2012

Thith Cometh of Biting Crutht: Interactions with Nonsense Literature and Victorian Philosophical Toys

Alexandra Patkin
Bard College

Thith Cometh of Biting Crutht**:**

Interactions with Nonsense Literature and Victorian Philosophical Toys

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Languages and Literature

of Bard College

by

Sasha Patkin

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2012

I would
like to express
my sincerest
thanks to Professor
Deirdre D'Albertis
and to Professor
Richard Aldous for
agreeing to read this
thesis and sit on my
project board; to my
adviser, Professor
Stephen Graham,
for being so often
subjected to
the hideous
underbelly
of my writing
process and
for offering
unparalleled
advice anyway;
to Luisa Lopez,
without whose
friendship
and countless
adventures
this project
would
have
been
written
in half
the time,
and, as ever,
to my family –
for putting
up with
my nonsense.

Table of Contents

Introduction:

Life in Negative

"Nonsense," on principle, seems to stand stubbornly in contradiction to the world of sense. Arms folded and defiant, nonsense speaks a negative language, declaring that whatever sense is, nonsense, necessarily, is not. If sense is reasonable, then nonsense is unreasonable. If sense is ordered and logical, then nonsense is random and irrational. Nonsense is "not-sense" – and seems to play a childish enough game. Indeed, in common usage, nonsense is often presented as being fairly childish and trivial – occasionally a nuisance, sometimes disrespectful - but ultimately an innocuous diversion. An order to "Cut out that nonsense!" or "Knock off that nonsense!" for example, brings to mind images of immature or disobedient children reprimanded by a social superior. This connotation suggests that nonsense naturally allies itself with the foolish, the irrelevant, and those who show a certain amount of disregard for normal order. These commands suggest that a mature, productive world is one that has pushed nonsense to its periphery.

However, as any true companion of nonsense can attest to, our world is not so easily divided into black and white distinctions of "sense" and "nonsense." Upon closer investigation, this seeming opposition reveals itself to be a much subtler dialogue. Sense is constantly second-guessing itself, redefining itself, and forcing nonsense into infinite gradations of grey. Boundaries are undefined, and contending parties are constantly transgressing, disguising and confusing themselves - neither truly wanting to annihilate the other, being in full awareness that without sense there can be no category of non-sense, and that, without nonsense, it would be very hard to say for certain what classifies as sense. As poet and literary critic Susan Stewart

writes, "Nonsense always refers back to a sense that itself cannot be assumed" (Stewart 1979, 3-4). This subterranean dialectic between "sense" and "nonsense" makes any authoritative discussion or definition of so-called "nonsense *literature*," therefore, almost impossible. What exactly constitutes nonsense? Nonsense seems to naturally ally itself with satire or parody– but nonsense can also be situational or stylistic, melancholic or musical. Indeed, the label of "nonsense" has been assigned to the works from everyone from Lawrence Sterne to Ogden Nash, Samuel Beckett to Dr. Seuss.

Michael Heyman, in his mapping of the genre, outlines what is possibly the most widely accepted historical definition of nonsense literature, however. Heyman notes in his thesis that nonsense, or near-nonsense, briefly appears in English literature for the first time in the mid-fifteenth century in the form of "impossibilia" – a hyperbolic description of impossible actions or phenomena, and a technique whose roots can be traced back to writings of ancient Greece (Heyman 1991, 1). Heyman notes how nonsense then disappeared for nearly two centuries as impossibilia fell out of fashion, resurging in new form in the verse of John Hoskyns and John Taylor in the early seventeenth century, and then disappearing as a technique again for nearly 100 years until the Victorian era (Heyman 1999, 2). Heyman, like many others, argues that true literary nonsense held a unique relationship to the Victorian era; and that, although forms of nonsense may have existed prior to this time, early nonsense such as that of Hoskyns or Taylor was not what we think of as nonsense today, which is essentially a Victorian creation. Rather than the whimsical nonsense that came in the nineteenth century, the early nonsense, according to Heyman, was highly satirical, topical, and meant almost exclusively for an adult audience (Heyman 1999, 2).

Certainly, of course, there are indisputable uses of pure nonsense to be found prior to the Victorian era. Nonsense words are often found in the refrains of songs and poems, for example, and many traditional rhymes used variants of "hey nonny nonny" or "fal-de-ral" (Skoyles 2012). In Act V, scene III of *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's pages sing:

> It was a lover and his lass —
> With a hey, and a ho, and a hey-nonny-no —
> That o'er the green cornfield did pass
> In springtime, the only pretty ring-time,
> When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding.
> Sweet lovers love the spring.

And a variety of other nonsense words and phrases were also often used by troubadours in place of words which they considered too risqué, as stylistic elements in nursery rhymes, and as mnemonic devices (Conley 2008, 78).

But pure nonsense before the Victorian era generally confined itself to within the context of song, as technique for comic relief, or as part of a larger satire. Indeed, by popular remembrance, only in the Victorian era does nonsense begin as a purposefully made aesthetic – existing by its own merit and laughing at its own jokes. The Victorian "fathers of nonsense," Edward Lear (1812-1888) and Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson – "Lewis Carroll" (1832-1898) – were perhaps the first to purposefully write whimsical, self-labeled "nonsenses," denying any particular meaning to their work. Lewis Carroll – logician, mathematician, and photographer – seems to hardly need introduction as being the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Edward Lear, his near exact contemporary, published his first nonsense book, *A Book of Nonsense*, just slightly earlier, in 1846, and his other volumes of nonsense - *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets*, *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany*, and *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems,*

Songs, Botany, Music – just after the appearance of the *Alice* books in 1871, 1872, and 1877, respectively.

Both men gained remarkable popularity and were very well received, becoming household names within their own lifetimes (Heyman 1999, 11). Indeed, Edmund Strachey's 1888 article in *The Quarterly* Review, "Nonsense as a Fine Art," praises the nonsense verses of Edward Lear as "the flower of humour and wit," and G.K. Chesterton's 1901 essay "Defense of Nonsense" defines what he calls the "new" nonsense of Lear and Carroll as suggesting their own version of the cosmos. Carolyn Wells notes that nonsense was also praised in an 1875 article titled "Treatise of Language" as deeply affecting and a thing of beauty, and that Thomas Penson de Quincey (1785-1859) remarked, "None but a man of extraordinary talent can write first-rate nonsense" (Wells 1911).

In many ways, however, the emergence and popularity of nonsense literature in the Victorian era itself seems nonsensical. The significance of nonsense is so elusive and its content so ill-defined that analyses of nonsense literature often seek to understand it within the terms of a defined historical context. But rather than helping to define the genre or provide an authoritative reading of nonsense literature, the association of whimsical nonsense with the Victorian era seems only to beg more questions about the true conversation between sense and nonsense. The Victorian era is a time generally remembered for being utilitarian, conformist, rationalizing, and positivistic, embracing realist modes of representation and devoted to seeking out perceptible truth. Nonsense, however, revels in the overtly useless, centers on and values eccentrics, and describes impossible thoughts for which no natural equivalent exists. The Victorian era can be said to have seen a desire for the full consolidation of the English language and in reducing English to a set of rules: a desire reflected in the rise of the field of philology just slightly earlier

(Tigges 1988, 234), as well as in the Philological Society of London's call for the complete re-examination of Anglo-Saxon English on in beginning of the creation of the the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1857 (Campbell 2012). Nonsense, on the other hand, delights in making up words, and loves nothing more than to misinterpret or highlight exceptions to grammatical rules.

The simplest way to account for the presence of nonsense is perhaps to read it as a counter-culture emerging out of "repressive Victorian society," or as a reaction against the valuing of rationality above creativity. However, just as nonsense can be said to never stand in absolute contradiction to sense, so nonsense literature can be read as overlapping in more dynamic ways and engaging more deeply with culture and philosophical concerns. Wim Tigges, for example, gives passing mention in his *Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* to ideas on the limits of rational knowledge as expressed in the epistemological studies of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). For Tigges, the ways in which Kant turns thought back upon itself and attempts to distinguish what man can and cannot assert with certainty seems to need little defense of its connection to the subsequent presence of nonsense literature in a highly rational age – the same interests investigated in Kant's arguments somehow mirrored, though not directly addressed, in equal complexity in the writings of Carroll and Lear. Others, as well, have found engaging in nonsense literature to be comparable to engaging in conversation with fields of philosophy such as structuralism, the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein – or indeed any other field which concerns itself with the knowable limits of the world.

The investigation of language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can also be seen as becoming a source of interest and study in its own right, and nonsense, in many ways, can be argued as displaying a similar interest in language's implications – its concerns and explorations of language very much relevant to these contemporary debates. Growing out of an interest in

philology during the Romantic era, modern historical linguistics emerged as a scholarly discipline during the early nineteenth century and attempted to approach language scientifically, analyzing it for its underlying structure (*Britannica* 2012). Language's structure began to be investigated during this time for what it reveals about the order of the universe and our ability to understand the world, and nonsense literature's unconventional use of language and tenuous relation with sense seems to tie in directly with these concerns.

Indeed, the English language proved nearly impossible to consolidate, and the desire to understand the world in terms of a set and ordered system perhaps ultimately proved to be more frustrating than successful. While many words could be traced back to their Greek or Latin roots, for example, language was in many ways proved to be unstable – susceptible to miscommunication and misinterpretation. The techniques of nonsense can be seen as playing with and perhaps exaggerating these frustrations, the ambiguities of its language defying successful communication, and Carroll's mathematically-based nonsense in particular as using logic against itself to highlight exceptions to rules and mock the concept of set, ordered structure.

