ever met----" (TLG,VI,168). By lumping Humpty Dumpty with all the other "unsatisfactory" character she has met--whatever that means to her--and by diverting herself with "such a long word" Alice not only comforts herself, she also alters the nature of her confrontation with Humpty Dumpty, robbing it of most of its significance.

But although Alice is able to dismiss the arguments of those she meets merely by changing the subject, deserting the scene, or retreating into long words, the reader cannot. For as in Alice in Wonderland, in Through the Looking-Glass it is the reader, not Alice, who learns from her experiences. The reader does not seek out this knowledge, which threatens both the rational basis of his world and his sense of identity; instead, Carroll lures him into joining what he thinks is a game, one whose outcome is certain, and hence safe. The outcome is certain, but the game is anything but safe.

First of all, the game itself turns out to be much less stable than the chess diagram and the Red Queen's detailed instructions at the end of the second chapter might lead one to expect. The moves from one square to the next are necessarily abrupt and disconnected; except in the case of the fifth and sixth chapters, where the egg in the shop turns into Humpty Dumpty, the only connection between events is that arbitrarily provided by the game. These "jumps" are at times explicitly surreal, often involving the metamorphosis of objects or persons, or an abrupt and unexplained change of location. When the train Alice is riding in the third chapter jumps from the third to the fourth square, for example, the Goat's beard that she had grabbed to steady herself disappears, and she finds herself in an entirely different environment. Furthermore, the gnat that in the previous square was only "an extremely small voice,
close to her ear" (TLG,III,132) is now "about the size of a chicken" (TLG,III,132). Alice reacts to this grotesque sight with incredible calm—"It certainly was a very large Gnat . . . Still she couldn't feel nervous with it, after they had been together so long" (TLG, III,132). Her response, and the reader's awareness that a jump has been made, tend to mitigate the most immediately disturbing aspects of these transitions, without destroying the force of the image or experience itself.

Not all the transformations that occur in Through the Looking-Glass occur as a result of a "jump," however. In the fifth chapter, "Wool and Water," Alice meets the White Queen. After a brief conversation, they cross a brook together, whereupon the Queen turns into a sheep, and Alice finds herself in a small shop. Disconcerting as this even is, the reader accepts it with relative ease, for he is by now accustomed to such changes occurring at certain points in the game. This first metamorphosis is followed by another, however, one which serves no function in the game: the little shop disappears and Alice finds herself rowing a small boat, with scant success. This incident is more upsetting, for it questions the reliability or order of the game itself. Most disquieting of all, however, is the frustrating evanescence of the objects in the shop, which fade before Alice can reach them, and of the dream rushes. These incidents anticipate Alice's feast, where the players she has thought she would rule threaten to overwhelm her, and objects begin to blend and merge into one another. At this point, however, they serve mainly to undercut the reader's faith in the certainty of the game, to show the reader that even in a world as regulated as Alice's "great huge game of chess" (TLG,I,126), experience refuses to conform to rules.
It is mainly through Alice's conversations with the nursery rhyme characters, however, that the reader comes to realize that Alice's faith in the game and her sense of control over it is an illusion. At the same time, the significance of the game itself is enlarged, as Carroll reveals how man uses language to construct arbitrary systems of order, only to find himself trapped by his own creation. W. H. Auden has noted that, in both Alices, "one of the most important and powerful characters is not a person but the English language." This is especially true of Through the Looking-Glass where, if language did assume a personality, it would be that of Frankenstein—the invention that overpowered its human inventor.

Although the first nursery rhyme characters, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, do not appear until the fourth chapter, the earlier chapters prepare the reader to grasp the significance of their predicament, which is that of being destined by language to think the same thoughts, repeat the same actions. As I have noted, the first reference to language in Through the Looking-Glass, the White King's obsessive memorandum-taking, which is foiled by Alice, introduces a sense of both urgency and futility concerning language. This is continued by the Red Queen, who repeats her instructions to Alice several times, "for fear of your forgetting them" (TLG,II,128). Even before Alice learns of her role in the chess game, the Red Queen treats conversation with her like a game: "'It's time for you to answer now,' the Queen said looking at her watch: 'open your mouth a little wider when you speak, and always say 'your Majesty'" (TLG,II,124). Alice, of course, attends to all of these "directions" (TLG,II,124), with the greatest seriousness,
for the Queen's method of systematizing thought and action conforms to her own way of doing things. The Queen's final instructions, "Speak in French when you ca'n't think of the English for a thing--turn out your toes when you walk--and remember who you are" (TLG,II,128; my emphasis), crystallizes the reader's growing sense of apprehension, his awareness that in joining the game Alice is risking more than she realizes.