In much the same way that language was beginning to be read and understood as unstable, the subjective nature of perception and frustrations of interpreting the world in general began to be given attention around the mid-nineteenth century. It was around this time that our eyes were acknowledged to be not simply passive receptors and reliable mediators of the outside world, but rather active, subjective creators of experience – able to produce sensation even in the absence of stimulus. Studies during this time focused on the physiology of the eye and "higher level processing," articulating the difference between sensation (photons which stimulate the retina) and phenomenology (subjective experience), and concluded that the brain plays a large role in interpreting the visual data in order to construct a picture of reality. For perhaps the first

time, vision was understood not as something fixed and immutable in the world that enters the mind though the eye, but as something which could be created in the mind and 'projected' back onto the world.

In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Jonathan Crary similarly argues that these contemporary convulsions in optical science may be considered as a unique point of intersection in which philosophical debates collide with other fields of interest. Like language, vision in the nineteenth century interacted with various theories of how we interpret the world around us as the eye became a subject of interest, exploration, and observation, rather than an 'object of knowledge'. As Crary argues, "The work of Goethe, Schopenhauer, Ruskin, and Turner and many others are all indications that [in the nineteenth century] … the process of perception itself had become, in various ways, a primary object of vision" (Crary 1990, 138).

While a direct comparison of the radically different fields of optical science and literary nonsense would undoubtedly be unjust to the complexities of both, it is nevertheless interesting to explore the ways in which one arena of thought may inform, interact, and conflict with those of another. Crary seemingly views the true importance of nineteenth century studies of optics to be due to the new types of epistemological reflection they inspired, rather than any particular empirical discovery – their implications speaking to more than just the mechanics of vision. Though he does not discuss literature and makes no connection between nineteenth-century studies of optics and nonsense, Crary's work gives interesting insight into contemporary scientific and aesthetic approaches to the world, and provides another angle from which to approach many of the same philosophic concerns touched upon by literary nonsense.

For example, both nonsense literature and studies of optics in the nineteenth century speak generally to the tensions between objective reality and subjective perception as they relate to vision and interpretation. Indeed, the German physicist Hermann von Helmholtz is particularly notable for his discoveries on how colors can be falsely apprehended by the mind, but Helmholtz also seemed to find his work informed by an equal interest Kantian epistemology and the limits of human knowledge. Laura Otis notes that Helmholtz's mentor, Johannes Muller, had developed a hypothesis in the 1830s which loosely supports Kant's philosophy and concerns about interpreting the world - focusing on how the mind relies on structural categories to interpret the world. Muller argued that our knowledge of the world reflected not inherent properties of our external surroundings, but rather the limited workings of our sensory nerves and organs in our perception of sensations (Otis 2001, 41-2).

Helmholtz, the son of a philologist, was also an admirer of Thomas Young, a scientist who set out a model for the visual interpretation of colors. For Helmholtz, it seemed perfectly natural that Young should both be so concerned with subjective perception and have gained fame as being one of the first to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphics. Helmholtz argues for an analogy between learning how to interpret the visual system of signs of hieroglyphics, and learning how to interpret an apparently arbitrarily chosen system of words (Otis 2001, 44). For Helmholtz, studies of the processes of the eye extended beyond just what they indicated in studies of optics, but were part of a much larger discussion on the ways in which we interact with structure and interpret the external world. Helmholtz concerned himself not just with optic sensory receptors, but more widely with the ways in which the world could be wrongly apprehended, in the role in which a human plays in the creation of his own experiences.

While nonsense may be found to engage in various ways with grand philosophical concerns, however, its general popularity in the Victorian era is still perhaps slightly confusing. The overwhelming focus of British children's literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was on moral instruction – a concept which nonsense literature has steadfastly eschews, if not outright mocks (Kosanke, 129). Indeed, the techniques of nonsense seem to be largely negative or subversive, engaging in but ultimately frustrating and mocking sense-making activities. As Tigges articulates, nonsense can be said to be "more than a formal structure, a pattern of rhyme, metre, alliteration etc., that provides a framework obliterating the actual meaning; rather meaning itself is constantly shown to be arbitrary" (Tigges 1988, 23). By all rights, then, nonsense should be frustrating or disconcerting to the majority of its readers, provoking more anxiety than enjoyment to anyone not directly concerned in its intellectual or epistemological implications.

But Victorian nonsense was by no means a highly intellectualized divertissement, and was rather loved simply as a light-hearted entertainment. Indeed, while the world of nonsense does sometimes highlight the failure of language to articulate all that is asked of it, it is also expansive, bantering, and humorous. Nonsense can be repetitive, misunderstood in a thousand places, or defeatist, but, more often, the language of nonsense is incantatory and magical. Rather than a subversive dismissal of structure, there is an almost divine importance placed on language and logic in nonsense. Nonsense produces more than the sum of its parts in its creation of Rocking-horse-flies and Snap-dragon flies – worlds created almost solely out of a play on language and misconstrued logic. Nonsense can perhaps be argued, therefore, as not just interacting with or contradicting sense, but rather as playing with it. Not only is nonsense more than just argumentative, but much of the pleasure of reading it seems to be derived from its

continually shifting rearrangements of sense, nonsense apparently being more interested in exercising the imagination and playing with these elements of sense than in mastering them or in proving some sort of theory.

And, interestingly, far from inundating society with anxieties and despair, the new discoveries of optics during this time were similarly reflected in playful counterpart. Optical toys, also called "philosophical toys," captured the imaginations of their Victorian audience, toys like the kaleidoscope and the stereoscope reaching a popularity which has hardly diminished in the years since.

Today, the term "philosophical toys" may seem odd. "Philosophy" and "toys" may seem like strange bedfellows or perhaps even like opposites, and the relevance of the term "philosophical toys" to studies of optics may seem ill-defined. However, when the term first emerged in the early nineteenth century, the gap between them did not seem so wide. Literally, "philosophy" was associated with the study of nature, and what we think of today as natural science or physics was then referred to as natural or experimental philosophy. The term "philosophical toys," therefore, referred to the examination of the eye's processes encouraged by the various gadgets.

In many ways, however, the term "philosophical toy" somehow seems perfectly fitted to describe both nonsense literature and the optical gadgets, even by our current definition of "philosophy." Both nonsense literature and the optical toys encouraged philosophical and epistemological reflection, as well as physiological awareness. Both can be enjoyed as toys at face value, as well as read more deeply, and seem in this way to represent a playful synthesis of theory and practice. For example, the thaumatrope– a disc that, when spun, blended two images together as if in simple animation – was created as a demonstration of how afterimages persist on

the retina, but the thaumatrope's true popularity was due to its incarnation as a toy, and those who marveled at its effects and manipulated its mechanical workings likely knew or cared little about its scientific implications. Though their technical operations are bound up in realizations of the fallibility of the eye to exactly convey objective reality, the movement of the toys themselves seem inconclusive and inconsequential, producing laughter and wonder. Rather than despair, the toys evoked delight by both creating illusion and allowing for their audience to break apart its motion, and understand the joke.

Further lessening the gap between "philosophy" and "toys," science in the nineteenth century in general had a playful and fantastical side, suggesting endless new possibilities for the imagination. Much like looking through a stereoscope or seeing the effects of a thaumatrope for the first time, new scientific discoveries (as perhaps in any age) can be said to have sparked the collective imagination with the idea that the world might not be laid out exactly as had always been thought. Stephen Prickett notes that it is unsurprising that, in light of contemporary scientific studies, Tenniel gave the Jabberwock "the leathery wings of a pterodactyl and the long scaly neck and tail of a sauropod," (Prickett 2005, X) and Stephen Conniff mentions that fantastic creatures seemed to appear as often in scientific works as in Victorian fantasy stories:

> In his 'History of British Star-fishes, and other animals of the class *Echinodermata*,' for instance the naturalist Edward Forbes began one chapter with an illustration of Cupid in a sea-going chariot drawn by a pair of sea creatures with bodies like snakes and heads like sea urchins (they were Ophiuridae). Another chapter ends with Puck playing his pipe for a couple of dancing brittle-stars, one of which actually rests the back of a "hand" against out-thrust "hip." Elsewhere, he drew a stingray smoking a pipe and winking (Conniff 2011).

Jean-Jacques Lecercle points to a passage from Charles Darwin's explorations in Patagonia, an encounter with 'camel-like guanacos': "That they are curious is certain" writes

Darwin, “for if a person lies on the ground, and plays strange antics, such as throwing his feet up in the air, they will always approach by degrees to reconnoitre him” (Lecercle 1994, 202). For Lecercle, this act of nonsense in such a serious, supposedly academic setting is both humorous and life-affirming. “It is a comfort to us,” Lecercle writes, “That the famous scientist should behave like Lear’s ‘old man of Port Grigor,’ who ‘stood on his head, till his waistcoat turned red’” (Lecercle 1994, 203).

Language, too, could seem expansive and fantastical in the nineteenth century. Words were being created in order to describe the discoveries and inventions produced by the scientific and industrial revolutions, and the English language absorbed fun new words like “shampoo,” “pajama,” “sauna,” and “tycoon,” from foreign cultures as the British Empire expanded (*Britannica* 2012). Perhaps a connection could be drawn between the possibilities of language as suggested by these new words and Edward Lear’s lexical creativity and his invention of such nonsense words as spongetaneous, meloobious, dolomphious, ombliferous, borascible, himmeltanious, fizzgiggious, or mumbian.

Of course, a direct connection between this vaguely defined “expansion of the English language” and Lear’s nonsense words would be very hard to prove, and the idea that there is any great or redeeming significance to the fact that Darwin, at one point in his life, lay on the ground and threw his feet in the air to catch the attention of some guanacos is likely no more than a matter of personal opinion. Nevertheless, it can be said that the “philosophical toys” of both the nineteenth century optical gadgets and Victorian nonsense language, rather than merely proving the fallibility of the brain to convey objective reality, encouraged an examination of the world we live in, and a re-examining of our imaginative and perceptual processes. In this way, the philosophical toys extend beyond their lives as things of amusement. They require participation,

and are centered on processes of observation, active experiment, and self-consciousness of thought. They are instruments of imagination that demand a self-consciousness of vision, an acknowledgement of the artifice of structure, and a constant exploration of how the mind is stringing together and experiencing unrelated images.

For Johan Huizinga, this element of "play"– this necessity of toys and fun as well as for more serious philosophy – is an essential part of life and culture. Huizinga even suggests in his writings that in place of "homo sapiens," or "knowing man," perhaps a better term to describe mankind is "homo ludens," or "playing man." Huizinga posits that the ability to imagine hypothetical situations or to play with the possibilities of nature in a safe and inconsequential environment is not merely a pastime but a primordial necessity and, in fact, key to the creation of thoughts and ideas - thoughts which rarely, he argues, come from rational thinking or thoughts that are tethered by linear logic (Huizinga 1955).

Huizinga argues that the ability to play presupposes a certain understanding of the object or thought being played with and the ability to manipulate it, but he also asserts that the joy of a game comes from more than just a task of mastery: it comes from the process of manipulation itself, and from the exertion of the will. This importance of play has implications for the study of nonsense, as well. Even though both Lear and Carroll were not only highly qualified academics, but, by all accounts, concerned with precision and exactitude in many other aspects of their personal lives, they are also considered to be the greatest contributors to the genre of nonsense. Perhaps nonsense, then, suggests that the imaginative impulse and the rational impulse are not at all contradictory or mutually-exclusive; rather, that the willful interplay between two states of mind or two states of being creates quite a potent fusion. Though Edward Lear was an acclaimed naturalist, for example, he described the world in more than just precise and exact detail. Along

the margins of his notepad, he also represented the specimens he found in less concentrated, fanciful doodles.

Pyramidalis Piggiawiggia

Shoebootia Utilis

Jinglia Tinkettlia [1]

Nonsense seems to display an interest in going out into and exploring the world and in playing with what it finds. Carroll's writings collect oddities of language and logic, and Lear's limericks collect oddities of character. The reader of nonsense is often put in the position of an explorer, heading out into this new landscape of possibility.

Of course, it is always possible to argue that nonsense does not engage in any way with these serious philosophical debates, and that it is destructive to the very spirit of nonsense to suggest that it indicates anything at all. Indeed, most who read nonsense literature or play with a kaleidoscope do not press these more serious questions, feeling that it is enough to be entertained. However, while there may not be a defined "sense" to nonsense, this does not mean that it should necessarily be read as completely devoid of significance. Nonsense may be played with and loved by children and philosophers alike, and be meaningful to both. Rather, the idea that nonsense can both be read at face value and for its larger implications speaks to nonsense literature's unique wealth of a variety of interesting and equally-valid interpretations, enhancing an appreciation for both.

My ultimate goal is not to reconcile nonsense literature with the Victorian era through a discussion of the nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, or even to claim that Victorian nonsense has any particular relationship to the period in which it was created. I am interested less in attempting to untangle distinctions between sense and nonsense - or even in comparing the widely different fields of literature and optics - than I am in examining the various ways in which these "philosophical toys" have been interpreted and interacted with over the near century and a half course of their existence. Like a Lear nonsense alphabet ("B was once a little bear, Beary, Wary, Hairy, Beary"… "C was once a little cake, Caky, Baky, Maky, Caky"…) which defines itself by nothing other than the play and association of its sounds, I am interested in exploring and playing with the spontaneous connections between different fields of study and the assorted associations they have inspired, simply to see where these discoveries might lead.

One and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one:

The structure of nonsense and the sum of its parts

In 1862, the poet Edward Lear composed a letter which read:

> Thrippsy pillivinx,
>
> Inky tinky pobblebockle abblesquabs?--Flosky! Beebul trimble flosky!--Okul scratchabibblebongibo, viddle squibble tog-a-tog, ferrymoyassity amsky flamsky ramsky damsky crocklefether squiggs,
>
> Flinkywisty pomm,
> Slushypipp

-Surely an example of nonsense "sumptuous and sonorous," "pure and absolute" – as Lear himself asserted of his work throughout his lifetime (Lear 1888, 5).

Edward Lear, it seems, had a particular love for the untethered sounds of language. His personal letters as well as his published verse savored excessive alliterations and rhymes, made-up words and unnecessary syllables, and, perhaps as a response to his lack of formal education as a child or simply because they amused him, the margins of Lear's notebooks and drawings are littered with phonetically-spelt annotations of all the rox, dux, cammels, and korkodils he sketched. Lear's world is one is one of joyous linguistic inhibition; one in which Blue Boss-Wosses plunge into perpendicular, spicular, orbicular, quadrangular, circular depths of soft mud – one in which galloobious spikky sparrows raise their voices in choruses of, "Jikky wikky bikky see, chicky bikky wikky bee, twicky witchy wee!" (Lear 2008, 110).

But did Lear write "nonsense?" Is nonsense simply gibberish, or a concern only with the sounds of language? Many - especially those writing in the years leading up to Lear - have held

to this belief. Dr. Samuel Johnson defined nonsense in 1755 as "unmeaning or ungrammatical language… trifles; things of no importance," for instance, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined nonsense in 1830 as "verses consisting of words and phrases arranged soley with reference to the meter and without regard to the sense" (Tigges 2011).

Yet, while Slushypipp's letter to Thrippsy pillivinx does not seem to encourage interpretation of any sort, other instances of Lear's language are more pointed, and less easily dismissed as simply "gibberish." While often comical, many of his nonsense limericks present images of their subjects which are as clear as day. For example, in one limerick, Lear writes of an old person of Sheen,

> Whose expression was calm and serene;
> He sate in the water, and drank bottled porter,
> That placid of person of Sheen.

Though perhaps slightly ridiculous, reading of this old person of Sheen is a completely different experience than reading Slushypipp's letter. Similarly, in a recipe for Gosky patties, Lear employs all formalities of language, instructing the reader "procure some cream, some slices of Cheshire Cheese, 4 quires of foolscap paper, and a packet of black pins. Work the whole into a paste, and spread it out to dry on a sheet of clean brown waterproof linen" (Lear 2008, 157). The directions are fairly impractical, but the language itself perfectly sensible.

Further, Lear's first self-titled "Nonsense Alphabet" begins,

A
A was an ant
Who seldom stood still, and who made a nice house
In the side of a hill.
a
Nice little ant!

….which really doesn't seem very nonsensical at all. Even the illustration seems fairly uninspired. And yet all of these examples – the gibberish letter, the limerick, and the alphabet – have all been lumped together under the label of Lear's "nonsense."

So what constitutes "nonsense?" Does "nonsense" necessitate that every part of the text be nonsensical, and that nonsenses undeviatingly be "trifles, things of no importance"? Carolyn Wells thought so, and her *Nonsense Anthology*, published in 1902, does not even include any nursery rhymes – as she argues that nursery rhymes cannot properly be considered nonsense, as they are often in some ways "useful" – serving as mnemonic devices, teaching children to count, offering morals, or specifically composed to help put children to bed. While the words themselves often did not have meaning, 'sense' for Carolyn Wells is defined by the practical function of the text. In her eyes, even apparent gibberish could not be counted as nonsense if it had use, function, or meaning – nonsense being defined as that which is specifically purposeless. As she writes,

> Eena, meena, mona, mi,
> Bassalona, bona, stri,
> Hare, ware, frown, whack,
> Halico balico, we, wi, we, wack
>
> is not strictly a nonsense verse, because it was invented and used for "counting out," and the arbitrary words simply take the place of the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. (Wells 1911)

Elizabeth Sewell also excludes other "useful" texts in her review of nonsense – such as those used by Latin students to familiarize students with "mechanical values of quantity and metre" (Sewell 1911) – and Wim Tigges similarly exposes the very practical function of a sample of apparent nonsense as found in the following acting exercise:

> So she went into the garden to cut a cabbage-leaf, to make an apple-pie; and at the same time a great she-bear, coming up the street, pops its head into the

> shop. "What, no soap?" So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber, and there were present the Picninnies, and the Joblillies, and the Garyulies, and the grand Panjandrum himself, with the little round button at top, and they all fell to playing the game of catch as catch can, till the gun powder ran out at the heels of their boots.

-explaining how it was improvised by the English dramatist Samuel Foote in the 1750s as a test of a rival's memory (Tigges 1987).