By the time Alice meets Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the reader is already aware that Looking-Glass Land is a place where language exerts a special influence, or at least where that influence is more obvious. The gnat's lecture on Looking-Glass insects, for example, reveals that here there is at times a direct connection between a name and that which it represents; names thus appear to exert a mysterious force akin to that often ascribed to language by primitive peoples. What is in Alice's world a horse-fly, for example, becomes in Looking-Glass Land a "Rocking-horse-fly": "It's made entirely of wood, and gets about by swinging itself from branch to branch" (TLG,III,133).

Because she views language as a tool of man, something he uses to control his environment, Alice is confused by the gnat:

"What sort of insects do you rejoice in, where you come from?" The Gnat inquired.
"I don't rejoice in insects at all," Alice explained, "because I'm rather afraid of them--at least the large kinds. But I can tell you the names of some of them."
"Of course they answer to their names?" the Gnat remarked carelessly.
"I never knew them do it."
"What's the use of their having names," the Gnat said, "if they won't answer to them?"
"No use to them," said Alice; "but it's useful to the people that name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?"
(TLG,III,132)
Even after her experience in the wood where things have no names, she fails to perceive that in her world too, names have a mysterious power, a way of assuming a life of their own. Alice has been warned of the wood by the gnat, but she isn't too frightened at the possibility of losing her name, for people could still call her "Miss." Nevertheless, she finds the loss quite perplexing, and is delighted when she meets a fawn, who walks with her, "Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn" (TLG,III,137). This union, the warmest Alice has with any animal or man in either of the Alices, collapses when they leave the woods: "they came out into another open field, and here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arm. 'I'm a Fawn!' it cried out in a voice of delight. 'And, dear me! you're a human child!' A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed." (TLG,III,137). Although Alice is rather upset at the fawn's sudden disappearance, she takes comfort in the illusion of identity and control that she thinks her name gives her: "Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveler so suddenly. 'However, I know my name now,' she said" that's some comfort!" (TLG,III,137).

Alice continues on her journey, never realizing that in her own world she is the pawn, not of chess, but of language. This incident is Carroll's clearest indictment of the way in which language, an arbitrary system of signs, in effect, a man-made game, more often creates barriers, rather than penetrating them. Alice avoids this knowledge; still under the illusion that she controls language, she looks at the two finger-posts with Tweedledum's and Tweedledee's names that point down a single road through the wood and imagines that she has a choice: "'I'll
settle it,' Alice said to herself, 'when the road divides and they point different ways' " (TLG,III,137). The reader knows otherwise.

When Alice first meets Tweedledum and Tweedledee, she can barely talk to them, "for the words of the old song kept ringing through her head like the ticking of a clock, and she could hardly help saying them out loud:--" (TLG,IV,138)

"Tweedledum and Tweedledee
Agreed to have a battle;
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.

Just then flew down a monstrous crow,
As black as a tar-barrell;
Which frightened both the heroes so,
They quite forgot their quarrel."
(TLG,IV,138-39)

Tweedledum and Tweedledee divine her thoughts, however, and their vehement protestations only emphasize the power of the verse in their lives:

"I know what you're thinking about," said Tweedledum; "but it isn't so, no how."
"Contrariwise," continued Tweedledee, "if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic."
(TLG,IV,139)

For after a bit of dancing and poetry, Tweedledum does accuse his brother of ruining his toy, and they agree to "fight till six and then have dinner" (TLG,IV,147). Thus they are forced, against their will, to relive the events of their verse. It is at this point that the connection between language and the game, implied earlier, is clearly established. Alice's powerlessness, her own entrapment within the artificial system of reason she has used language to create, is further stressed by the other major incident in the chapter, Tweedledum and Tweedledee's attempt to convince her that "You know very well you're not real" (TLG,IV,145).
Though temporarily frightened and confused, Alice ignores Tweedle-dum and Tweedledee's argument, just as she manages to disregard the surreal shifts and metamorphoses of the following chapter, "Wool and Water." Even when the egg she has purchased from the Sheep turns in the sixth chapter into Humpty Dumpty, growing "larger and larger, and more and more human" (TLG,VI,159), Alice continues essentially unperturbed, led on by her vision of the wonderful crown which she imagines to be her final reward.