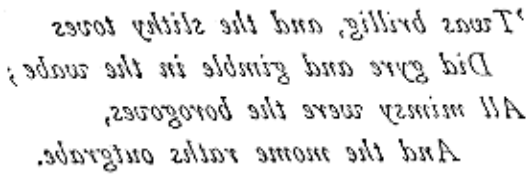
Labeling a text as 'nonsense' seems to demand an investigation of where, exactly, it deviates from sense. While Carolyn Wells defined sense through a verse's practical purpose, a number of other critical and linguistic approaches have also undertaken the task of limiting the genre of nonsense to some sort of definite, sensible criteria. Marina Yaguello defines nonsense as "Playing with sound: rhyme, repetition, alliteration, assonance, paronyms, misdivisions, spoonerisms" (Yaguello 1998, 18), for example – and Kimberley Reynolds list includes a whole zoo of exotic linguistic devices:

> Additive narratives, alliteration to imply connection, arbitrariness, borrowing, exaggeration, incongruity/ mixing unrelated or contradictory elements, inversion/reversal/mirroring, negating, neologisms, non sequitors, omission/silence, parallelism, paralipsis, parody, portmanteau words, puzzles or codes, repetition, simultaneity, silence (Reynolds 2010, 48).

But perhaps "Jabberwocky," by Lewis Carroll, can be said to be one of the best known and agreed-upon examples of nonsense verse in the English language – often held up as the prime example of all nonsense literature – and, as such, is surely as good a place to start an analysis of nonsense as any other.

Indeed, appearing before the public for the first time in 1871 as part of *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*, "Jabberwocky"'s influence has since extended beyond even the staggering popularity of the *Alice* series. The very word "Jabberwocky," in fact, is now considered to be an umbrella term for all whimsical, nonsensical language (Gardner 1960,

194). In many ways, "Jabberwocky" fulfills the promise of absolute linguistic nonsense – being the literal inversion of language, appearing to Alice in a Looking-glass book as:



Alice puzzles over this for some time. Unlike Edward Lear's gibberish letter, which is simply fun to read and which seems to a punchline in itself, Jabberwocky, to Alice, seems very capable of being read, and even as presenting a meaning just out of reach – as if in some language Alice does not know. Alice investigates and manipulates the poem – but even after she thinks to hold the poem to a mirror in order for the words go the right way, the poem's meaning remains opaque.

> "It seems very pretty," she said when she had finished it, "but it's rather hard to understand!" (You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all). "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don't exactly know what they are!" (*TLG*, 12)

Though Alice never offers an explanation of the poem's meaning, her emotional reaction to the text actually gives a very good reading of nonsense literature in general. Nonsense language is often a beautiful one. Fulfilling Coleridge's definition of nonsense, its words are sometimes even arranged solely with reference to sound and meter – as with Lear's letter – and the result is therefore very pretty, but rather hard to understand.

But perhaps literary nonsense also has the ability to extend beyond simple gibberish. Though Alice remarks that the poem must be in a different language, she soon realizes that – if not exactly written in plain English – she *is* quite capable of reading it. She recognizes the familiar structure of language in the verse – and perhaps it is because of this seemingly smooth

and transparent surface that Alice finds it so difficult to admit even to herself that she does not understand it at all.

The suggestion of meaning in "Jabberwocky" is more than a result of just the sounds of its language, in fact. Upon closer examination, "Jabberwocky" is hardly gibberish or devoid of standard conventions of English at all. The language of "Jabberwocky" is grammatically correct, written with standard punctuation, and adopts common conventions such as alliteration, assonance, and internal rhyme. "Jabberwocky" assumes a recognizable, standard poetic form – each of its seven quatrains adopting an ABAB rhyme scheme. On even the most basic level, the sounds of language are accompanied by technical authority. Not only does every nonsense word used in "Jabberwocky" conform to some sort of pronounceable combination of vowels and consonants which could easily be mistaken for English, it is even possible to identify their parts of speech. "Slithy" is an adjective and "toves" a noun, for example. Additionally, all auxiliary verbs and function words in "Jabberwocky" are kept in standard English, which effectively means that the nonsense of "Jabberwocky" is confined to its content words, and that all of the relationships between nonsense words are maintained. This design is what allows Alice to conclude, "*somebody* killed *something*; that's clear, at any rate-" (Carroll 1993, 19).

In fact, it is generally agreed that somebody *does* kill something. "Jabberwocky" intelligibly narrates an event, and in this way conveys not only a subjective, emotional response, but some form of objective content as well. Though descriptive detail may be lost in its obscure language, "Jabberwocky" plainly tells the tale of a father warning his son of some dangerous creature called the Jabberwock – "Beware the Jabberwock, my son!/ The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!". The son then takes his "vorpal sword in hand: Long time the manxome foe he sought" – hunting the Jabberwock and eventually confronting and decapitating it. He leaves it

dead, “And with its head/ He went galumping back.” A fairly common, trope, in fact. Far from being stripped of sense and structure, therefore, Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” is instead stripped to *pure* structure – almost like a code or a prototype of language.

But if the structure of “Jabberwocky” is that of a regular poem, what makes this poem nonsense? Surely the line “So rested he by the Tumtum tree/ And stood awhile in thought” isn’t nonsensical. The word “Tumtum” is unfamiliar and can’t be found in the dictionary, but clearly seems to be describing the tree. Perhaps a Tumtum tree is like a birch, or a maple. Instead of deciphering gibberish, reading “Jabberwocky” is more like reading a strange new dialect of English, capable of being read and interpreted in much the same way as any other.

“Jabberwocky” further encourages interpretation and this feeling of familiarity with its language through the repetition of its first stanza at the close of the poem. The reader discovers in the final stanza that words such as “brillig,” “gimble,” or “mimsy,” while still difficult to define, are no longer unfamiliar. In some sense, over the course of the poem, they have become part of the reader’s vocabulary. Modern readers will also find that “chortled” and “galumphing” in particular have been so thoroughly embraced by readers that they are now commonly listed in dictionaries. When one discovers that Carroll accompanied definitions of the poem’s neologisms and even a short interpretation of the scene when the first stanza of what later became “Jabberwocky” first appeared in the Dodgson family periodical *Mischmasch* in 1855, the labeling of “Jabberwocky” as seemingly impenetrable “nonsense verse” really begins to seem like a common misconception.

So, is even “Jabberwocky” – the golden example of nonsense verse – really nonsense? Its fundamental structure cannot be said to be, and, after all, poems may be ridiculous without being nonsensical. Yet “Jabberwocky” can also fairly be said to be a bit of a hike from being

what we would think of as completely sensible, either. Sense and nonsense, though perhaps initially seen as easy divisions, are in "Jabberwocky" less easily defined.

For being the "father of nonsense," much of Carroll's work has further failed in being dismissed as "trifles," and "things of no importance," as well. Even under the title "nonsense literature" the *Alice* books have been elevated in their lifetimes above simple amusements, and have been put to use by an impressively wide array of philosophical and academic areas of interest – examples ranging from Robert Sutherland's linguistic analysis of *Alice* in "Language and Lewis Carroll," to Katie Mitchell's thesis, "Growing up in Wonderland: An Analysis of Lacanian Subject Formation Within the Secondary Worlds of Children's Fantasy" – standing the test of interpretation and application with surprising success.

While most of these critical analyses do seem to acknowledge that the *Alice* books can be enjoyed at face value, they attempt to reach beyond the superficial reading – away from *Alice*'s "unfortunate miscarriage as a child's logic-book," to quote Peter Lauchlan Heath's *The Philosopher's Alice* – and toward some sort of generally unacknowledged truth. The driving force behind these "sophisticated" interpretations of *Alice* seems to be the desire to sweep away or account for the nonsense in *Alice*. These interpretations seem to wish to get to some sort of rock base which is either firmly established by the conventions of logic or which presents useful or serious philosophical queries; to make sense out of nonsense.

Indeed, human beings are programmed to speak and to learn languages, and language responds to a fundamental human need – namely, the need to communicate; to understand and to be understood. Therefore, the desire to try to reconcile or understand nonsense language is perfectly natural, and a process which promises to bestow – as Carroll writes in *Symbolic Logic,*

Part 1 – "…clearness of thought — the ability to see your way through a puzzle — the habit of arranging your ideas in an orderly and get-at-able form" (Tigges 1987).

And many of the authors of these readings seem satisfied with their success at finding sense in apparent nonsense. For example, Dr. Abraham Ettleson happily decodes the *Alice* books as a cryptogram for the doctrines of Hasidic Judaism, and even manages to completely translate "Jabberwocky" into sense, asserting that:

> Jabberwocky' is the code name of Rabbi Israel. Split the word Jabberwocky in almost equal parts – i.e. between the letters r and w. Reading *Jabber* from right to left spells Rabbi, and reading Wocky from right to left we derive the word Ykcow which sounds like the name Yacow. Yacow is the Hebrew name of Jacob, and Jacob is Israel. So Jabberwocky means Rabbi Israel. His full name was Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer, the famous Baal Shem Tov of Medzhbish (Ettleson 1966, 23).

Ettleson goes on to interpret the rest of "Jabberwocky" through such processes as inverting the "b" to a "d" in "Jubjub" to achieve "Judjud," or "Jude Jude," and explains how "uffish" is actually short for gefiltefisch.

Though "Jabberwocky" can likely no longer be considered a nonsense poem as interpreted by Ettleson, and loses the quality of what Alice describes of "filling one's head with ideas," nothing about Ettleson's interpretation is necessarily wrong. You *can* get to "Rabbi Jacob" from splitting the word "Jabberwocky" into two inverted parts, with enough effort. Further, highly-critical styles of interpretation similar to Ettleston's have been seen and accepted as a valid methods hermeneutic interpretation throughout history. From Genesis to Wittgenstein, there has been both fascination and scholarship around what the words of a text can reveal. To rearrange the holy words of the Bible even slightly, for example, is considered sacrilege of the highest order – the placement and functions of even smallest units of language taken to signify meaning.

As George Steiner writes,

> In Jewish hermeneutics we find those rubrics that will largely organize the main directions of Western argument about the essence and enigmatic dismemberment of human tongues… There is a philology and gnosis of the individual Hebrew letter as there is of the word and the grammatical unit (Steiner 1975, 60).

Steiner goes on to describe various theosophies which believe that the sense and words of God can be decoded from the arrangement of the Hebrew language – from Merkabah mysticism– wherein "each written character may be regarded as embodying a fragment of the universal design of creation; all human experience, no less than all discourse unto the end of time, is graphically latent in the letters of the alphabet" – to self-hypnotic meditation on groupings of letters in Kaballah – wherein "groupings which need not in themselves be meaningful, the initiate may one to glimpse the great Name of God, manifest throughout the lineaments of nature, but enveloped, as it were, in the muffling layers of vulgate speech" (Steiner 61). Seen in this tradition of interpretation, Ettleson begins to seem less ridiculous. Commentaries of the Zohar indicate that understanding its text's word games and puns is essential to understanding its crucial doctrines, and, in fact, many valued texts, religious or not, are thought to convey more than they expressly articulate.

But, while Ettleson's interpretation may have a place in hermeneutic tradition, there is something seemingly troublesome about his desire to understand every part of the text of a piece of nonsense literature. It seems in some way destructive to the aim of nonsense to believe that, not only is there only one divinely "correct" way to read and understand the true meaning of nonsense – but that there is a true meaning to be found at all. There seems to be something inadvisable about believing that the interpretation of nonsense literature has the power to uncover the underlying structure of the universe, or some sort of great, eternal truth.

And yet the desire to find meaning even in nonsense has been seen time and time again – by linguists and biblical scholars alike. As Lecercle explains, "Behind the author of nonsense who exploits the loopholes of grammar, there is a linguist realist lurking, who believes in the positive (even the positivist) thesis that grammatical practice reaches objective characteristics of the language it describes" (Lecercle 1994, 44), analyzing language for the truth to be found in its physical structure – and this statement was as true in the Victorian era as it is today. The Victorian era, following the Age of Enlightenment, entertained an impulse to cast off ignorance and classify the entire natural world based on its objective characteristics through a variety of practices – a desire perhaps reflected in contemporary studies of evolutionary biology, philology, and comparative linguistics. Many eighteenth century thinkers believed that English could be reduced to a system of rules, and eighteenth century grammarians such as Bishop Robert Lowth believed and worked toward ideals of universal grammar (Lowth 1979, 107).

To explain and illuminate this impulse, George Steiner notes that the root of the word "Esperanto," the name given a constructed universal language developed in 1887, means "to hope" – seemingly as if to explain the motives of certain linguists searching for eternal truth. According to Steiner, these linguists paint the importance of interpretation against a backdrop of a fallen civilization after Babel, and demonstrate a desperate desire to overcome the scattering of language and regain the originally unified point of origin (Steiner 1975, 60). In this world of perceived linguistic chaos,

> [For these linguists], the incommunicados that so absurdly divides [mankind] are [perceived as] a punishment. A lunatic tower was launched at the stars; Titans savaged on another and of their broken bones came the splinters of isolated speech; eavesdropping, like Tantalus, on the gossip of the gods, mortal man was struck moronic and lost all remembrance of his native, universal parlance (Steiner 1975, 57).

Steiner argues that, though men jabber incessantly, these linguist realists believe that what has been lost is the "comic syllable or Name of God" (Steiner 1975, 70). The opaqueness of a text and the seemingly impossibile task of finding its meaning is therefore seen as speaking to – not only the failure in interpreting that particular text – but a deep anxiety about human failure to interpret the world in general, and even the impossibility of ever truly being able to communicate with one another. Therefore, as Steiner argues, the acting impulse behind translation, like interpretation, is to "make tangible the implication of a third, active presence. It [hopes to] show the lineaments of that 'pure speech' which precedes and underlies both languages" (Steiner 1975, 64). Interpretation and translation strive to find true meaning – a meaning, perhaps, which transcends its presence in either text, and attempts to pin down art and make it understandable and manageable. It attempts to fit the contents of language into categories and make sense of them.

As seen in Ettleson's writings, this desire to find one stable, transcendent, objective interpretation of a text can often be found in readings of nonsense literature, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that what nonsense fails at most of all is this task of translation, or of successful interpretation. Nonsense mocks the possibility of communication, and threatens the reader with the ideas that there is no empirical truth to be found in the universe. Many, therefore, are perhaps attracted to this "challenge" of nonsense, and approach it attempting to uncover its underlying order and meaning.

But Carroll seems to mock these translators. Under the title of "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Carroll's original verse of "Jabberwocky" printed for his family in 1855 read:

> Twas bryllyg, and ye slythy toves
> Did gyre and gymble in ye wabe:

> All mimsy were ye borogoves;
> And ye mome raths outgrabe.

Though Carroll defines all of the words he uses, however, he cannot particularly rid the verse of its nonsense as, if the suggested definitions are applied, the stanza reads something like this:

> It was evening, and the smooth and active badgers
> were scratching and boring holes in the hill-side:
> All unhappy were the parrots, and the grave turtles squeaked out.

Carroll's expanded interpretation of this passage is similarly nonsensical, reading:

> There were probably sundials on the top of the hill, and the 'borogoves' were afraid that their nests would be undermined. The hill was probably full of the nests of 'raths', which ran out, squeaking with fear, on hearing the 'toves' scratching outside. This is an obscure, but yet deeply-affecting, relic of ancient Poetry.

Not only does this ridiculous situation seem like something unlikely to have been written about by the ancient Anglo-Saxons, but Carroll's repeated use of the word "probably" – "there were *probably* sundials," "the hill was *probably* full of nests" – casts a shadow of doubt on the interpretation offered. "Deeply-affecting" is also perhaps not the first descriptive adjective which springs to mind, whether or not the definitions are correct. The mental image of badgers attempting to scratch into a hillside full of turtles' nests and upsetting a whole bunch of squeaking parrots is not only unlikely, but cartoonishly comical – almost made sillier by the tone of Carroll's serious and scholarly reading.

This nonsense of interpretation as well as meaning apparently amused Carroll (whose tone is surely tongue-in-cheek), as he seems unable to resist including an interpretation of "Jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking Glass*, as well. The task of translation is taken up by Humpty Dumpty, who takes the meanings of words and phrases literally, answers Alice's every

question as though it were a riddle, and proudly declares that he is capable of explaining "all the poems that ever were invented — and a good many that haven't been invented just yet." Though many of his definitions are similar to Carroll's, Humpty Dumpty's reading varies slightly, ultimately producing a meaning roughly equivalent to:

> It was four o'clock in the afternoon and the lithe and slimy badgers
> did go round and round and make holes in the grass plot round a sundial:
> All flimsy and miserable were the shabby-looking birds
> and the lost green pigs made a noise somewhere between bellowing and
> whistling with a kind of sneeze in the middle.

While Humpty Dumpty is in command of the words, his claim to be able to explain "all the poems that were ever invented" seems to fall a bit flat – his interpretation apparently arbitrary. Humpty Dumpty's system of interpretation fails, and his perception is seen to be faulty.

The idea of a fallible, subjective interpreter of reality can perhaps also be seen in the thaumatrope – a philosophical toy invented in 1825 by John A. Paris which presents a picture on each side of a disk so that, when spun, the two images appear to overlap (Burns 1999). The thaumatrope – whose name literally means, "magic motion" or "turning wonder" – illustrated and popularized contemporary studies on the phenomenon of retinal persistence – also known as the "persistence of vision" (Mannoni 2000, 205). Though this phenomenon bad been observed centuries previously, the invention of the thaumatrope coincided with the first time the persistence of vision was give a clear scientific explanation – the thaumatrope developed as a simple tool to help demonstrate its effects to fellow scientists (Crary 1990, 106).

Paris himself described the phenomenon:

> An object was seen by the eye, in consequence of its image being delineated on the retina or optic nerve, which is situated on the back part of the eye; and that it has been ascertained, by experiment, that the impression which the mind thus

> receives, lasts for about the eighth part of a second after the image is removed... the thaumatrope depends upon the same optical principle; the impression made on the retina by the image, which is delineated on one side of the card, is not erased before that which is painted on the opposite side is presented to the eye; and the consequence is that you see both sides at once. (As quoted in Crary 1990, 105-6).

3

The thaumatrope, like so many of the philosophical toys, tied in with contemporary anxieties about the failings of structure. While the nineteenth century frequently made the eye "the preeminent organ of truth" (Christ/Jordan 1995, xx), for example, studies of optics done in the 1820s and 1830s also began to a dramatic repositioning of the visual observer – highlighting the subjectivity of individual vision.