Alice recognizes Humpty Dumpty instantly and, as with the Tweedle brothers, she immediately recalls his nursery rhyme, which she repeats softly to herself. Unlike Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Humpty Dumpty appears to be unaware of his verse, although this does not alter his situation. Thus he answers in response to Alice's question as to whether or not he would be safer on the ground:

"What tremendously easy riddles you ask!"
Humpty Dumpty growled out. "Of course I don't think so! Why, if ever I did fall off—which there's no chance of—but if I did--" Here he pursed up his lips and looked so solemn and grand that Alice could hardly help laughing. "If I did fall," he went on, "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.
(TLG,VI,160)

It is possible to view Humpty Dumpty's response in two ways. If he is truly unaware of his nursery rhyme, his arrogance and egotism, his false sense of independence and control all seem pathetically absurd. His situation would thus parallel that of Alice; both "play" language like a game, most confident and proud when most trapped.
It is equally conceivable, however, that Humpty Dumpty may only
be feigning ignorance. This would explain, among other things, the
puzzling contradictions in his discussion of language. For Humpty
Dumpty begins by arguing that there is or should be an inherent con-
nection between names and that which they designate:

"Don't stand chattering to yourself like
that," Humpty Dumpty said, looking at her for
the first time, "but tell me your name and
your business."
"My name is Alice, but-----"
"It's a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty
interrupted impatiently. "What does it mean?"
"Must a name mean something?" Alice asked
doubtfully.
"Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with
a short laugh . . .

(TLG,VI,160)

Later, however, he proposes exactly the reverse, as he pompously announces
that when he uses a word "it means just what I want it to mean--neither
more nor less" (TLG,VI,163). When Humpty Dumpty attempts to bluff his
way through a simple subtraction problem, inadvertently betraying his
ignorance by holding Alice's memorandum-book upside down, the reader may
begin to suspect that he is bluffing in other matters as well. If this
is the case, Humpty Dumpty's entire chapter becomes tremendously ironic,
for instead of being the "master" (TLG,VI,163) of words, he becomes theirvictim, desperately trying to find a way to avoid his fate, and espousing
any theory that offers hope to him.

The final nursery rhyme characters Alice meets, the Lion and the
Unicorn, make no reference at all to their verse, which Alice again
immediately recalls--they merely act it out, as though it were an assigned
task. By presenting another variant of the same pattern, that of nursery
rhyme characters "trapped" by their verse, Carroll stresses man's similar
situation; he too is "trapped" by the "game" of language he himself has
created. This dilemma is further emphasized by another even, whereby Alice and the White King become unwilling participants in a different kind of language game, as the King tries to explain his messenger's strange movements to Alice:

... "He's an Anglo-Saxon Messenger--and those are Anglo-Saxon attitudes. He only does them when he's happy. His name is Haigha." (He pronounced it so as to rhyme with 'mayor'.)

"I love my love with an H," Alice couldn't help beginning, "because he is Happy. I hate him with an H, because he is Hideous. I fed him with--with--with Ham-sandwiches and Hay. His name is Haigha, and he lives ---"

"He lives on the Hill," the King remarked simply, without the least idea that he was joining in the game, while Alice was still hesitating for the name of a town beginning with H.

(TLG, VII, 170; my emphasis)

And, as with the nursery rhymes, the game becomes reality, as Haigha feeds the King, who feels faint, with the only food he has, ham-sandwiches and hay.

Alice leaves the Lion and the Unicorn, jumping into the White Knight's square, where she immediately announces that "I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be Queen" (TLG, VIII, 181). To Alice, the "great huge game of chess" (TLG, II, 126) is still "fun" (TLG, II, 126), for she continues to believe in her illusion of self-direction and choice. To the reader, however, the chess game has come to symbolize neither power nor freedom, but entrapment. Ironically, Carroll uses one of the "pieces" in the game itself, the White Knight, to represent all that Alice lacks. The White Knight's movements may be restricted by the game but, as he himself says, "What does it matter where my body happens to be? ... My mind goes on working all the same" (TLG, VIII, 186). Alice, however, is the prisoner of her own limited consciousness, so she is enslaved no matter where she goes.
Chess is one of the most serious and certainly one of the least spontaneous of games; as such, it fits Alice perfectly. The White Knight seems less suited for it however, and this may in part explain his radical unfitness for anything, including sitting on his horse. At any rate, his own playful, warm, gentle, and utterly uncalculating character contrasts sharply with that of Alice. Although the Knight is treated humorously, both in terms of his physical awkwardness and his impractical inventions, Carroll also clearly presents him as both sensitive and thoughtful.

Alice's response to the White Knight is ambiguous. For most of the journey, she treats his with condescension, occasionally losing patience with him entirely, as when she explodes "It's too ridiculous! . . . You ought to have a wooden horse on wheels, that you ought!" (TLG, VII, 184), while at other times merely giving vent to a "little scream of laughter" (TLG, VIII, 184). When the White Knight perceives that she is sad and offers to sing a song "to comfort you" (TLG, VIII, 186), Alice rudely asks only "Is it very long?" (TLG, VII, 186). Nevertheless, when he finally does begin to sing, Carroll has her respond with unusual emotional intensity:

Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through The Looking-Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if it had been only yesterday—the mild blue eyes and kindly smile of the Knight—the setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armour in a blaze of light that quite dazzled her—the horse quietly moving about, with the reins hanging loose on his neck, cropping the grass at her
feet—and the black shadows of the forest behind—all this she took in like a picture, as, with one hand shading her eyes, she leant against a tree, watching the strange pair, and listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song.  

(TLG,VII,187)

I have already noted how the "Years afterwards" tends to distance Alice from her immediate experience, perhaps emphasizing the fictive, transitory nature of her adventures. Interestingly enough, the White Knight's chapter begins with a reference to the question of Alice's existence, as she reassures herself that she wasn't dreaming about the Lion and Unicorn "unless—unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's my dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream" (TLG,VIII,179).

Alice's vision, whose elaborate detail and sentimental tone varies from that of the rest of the chapter, also romanticizes the White Knight, changing him suddenly from a comical to an almost heroic figure. The conventional nature of the description, the use of such cliches as "setting sun gleaming in the hair" and "the black shadows of the forest behind" betray a temporary loss of narrative control, one that does no serious damage—Carroll quickly reasserts a more ironic posture by commenting in the next paragraph how "no tears came to her eyes" (TLG, VIII,187)—but that does foreshadow the maudlin lapses of Sylvia and Bruno.

Alice's callous eagerness to leave the White Knight and her brutal response to his request that she "wait and wave your handkerchief when I get to that turn in the road . . . it'll encourage me, you see" (TLG, VIII,190) emphasize, as Kincaid argues, "the gentle and comic values she
is leaving behind" in her quest for power and order. Alice herself is entirely absorbed in anticipating her reign which, significantly, she imagines in terms of linguistic, not actual, reality: "and now for the last brook, and to be a Queen! How grand it sounds!" (TLG, VIII, 190; my emphasis). She wins her prize, but immediately discovers that her hope that "if I really am a Queen . . . I shall be able to manage it quite well in time" (TLG, IX, 192) is misplaced; the game is far from over.

Alice has assumed all along that the game was her game, that when she became a queen the process would be complete. She learns how wrong she is, however, when she attempts to ask the Red Queen "if the game was over" (TLG, IX, 192), but is not even allowed to complete her question. What Alice discovers, both in her frustrating "examination" (TLG, IX, 192) and in the frightening banquet scene, is that "when you've once said a thing, that fixes it, and you must take the consequences" (TLG, IX, 195).

The "consequences" proceed much more quickly in Through the Looking-Glass than in Alice in Wonderland, where Alice's gradual movement towards the denial of her dream provides both plot and theme. In Through the Looking-Glass, Alice is clearly aligned with order. The increased rigidity of her position may be one reason why the attacks against her in the ninth chapter are both more direct and aggressive, and also much more explicitly surreal, than those of the trial scene in Alice in Wonderland.