Many studies on the perception of afterimages were conducted during this time. In 1828, Belgium scientist Joseph Plateau concluded through his studies with a Newton color wheel that afterimages persist on the retina for approximately one third of a second and that afterimages depend upon factors such as time, color, and intensity (Crary 1990, 27). Peter Mark Roget, an accomplished English mathematician, also made many important observations about the nature of persistence of vision in the first half of the 19th century (Crary 1990, 25). In 1825, Roget wrote on how the spokes of train wheels as seen through intervals through the bars of a fence appear to either be motionless or even moving backward, which he determined must be the result of the

location of the observer – in this case speaking to how multiple angles of each spoke are seen simultaneously and perceived as on top of each other by the retina (as quoted in Crary 1990, 26).

Interestingly enough, in addition to contributing much to knowledge on the persistence of vision, Roget was also the author of the first thesaurus. And, in many ways, it does seem as though language, like vision, is susceptible to ambiguity and subjective interpretation – as nonsense literature often exposes. "Jabberwocky," for example, draws attention to the concept that one word can have multiple meanings, and how much of the nonsensicality of nonsense literature lies in the doubtful way its ideas are put together, rather than in the structure of reality itself.

Humpty Dumpty is certainly determined in imposing his own meaning on "Jabberwocky" – his interpretation perhaps comparable to the effects of the persistence of vision. Humpty Dumpty accepts only one reading of the poem – seeing it like a straight picture of a bird in a cage, instead of seeing the possibility of two simultaneous, overlapping images in the text. Humpty Dumpty cannot even be said to be playing with a thaumatrope – seeing a single image but acknowledging how he got there, breaking apart his thought process or realizing that the bird exists independently of and can be set free from the cage. Rather, he tames the words, and strips "Jabberwocky" of its nonsense:

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less"
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all." (*TLG*, 95)

Further, Humpty Dumpty's method of interpreting the strange words in "Jabberwocky" is to view them as portmanteaus – with two meanings packed into one word. For example, he explains how "slithy" can be understood as "lithe and slimy."

Carroll defined these types of words:

> For instance, take the two words "fuming" and "furious." Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards "fuming," you will say "fuming-furious"; if they turn, by even a hair's breadth, towards furious," you will say "furious-fuming"; but if you have a perfectly balanced mind, you will say "frumious" (*HTS*, 10).

-a perfect balance of meaning, pressed together conceptually in a single containing unit with one definition, one master. Humpty Dumpty's method in this way is also like the persistence of vision – slurring two images together to create a single, blended third image.

And there is value to Humpty Dumpty's and Ettleson's readings just as, for Goethe and the physiologists who proceeded him, all images experienced by the eye and brain were "optical truth," rather than simply "illusion," – they are true and speak to how we see and interpret the world. Indeed, this desire to interpret find true meaning and significance is often what sustains interest in nonsense, and, with equal and opposite force, the attempt at interpretation is what sustains the idea that there is empirical truth to be found. Like the fascination of investigating the workings of a spinning a thaumatrope which seems to lay bare the secrets of its illusion, apparently concealing nothing in the presentation of its seemingly simple and logical design, the *Alice* books derive their strength from their suggestion of structure and invitation to interpretation.

Many readers have noted the ways in which the makeup of Wonderland is consistently more logical than nonsensical, for example, and have shown how Carroll presents us with some

form of a recognizable logic system – though not necessarily a familiar one. For example, at one point Alice exclaims, "Four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is – oh dear! I shall never get to twenty at that rate" – which seems at face value to be inconsequential rambling. However, as Stephen Prickett explains in his critical writings, far from abandoning mathematics and logic, Carroll has instead invented a "new, logical, regular, and utterly lunatic multiplication table" in which Alice uses a base of 18 instead of the standard base of 10 – thus making it actually impossible for her to reach 20 at the rate she's counting (Prickett 2005, 126). Prickett while the lack of gravity at the center of the Earth would prevent Alice from being harmed as she fell down the rabbit hole, and why the Mad Tea Party is always at 6 o'clock – sitting at the center of all hemispheres. When the Mad Hatter asks Alice the date and cries, "two days wrong!" Prickett notes that in the center of the earth there is no rotation, no alteration between night and day, or solar time at all, rather necessarily operating under the lunar calendar – a set calendar, rather than the arbitrary solar one. We know that wonderland is supposed to be set on May 4th, 1862 – and at that time there was an exact two day difference between the solar and the lunar calendar (Prickett 2005, 125).

This mathematical justification of Wonderland's structure is found again and again. To explain Alice's motion in running with the Red Queen, Prickett states:

> In our world, Speed is the ratio of Distance over Time: s=d/t. In other words, the higher the speed at which we travel, the greater the distance travelled, and the shorter time taken. Through the looking glass, however, the equation is, in Carroll's logic, inverted, so that s=t/d. The higher the speed, the greater time taken, and the shorter distance covered. Thus you would have to run very fast indeed in order to stand still (Prickett 2005, 128).

Prickett further describes Carroll as promoting "undeviating rationality pushed to its furthest and wildest extremes" in the creation of his Wonderland – describing the rationality

behind everything from how Dodgson chose his penname to a geographical explanation of how, if Wonderland is at the center of the earth, one can sit down at a table and have it be continuously teatime (Prickett 2005, 125).

It seems strange to argue that concepts of structure and function can be so central to nonsense form. Some sort of structure is undoubtedly an inescapable part of nonsense literature, but surely this is not the main point of Carroll's writing? And yet it is also true that the characters that Alice meets in *Through the Looking Glass* are all chess pieces – which are defined by their function and actions. While Ettleson's approach to nonsense literature seems to be a clear example of a deductive approach to a text, therefore – forcing it into logic system it does not quite fit –other examples are less clearly defined. Though Carroll resisted specific classifications of satire for *Alice*, for example, he had previously written and published satirical work, and strong cases have made to argue that many aspects of the *Alice* books directly relate to aspects of Carroll's life at Oxford. Carroll himself authenticated some of these claims – for example, the claim that the Dodo is based on Carroll himself, who often stuttered as he introduced himself as "Do-Do-Dodgson" (Jones and Gladstone 1998, 71).

The tale of "Jabberwocky" and its associations with Anglo-Saxon verse in *Mischmasch* has further led critics to argue that beyond having a firm footing in the standard conventions of language, "Jabberwocky" conforms to a larger historical or literary tradition, and is perhaps a mock heroic tale – meant as a burlesque of folk ballads. In *How Does a Poem Mean*, John Ciardi notes that the form of the third, fifth, and sixth stanzas closely resemble the most common form of the early ballad stanza, and that "Jabberwocky" satirizes motifs that were often found in such ballads – such as the depiction of a hero on an epic test of strength, and the opening contest of dark forces. As Ciardi says, "sometimes the hero returns victorious to be greeted with joy,

sometimes he returns dying to be saluted with a lament, sometimes the action takes a different turn. The pattern itself, however, is unmistakable" (Ciardi 1975, 20).

Instead of reading "Jabberwocky" as a parody of folk ballads, however, it is perhaps more productive to read it as a study of strict form and structure in general. Carroll pokes fun at the idea of taking both interpretation and the structure of language itself too seriously and as something stuffed, set, and unmoving. For example, Marina Yaguello explains how parts of speech whose meanings are derived from their context within a sentence and in relation to the speaker's position are called "shifters," as they are always moving. As Yaguello points out, while Alice believes in this fluidity of language and definition the White Queen does not, and this inflexibility on the Queen's part is what results in nonsense when The White Queen offers Alice jam every other day – "Jam tomorrow and jam yesterday, but never jam *to-day*." While Alice can understand how today will become yesterday, and how tomorrow will become today, the Queen cannot (Yaguello 1998, 9). Therefore, while the Queen's logic is simpler and more structured in that it displays undeviating devotion to a single rule, it simply doesn't make sense.

So, the desire to find deeper meaning in a text can hardly be criticized. A joke can only be funny if you understand the humor. There's nothing wrong with reading *Alice* as satire, and not all the "sensible" interpretations of *Alice* are totally unreasonable. Carroll, in fact, undoubtedly requires intellectual engagement from his readers, much in the same way that he required it of his child friends. Roy Porter tells us in his forward to *The Alice Companion* that "once a child-friend ceased to be responsive to the seduction of her wits… she would be dropped without further ado" (Porter 1998, x). As a logistician, Carroll was fascinated by anagrams, mathematics, and riddles that could be cracked open – and the *Alice* books both reflect this and hold up to investigation.

But while there is can be said to be something to be gained by the intellectual exercise of reading the Mad Tea-Party as a satirical allegory of the inherent danger of unequal sharing in the doctrine of Christian Socialism (Jones and Gladstone 1998, 115), surely there is something destructive to the spirit of nonsense to push reliance on decoding readings to such an extreme that the cry of Carroll's Gryphon – "Hjckrrh!" – can *only* be understood and appreciated as a partial parody of John Ruskin (the letters "Hjkr" can be found in the names "John" and "Ruskin," and the "chr" can be accounted for by knowing that Ruskin's childhood nickname was "St. Chrysostom," of course) (Jones and Gladstone 1998). It is this insistence on one set way of looking at the world which Carroll seems to mock – and anyway, a thaumatrope just isn't very interesting if you only ever see one blended image, and never break apart its motion or try to spin it in the other direction.