Alice's rejection of Wonderland is the result of an internal, psychological process--perhaps best represented by her rapid growth during the trial. In Looking-Glass Land, however, her motivation is more extremely derived. She has been frustrated by the bizarre behavior of her "guests,"
but it is only when the Red Queen seizes Alice's hair and screams
"Take care of yourself! . . . Something's going to happen!" (TLG, IX, 203) that Alice takes any action. Alice watches as her dream of
order and power dissolves into a nightmare:

The candles all grew up to the ceiling, looking
something like a bed of rushes with fireworks at
the top. As to the bottles, they each took a
pair of plates, which they hastily fitted on as
wings, and so, with fork for legs, went fluttering
about in all directions . . . At this moment she
heard a hoarse laugh at her side, and turned to see
what was the matter with the White Queen; but, in-
stead of the Queen, there was the leg of mutton
sitting in the chair. 'Here I am!' cried a voice
from the soup-tureen, and Alice turned again, just
in time to see the Queen's broad good-natured face
grinning at her for a moment over the edge of the
tureen, before she disappeared into the soup.
(TLG, IX, 204)

Finally, when the soup ladle walks threateningly towards her, Alice
herself explodes: "'I ca'n't stand this any longer!' she cried, as
she jumped up and seized the tablecloth with both hands; one good
pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together
in a heap on the floor" (TLG, IX, 204).

A patient and practical child, Alice can endure much when she has
a precise goal, and what seem to be consistent "rules" for achieving it.
What she can't stand is to have the veneer of order ripped away, exposing
the mad, frightening, surreal underside that has been present all along.
For from her first walk in the garden of live flowers, where the path
she is attempting to follow "gave a sudden twist and shook itself" (TLG,
II, 120), Looking-Glass Land has refused to conform to Alice's meek
expectations. While she was ruled by her faith in the game and her hopes
of power, Alice was able to ignore this Land's bizarre shifts and wierd
metamorphoses. When she loses these supports and thus is vulnerable, she destroys the game and returns to her own world.

As in Alice in Wonderland, in Through the Looking-Glass Alice returns unchanged by her experiences. Immediately after she awakens, for example, she tells her kitty that "You woke me out of oh! such a nice dream!" (TLG,XII,296). But though the dream has meant little to Alice, who happily announces to her kitty that "To-morrow morning you shall have a real treat. All the time you're eating your breakfast, I'll repeat 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' to you; and then you can make believe it's oysters dear!" (TLG,XII,208), the reader may not find it so easy to reestablish order in his world.

In Through the Looking-Glass, Carroll shows how man uses language to create rational "games" to give himself an illusion of order and power, only to become trapped by his own creation. This sense of entrapment is heightened in Carroll's last great nonsense poem, "The Hunting of the Snark," where man's position, that of being an unwilling and powerless participant in a mad cosmic game, is even more bleakly portrayed. Like Lear's nonsense verse, "The Hunting of the Snark" achieves its power through the balanced opposition of form and content.

The poem is "An Agony in Eight Fits," each "fit" or section containing from nine to twenty-two stanzas of four anapestic lines each—the first and third containing four feet; and the second and fourth lines, three. Structurally quite similar to the limerick, this form also tends to force the reader to scan the verse quickly, while the strong rhythmic pattern further distracts him from the "sense" through involvement with "sound."
Just as language appears to exert a unique force in the limericks, where the vagaries of rhyme and rhythm control a character's destiny, so too in "The Hunting of the Snark" is language the most powerful agent of (or substitute for) casualty. In the second stanza of the first "fit" the Bellman, who heads the motley crew searching for the Snark, establishes the rule of three:

Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:
    That alone should encourage the crew.
Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:
    What I tell you three times is true.

(HS, 216)

Thus when the Butcher wants to convince the Beaver in the fifth "fit" that the terrible scream they have just heard is that of the Jubjub, he "proves" the assertion by referring to the only evidence that matters:

'Tis the note of the Jubjub! Keep count, I entreat;
    You will find I have told it you twice,
'Tis the song of the jubjub! The proof is complete.
    If only I've stated it thrice.'

(HS, 224)

The inexorability of this rule is demonstrated through the fate of the Baker, who is introduced in the first "fit." The baker is distinguished from his peers by "the number of things/He forgot when he entered the ship" (HS, 217):

The loss of his clothes hardly mattered, because
    He had seven coats on when he came,
With three pair of boots--but the worst of it was,
    He had wholly forgotten his name.

(HS, 217; my emphasis)

Such a lapse in a world ruled by language is dangerous, and the reader's suspicion that the Baker's position is precariously weak is confirmed later in the poem, when the Bellman first mentions "Boojums," an extraordinary type of Snark, and the Baker faints in horror. After he is roused, the Baker tells "his story of woe/In an antediluvian tone" (HS, 221).
The Baker reveals the warning his uncle gave him before he left on the hunt, that he may search for ordinary Snarks without fear,

But oh, beamish nephew, beware of the day,
If your Snark be a Boojum! For then
You will softly and suddenly vanish away,
And never be met with again!
(HS,221)

The Baker goes on to, in effect, pronounce his own doom for, despite the protests of the Bellman, he repeats his fears three times, unconsciously invoking the rule of three. From this point, which occurs in the third "fit," both the Baker and the reader are caught in the grip of the illogical, arbitrary, and completely relentless system that controls human destiny in the poem.

The Snark itself is never clearly defined, though some of its characteristics are established; its taste, for example, is "meagre and hollow, but crisp" (HS,220). Many readers have tried to allegorize the Snark, but such attempts at specificity work against the poem itself. In fact, it is the Snark's anonymity and its vagueness that give it power. The reader knows neither why the crew are hunting it, nor how it has the ability to make a person "softly and suddenly vanish away" (HS,221). In the sixth "fit" another crew member, the Barrister, dreams of the Snark, envisaging it in a courtroom setting. Although the Snark first appears as a defense lawyer, it soon takes over the functions of both judge and jury. This image of misplaced, ever-growing power is the most specific account of the Snark given to the reader, and it sums up the force of its shadowy presence well.

As in Lear's poem, "The Seven Families," once the initial pattern is established the conclusion of "The Hunting of the Snark" is inevitable.
The Baker meets the Boojum in the eighth and final "fit," and does indeed disappear, as the final stanza notes,

In the midst of the word he was trying to say,
   In the midst of his laughter and glee,
He had softly and suddenly vanished away--
   For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.
(HS,230)

It is appropriate that the Baker, of all the crew, should be the one to meet the Snark; "their here unnamed" (HS,230), the Baker has been trapped by language in more ways than one. Placed in a world where language provides the only certainty, he has somehow lost his name. Furthermore, when pressed by the Bellman to explain why he had not previously mentioned his uncle's warning, the Baker responds that he told them the day they set sail; unfortunately

   I said it in Hebrew--I said it in Dutch--
   I said it in German and Greek:
   But I wholly forgot (and it vexes me much)
   That English is what you speak!
(HS,222)

Like so many of Carroll's characters, the Baker is placed in a hopeless situation, where the correct use of language is equally necessary and impossible.

At the beginning of the journey, the Bellman unrolls his map for the crew, revealing "A perfect and absolute blank" (HS,219). The crew are pleased, for "They found it to be/A map they could all understand" (HS,218):

   "What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,
   Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?"
So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply
   "They are merely conventional signs!"
(HS,218)
Language too is a system of "merely conventional signs," and yet by the conclusion of "The Hunting of the Snark," its emptiness, like that of the blank map, is a frightening indication of man's estranged position in an apparently absurd world.

There can be no easy transition from the power and beauty of the Alices and "The Hunting of the Snark" to the sentimental, terribly flawed Sylvie and Bruno. And yet this failure is in many ways as interesting as Carroll's greatest nonsense, though for entirely different reasons. For in Sylvie and Bruno the terms of the nonsense dialectic are more obvious than in any of Carroll's or Lear's other works, because they have split totally apart.

Sylvie and Bruno relates two parallel, interconnected stories. The narrator, an aged bachelor with a weak heart, weaves back and forth between two "worlds," the human and the fairy. The human story involves the love of Dr. Arthur Forester and Lady Muriel, while the events in fairyland focus on the two sprites, Sylvie and Bruno. Never one to leave matters at loose ends, and perhaps also because he intuited the novel's weaknesses, Carroll attempts in the preface to Sylvie and Bruno to clarify the novel's form. The following is only part of his long explanation:

I have supposed a Human being to be capable of various psychical states, with varying degrees of consciousness, as follows--
(a) the ordinary state, with no consciousness of the presence of Fairies;
(b) the 'eerie' state, in which, while conscious of actual surroundings, he is also conscious of the presence of Fairies;
(c) a form of trance, in which, while unconscious of actual surroundings, and apparently asleep he (i.e. his immaterial essence) migrates to other scenes, in the actual world, or in Fairyland, and is conscious of the presence of Fairies.
Despite frantic attempts to connect this structure to Zen Buddhism and a careful tabulation of the passages where abnormal states occur, Carroll fails totally in uniting the diverse threads of his story.