Sontag argues that, instead of hermeneutics, the world needs an erotics of art – a pure joy taken from its impressions. Modern interpretation, Sontag argues, is "often prompted not by piety toward the troublesome text (which may conceal an aggression)" – but is instead "marked by "an open aggressiveness, an overt contempt for appearances" (Sontag 1966, 6). According to Sontag, modern interpretations often tend to be disrespectful to the original. "The old style of interpretation was insistent, but respectful," she writes, "it erected another meaning on top of the literal one. The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one" (Sontag 1966, 6). Sontag compares modern interpreters to leeches, draining texts of their lifeblood and reducing art to its content. By defining art, interpretation pins it down, renders it lifeless, like a dead butterfly against a black background, sealed behind glass – closing it off from and protecting it against further subjective interpretation or associations. Interpretation can therefore fairly be defined as reducing art,

making nonsense and art manageable and reducing art to its content. But, as these readings indicate, the act of translation is fallible and erroneous.

For example, many attempts have been made to reconcile all content of *Alice* with Carroll's personal life, for example:

> The DRINK ME! Bottle has a flavor of "cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy and hot-buttered toast" – which Jones and Gladstone attribute to Carroll's experiences processing a collodion plate, which "used an alchohol-drenched, ether-based solution of potassium iodide, and some potassium salts are as red as cherries. The glass plates were furnished with albumen – egg white, also the ingredient of nursery 'custard'. The resulting mixture was as stick as 'toffy', and as trickly brown because of the iodide (Jones and Gladstone 1998, 48).

Not only is this comparison far-fetched, but it seems disrespectful to Carroll's imagination. This type of interpretation seems to go against the very spirit of nonsense. At a certain point, the nonsense text seems to have strayed so far from its original reading as to have become a different text entirely – one that perhaps cannot quite be said to fit into the category of "nonsense." These interpretations value deny even the idea that two interpretations may exist at the same time, or even that two visions may blend together.

And yet, though these interpretations may seem to violate the spirit of nonsense, one gets the impression that Carroll might have accepted them and even found them amusing, nonetheless, just as he made sure to include Humpty Dumpty's interpretation of "Jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Indeed, Dodgson has been described as loving all alternate forms of common thoughts and objects, and examining how we examine things generally – experimenting himself with turning familiar thoughts and expectations upside-down, inside-out, and backward. He taught himself how to write in reversed letters, loved to make music boxes

play backward, and placed a large, disorienting mirror in one of his rooms. As Alexei Panshin describes:

> Like so many people of the mid-Nineteenth Century, Dodgson was deeply impressed by the technical advances of the era. For Dodgson, the innovations of the day were marvelous new toys. He would own and use an early typewriter. He would ride a velociman, an adult tricycle powered by hand, and give thought to how it might be improved. And he himself would invent a nyctograph, a device for taking notes in the dark (Panshin 1999).

Carroll would constantly deny that there was any set meaning to his work – but was more than happy to accept any meanings which his readers dreamt up – or indeed any creative imagination of his world of nonsense. As Carroll write to one reader who had asked about the meaning of "The Hunting of the Snark":

> I'm very much afraid that I didn't mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them; so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer means. So, whatever good meanings are in the book, I'm glad to accept as the meaning of the book" (Lewis Carroll, in a letter to Florence Balfour, April 6, 1876, quoted in Collingwood, "The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll")

In another letter he writes,

> Periodically I have received courteous letters from strangers begging to know whether [it] is an allegory, or contains some hidden moral, or is a political satire; and for all such questions I have but one answer, "I don't know!" (as quoted in Phillips 1971, 29)

Additionally, the Girl's Latin School in Boston once wrote to Carroll for permission to name their school magazine "The Jabberwock," a request to which Carroll replied:

> Mr. Lewis Carroll has much pleasure in giving to the editors of the proposed magazine permission to use the title they wish for. He finds that the Anglo-Saxon word 'wocer' or 'wocor' signifies 'offspring' or 'fruit'. Taking 'jabber' in its ordinary acceptation of 'excited and voluble discussion,' this would give the meaning of 'the result of much excited discussion.' Whether this phrase will have any application to the projected periodical, it will be for the future historian of American literature to determine. Mr. Carroll wishes all success to the forthcoming magazine (Carroll 1960, 80).

It is this earnest, excited discussion –this love of uncertainty and misinterpretations and ambivalence upon which nonsense thrives. So, while Carroll would surely have taken issue if every single reader of the *Alice* books read the Gryphon as a stand-in for John Ruskin, one can't help but imagine that he would be more amused than offended at the various interpretations and misinterpretations that his work has seen in the years since its original publication.

No matter the content of his final interpretation, the reader of nonsense literature must be more than a passive observer. As the thaumatrope spins, it demonstrates the viewer's susceptibility to persistence of vision, but it also opens opportunities for a unique agency of the viewer – allowing him to stop or slow the thaumatrope and examine how the images were put together. Nonsense in general, in this marriage of constructive and destructive impulses, produces unique images and conveys the wonders of a device which relates more than it claims to articulate. A bird in a cage is not that interesting, but the idea that our minds have erroneously put the bird there is fascinating. The idea that we hold within ourselves the ability both to encage and free this bird is magic.

Much in the same way as with reading nonsense literature, the thaumatrope demands controlling, manipulation, and figuring out of its motion. Like the thaumatrope, nonsense literature achieves and maintains its dynamicism by constantly coming together and falling apart again as we allow ourselves to relax our grip on the apparatus and let it spin of its own accord. Meaning in nonsense is never stable –rather circulating between meaning and meaninglessness as we facilitate the collision and splitting of meanings. Thus, the "failings" of subjectivity – those aspects of structure which prevent communication– can just as easily be argued as structure's greatest strength when realized and played with. Just as with the thaumatrope, nonsensical,

subjective language creates something new. Carroll's Looking-Glass insects– the Rocking-horse-fly, the Snap-dragon-fly, the Bread-and-butterfly- represent objects created from the attributes of language, and nonsense has the potential to create something new with something negative (such as Alice's un-birthday – or the ability to see "nobody" on the road).

Elizabeth Sewell argues that nonsense poetry concentrates "on the divisibility of its material into ones, units from which a universe can be built. This universe, however, must never be more than the sum of its parts, and must never fuse into some all-embracing whole which cannot be broken down again into the original ones. It must try to create with words a universe that consists of bits" (Sewell, The Field of Nonsense, 53-4). However, violating mathematical principles for a moment, it can be said that the magic of nonsense is that the whole qualitatively exceeds the sum of its parts. As Mark Burstein writes,

> Language is infinitely richer than the sum of its words, as words are more than the sum of their letters. Subatomic idea-forces and probabilities become atomic; atomic realities molecular; molecular reactions chemical, then elemental; compounds are formed, leading to organic cells, tissues, organs: behold a man…. (Burstein 2011)

Like Carroll, Lear dots his verses with nonsense words such as the reoccurring words "runcible," "purpledicular," "borascible," and "sponsgetaneous." However, unlike Carroll, who even references the words of "Jabberwocky" as "new words" in the preface to *Looking Glass,* Lear does not suggest possible translations or even an approach to his words (such as suggesting they be read like portmanteaus) – and leaves the readings of his words subject to subjective interpretation – that which takes into account feeling and sounds, rather than just the intellect.

In 1957, Noam Chomsky defined linguistic nonsense with the sentence "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously," which he annotated as "An example of a sentence which, though

grammatically acceptable, is without meaning" – distinguishing nonsense language from gibberish by describing how the words used individually make sense and are arranged grammatically, but suggest a meaning which is nonsensical (Tigges 1987, 2).

The sentence can then be seen as a veritable "mass of dead words," and verbal nonsense as coming from internal contradiction or irrelevancy of ideas. However, in "On Nonsense and on Logic-Fiction," Stefan Themerson takes issue with this annotation, arguing:

> Chomsky's sentence would not be without meaning to Rimbaud, the author of:
>
> A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,
> Je dirais quelque jour vos naissances latentes…
> I, pourpres, sang crache, rire des levres belles
> Dans la colere ou les ivresses penitentes.
>
> or to Shakespeare's Bottom:
>
> The eye of man hath not heard,
> the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste,
> his tongue to conceive
> nor his heart to report,
> what my dream was.
>
> (Tigges 1987).

In fact, psycholinguistic experiments in language processing have looked to "nonsense syllables" – pronounceable sounds which vary in meaningfulness based on their "phonetic distance," or the degree to which the syllables accord with or depart from standard word formations and structures in a given language, and on the associations related to the sound of the syllable (Jenkins 459). As Alice Jenkins explains, "For example, given the utterance [swit], native speakers of English would associate "sweet ," "swat ," "swish," "switch" "wit," "quit." "sit," "spit," etc., and classify it as "not a word," but "similar to an English word" (Jenkins 459).

As psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus also points out, these non-words are therefore capable of suggesting more than the single definition implied by a neologism, or even the two meanings packed into one portmanteau (Jenkins 459). Lear's words, like the non-words, rather activate several potential meanings and bring to mind a variety of subjective thoughts and associations - leaving the reader with a sense of ambivalence. Part of the love of "runcible spoons" and "frumious bandersnatches" is perhaps their inconclusively – their suggestion that words are defined as much by their sounds and feelings as any sort of intellectual definition.