It is important to note again that Sylvie and Bruno, composed over such a long period, does not represent a sudden deterioration of Carroll's abilities and judgment. Furthermore, several of the fairyland chapters and many of the nonsense verses are as good as any isolated example from the Alices or "The Hunting of the Snark." "The Mad Gardener's Song," which appears at various points throughout the novel, is one of the best:

He thought he saw an Elephant,  
That practised on a fife:  
He looked again, and found it was   
A letter from his wife.  
'At length I realize,' he said,  
'The bitterness of Life!'\(^{18}\)

He thought he saw an Argument  
That proved he was the Pope:  
He looked again, and found it was   
A Bar of Mottled Soap.  
'A fact so dread,' he faintly said,  
'Extinguishes all hope!'\(^{19}\)

Also interesting are "Peter and Paul, and "The Pig-Tale," both of which are similar to "The Walrus and the Carpenter" in their attacks against conventional social attitudes. "The Pig Tale" has a unique structure; here Carroll interweaves nonsensical verses such as the following throughout the narrative sections of the poem, with most effective results:

Little Birds are choking  
Baronets with bun,  
Taught to fire a gun:  
Taught, I say, to splinter  
Salmon in the winter—  
Merely for the fun.
Little Birds are hiding
Crimes in carpet-bags,
Blessed by happy stags:
Blessed, I say, though beaten--
Since our friends are eaten
When the memory flags.20

But though individual poems or incidents succeed, they have no organic function in the work as a whole; thus, their impact is severely limited. Most of the novel, including the sections involving Sylvie and Bruno, are at best, terribly insipid, even offensive. Under the cover of conversations between the narrator and Dr. Forester, Carroll includes small disquisitions on some of his favorite personal subjects, especially religion and politics. The love affair between Dr. Forester and Lady Muriel fulfills every Victorian cliché, and the relationship between Sylvie and Bruno follows suit.

Early in *Sylvie and Bruno*, Sylvie's father presents her with two lockets and asks her to choose between them. The first bears the inscription "All-will-love-Sylvie"; the second, "Sylvie-will-love-all."21 Sylvie chooses the latter, but in the end they are shown to be one and the same. There is no place for aggression or hostility, either personal or philosophical here; all is subsumed under the cover of love. There is also, unfortunately, no place for nonsense.
FOOTNOTES


2 Kincaid, 95.


4 Kincaid, 93.


7 Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno, xvi.

8 Carroll, Diaries, p. 239.


12 Carroll, *ibid.*, p. 29.


14 Auden, p. 9.

15 Kincaid, 94.

16 For matters of convenience, and because no real distinction between the two is necessary, I will refer to *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1894) in the text as *Sylvie and Bruno*.

17 Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, xiii.

18 Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*, p. 65.


21 Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*, p. 76.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In his diary entry for May 21, 1856, the twenty-four year old Lewis Carroll noted that he had just finished reading "that extraordinary book Wuthering Heights," and that it was "of all the novels I ever read the one I should least like to be a character in myself."¹ This is an interesting observation, for he himself would in the next fifteen years write two works, Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, bearing crucial, though subtle, similarities to "that extraordinary book." For though the Alices and Wuthering Heights may at first seem to be strange bedfellows, both utilize the tension between order and disorder to explore and describe man's situation.

As Dorothy Van Ghent notes in her excellent discussion of the novel, "Essentially, Wuthering Heights exists for the mind as a tension between two kinds of reality: the raw, inhuman reality of anonymous natural energies, and the restrictive reality of civilized habits, manners, and codes."² These terms differ only slightly from those of the Alices, and of Lear's work as well; the effect--that of questioning "the restrictive reality" of the ordered world--is the same. This tension is most clearly evidenced in the distinction between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, but equally important is the role of the narrators, Nelly Dean and Lockwood. Like Alice, Nelly Dean and Lockwood orient the events "in the context of the psychologically familiar."³ Just as the form of the limericks or the chess game and
Looking-Glass reversals function to mediate the force of Lear's and Carroll's often anarchic, frightening content, so too does the technical displacement provided by the two narrators tend to moderate the almost daemonic energy of Heathcliff and Catherine's passion.

Van Ghent's assertion, that "the tension between the two kinds of reality . . . provides at once the content and the form of Wuthering Heights," could stand as a general description of both Lear's and Carroll's nonsense. In fact, this statement can be seen to apply to a great deal of the literature written in the nineteenth century. In this sense nonsense is a typical, not an eccentric form. Perhaps this is so because many Victorians felt themselves trapped between two worlds, between the old one of religious belief and secure social order and the new one of radical questioning and social chaos. Arthur Hugh Clough certainly typifies this uncertainty, as well as the determination to face apparently irresolvable contradictions:

Where lies the land to which the ship would go?  
Far, far ahead, is all her seamen know.  
And where the land she travels from? Away  
Far, far behind, is all that they can say.  

Lear's and Carroll's nonsense and Wuthering Heights are alike in that their structural and thematic simplicity reveals this conflict, balancing the opposition of disorder, of the self and society, is a purified form, making all the elements readily apparent.

This same order/disorder dialectic controls much of Matthew Arnold's poetry. In Empedocles on Etna, for example, Arnold gives form to this conflict through the opposition of the beautiful, sensual songs of Callicles and the philosophical, intentionally tortured meditations of Empedocles himself. Similarly, in the Switzerland series, the ambivalent views of
the narrator are represented by contrasting verse forms. Thus Arnold intersperses among the narrative sections, which describe the poet's doubts and fears, forward-rushing, lyrical passages which express his desires for happiness and peace:

Hark! the wind rushes past us!
Ah! with that let me go
To the clear, waning hill-side,
Unspotted by snow,
There to watch, o'er the sunk vale,
The frore mountain-wall,
Where the niched snow-bed sprays down
Its powdery fall.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
--I come, O ye mountains!
Ye pine-woods, I come!" 

As with Lear's and Carroll's nonsense and Wuthering Heights, the tension between these opposing desires remains unresolved.

The subversive nature of the order/disorder dialectic in Victorian literature is perhaps most clearly evident in Charles Dickens' novels. Bleak House, for instance, is composed of two alternating and even opposed narratives. The novel begins with the implied author's vision of a London permeated with decay and corruption, its moral ambiguity symbolized by the fog that originates from the High Court of Chancery and covers the city. The implied author's tone is bitter and ironic, even contemptuous, and his chapters represent an indictment of all of Victorian society. The implied author's attacks against this corruption are balanced, however, by Esther Summerson's moderate and conventional views. One of Dickens' heroines who is almost too good to be true, Esther represents throughout the work the values of charity and love. Her detachment—she tells her story in the past tense, while the implied author speaks
in the present—and her more simple, personal perspective temper the force of the implied author's chapters, without altering their significance. Thus although the novel concludes with Esther's summation, in which the good have been rewarded and the wicked punished, her individual "happy ending" does not change the essential significance of Bleak House, which portrays society as either dead or dying from a moral illness which man refuses to cure—or cannot.

These are only a few examples, yet their diversity seems to indicate the presence of a consistent pattern. All literature is of necessity concerned with order and disorder, if only formally within its own limits. What distinguishes most Victorian literature is the self-conscious attempt made to balance these opposing claims. Lear and Carroll both present characters—the Discobolos Family and Humpty Dumpty—trying to balance precariously on a narrow wall. Such a coincidence is fitting, for this image describes not only Lear's and Carroll's nonsense, but much of Victorian literature as well.

It is this insistence upon non-transcendence that distinguishes Lear's and Carroll's nonsense from Surrealism, for example. Like Lear and Carroll, whom they admired, quoted, and wrote about, the Surrealists explored the tension between logic and fantasy, order and disorder, and the self and society. As Andre Breton asserted in the 1924 Manifesto, however, the Surrealists hoped to overcome this dialectic: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality." The Surrealists' goal of "reaching the supreme point of total reintegration of man with himself and with his universe" separates
them in crucial ways from Lear and Carroll's nonsense. A less extreme but equally important distinction involves the Surrealists' explicit anarchism, their attempt to shock society into change through direct attacks, as opposed to Lear's and Carroll's more covert subversiveness.

The Surrealists took Nonsense seriously, perhaps even a bit too seriously, for they often distorted both its intent and effects in an attempt to locate literary predecessors. Still, their concern, and in some ways their seriousness, was justified. For nonsense is not an isolated or incidental experience and its achievement is far from minor. Engrossing and peculiarly satisfying in itself, nonsense utilizes many themes and techniques common to prominent modern art forms. Such themes and techniques, one might say, have simply become in modern art more blatant. In nonsense there is a veil made up of a presumably comforting rhetoric, humor, and an apparently remote subject matter. But that veil, in the end, does not protect us; it exposes us to the true darkness within. Setting us up for attack and then allowing us to retreat for cover, nonsense presents a difficult but insistent claim for attention and concern.
FOOTNOTES

1 Carroll, *Diaries*, p. 86.


3 Van Ghent, p. 155.


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