And perhaps it is this ultimate sense of ambivalence – of unimpeded possibility – which can be said to be the goal of nonsense. Carroll once wrote in a letter to child-friend Edith Rex, "My view of life is that it's next to impossible to convince anybody of anything… One of the hardest things in the world is to convey a meaning accurately from one mind to another" – but it would be a hard argument to say that Carroll despaired in this difficulty – or even futility – of communication. For one, he wrote that statement in a letter, and therefore attempted to communicate his thoughts and ideas despite the seemingly insurmountable odds that they would be delivered to their destination unaffected by the journey. If his nonsense writings are any indication, Carroll actually delighted in the power language has to avoid forcing accommodation and leave room for possibility.

Perhaps one of the most unique aspects of nonsense is that it often speaks most and inspires the most amount of discussion when it communicates the least amount of objective content successfully. That is, the more ambiguous its language, the more opportunity for varied interpretation. A 20th century reading of *Alice* perhaps views nonsense's language as dead, and its plays on logic as articulating the limits of knowledge. Though its form and structure is upheld, the words no longer communicate truth or represent reality – rather serving only to distort

intentions and prevent communication. But in the nonsense world, there is no room for automatic language. Alice is faced with the dissolution of what she knows to be the phatic – or social – function of her language. Those phrases like "I see" which are usually banal tossed phrases to establish contact with another party reaffirm that what one says is being interpreted by and reacted to by the other party in the typical manner. However, characters in Wonderland interpret the formalities of language which Alice clings to in a different way than she – taking each expression in its most literal sense. Those expressions which attempt to be static in definition are instead sources of re-thinking and re-examining language. ("Only one doesn't like changing so often, you know" "I *don't* know, said the Caterpillar.")

As nonsense literature sometimes indicates through its ambiguities, human communication is not just about information. Language *is* information, but language is first and foremost a mode of communication – created by and for humans – and, as such, we often end up saying much more than what is explicitly put into words. In real conversation, the rules of conversation are constantly shifting. People sometimes say the opposite of what they mean, or attempt to communicate through inference. Speech is also used to social order, relationships, and as a mode self-expression. Yaguello points to polite expressions as examples of phrases meant to establish relationships – and as phrases which are often deliberately misconstrued (Yaguello 1998, 13). Though nonsense exaggerates these miscommunications to an absurd degree, it seems to speak to the failure of structure and language, and our inability to truly communicate ourselves to one another.

But surely this is something incommunicable, inimitable in any medium. The human soul is not divisible, and cannot be put to paper – its impressions, feelings, and perceptions cannot be transferred or lent to another being. So, though writers of nonsense by no means make

a clean break from earnest forms of communication or mock those who attempt to convey meaning through language, they can be said to take a different – and perhaps more humble – approach to writing. Instead of attempting to rid their writings of ambiguities and places where their message could become lost or confused by the reader, nonsense writers fill their writings with these, and are fascinated and wonder at their results. In their nonsense, there is at once a comfort taken in a stable structure; a belief that truth and even morality springs from obeying its laws, and a fascination with that structure's dissolution – an open embrace of that which threatens the dissolution of the whole. Nonsense seems more driven by a curiosity to see new creations than a fear or anxiety of being misrepresented. Nonsense is not afraid of being misunderstood.

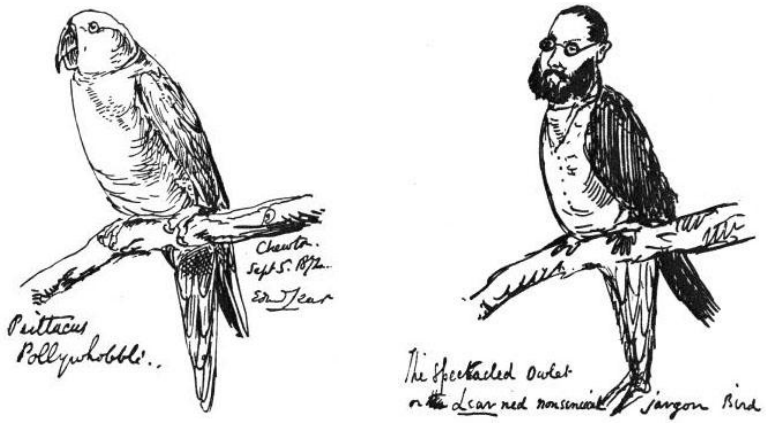
If nonsense depends on ambiguities, it seems as though it should collapse at the touch of logic. Intelligence and logic should clip the wings of nonsense. Though nonsense seems to demand investigation, and there is nothing necessarily *wrong* with interpretations such as Abraham Ettleson's, it seems as though any sort of investigation is doomed to immediately soil its pure, unassociated content.

But Elizabeth Sewell addresses this concern and aligns nonsense to poetry – arguing against the concept that any attempt to interpret or systematically understand nonsense will cause it to collapse and destroy any pleasure it gives its reader. As she says,

> Nonsense, with its immense sense of balance and safety, is better built than that; one might as well expect the splendid vision of a great building to disappear in smoke because the mind happened to know its proportions in terms of mathematics. There is on record at least one example of a vision being submitted to exact measurements with a yardstick, and neither the angel nor the prophet Ezekiel seems to have be troubled by a sense of futile desecration (Sewell 1952, 6).

Sewell suggests that finding to a richer meaning does not necessarily imply a destruction of the pleasure in the senseless – especially when a careful balance or tension between meaning and nonsense is maintained. Indeed, Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues that the entire genre of nonsense literature faces and is defined by this very game of tension and balance. As he writes, "The genre [of nonsense] is structured by … a dialectic, between over-structuring and destructuring, subversion and support… the dialectic of excess and lack" (Lecercle 1994, 3). As with a philosophical toy, it is this playful tension which encourages an investigation and figuring out of its parts.

Perhaps, then, instead of the ambiguities of language and studies on the persistence of vision speaking to the fallibility of the observer to achieve objective truth, they instead speak to a more complex system of perception – one in which scientific objectivism is not seen as standing in destructive opposition to the perceptions of a subjective producer of experience, but rather in productive tension. Instead of highlighting their fundamental difference, it is their multiple points of overlap and conflict which – like the competing images on a thaumatrope – have the power to create something entirely new through their dialogue, and which hold the possibility of creating something greater than the sum of their parts.



4

Birds of a Feather:

Structural incongruities and nonsense's binocular vision

Wandering past the Parrot House in the newly-founded Zoological Gardens of Regent's Park during the summer of 1830, one would likely have run across a rather chubby, bespectacled boy of eighteen earnestly sketching out the parrots there as they sat and played on their perches. Indeed, taking scientific measurements as he worked of the birds' wingspans, beak sizes, and precise dimensions, young Edward Lear became quite as much of a spectacle to visitors as did the exotic creatures on display (Brown 2012). Though he surely left an impression on wanderers through the park, however, it is perhaps curious that this analytical, serious Lear has been so overlooked by history. Better known for his spontaneous runcible birds and scroobius pips, few remember that Edward Lear was in reality a studied and accomplished draftsman, producing in his lifetime an impressive body of natural history illustrations – including over 300 landscape oil paintings, 9,000 watercolors, hundreds of well-acclaimed ornithological lithographs, and multiple travel journals (Brown 2012). Still favorably compared with Audubon as one of the finest ornithological illustrators of his age, Lear's drawings are crisp and exact in their

naturalistic detail, exhibiting both impressive precision and subtlety in shading and color (Lear and Sherrard 1998, 5).

It is difficult, perhaps, to reconcile this picture of the concentrated, serious artist with that of Edward Lear, author of "The Owl and the Pussycat." Many who write on Lear's character find it peculiar to the point of indicating psychosis that someone at one moment so dedicated to insuring that his rendering of a particular bird mirrored nature to an exact degree could the next moment doodle out "Mrs. Blue Dickey-Bird" with her parasol and a bonnet of green silk. And, in many ways, it does seem odd that someone so apparently humorless – someone who suffered from bouts of "the morbids," who was plagued by shame from his struggles with epilepsy, and who contemplated suicide in his journals – could display such unpredictable and violently sudden disconnects in character, withdrawing from society at one moment, only to turn around and charm an entire drawing room of gentlemen with a lively nonsense chorus the next.

A similar unease can be seen reflected in biographical studies of Lewis Carroll, whose persona never seems to be fully reconciled with the Reverend Charles Dodgson as an organic whole. While many acknowledge the central role that logic plays in Carroll's nonsense, few accept that *Alice in Wonderland* could have been written by the pompous, priggish, and morally-exact Dodgson without some sort of deep or repressed perversion of his character coming into play. Dodgson himself insisted on this separation – rarely speaking of his love of children or of play, and even refusing letters addressed to "Lewis Carroll, Christ Church, Oxford" (Collingwood 1967, xi). Dodgson seems to belong entirely to the left brain; Carroll, completely to the right. So how can such a dichotomy – such a rupture of interests –be explained but through psychological fragmentation?

The world of nonsense is so seemingly unapproachable and ultimately frustrating to analysis of any sort that the mind gropes about in the dark for something tangible upon which to base the beginnings of a useful reading, leaning upon the physical world of fact and historical documentation for support. The mental states and personal lives of its authors are subjected to analysis in hopes of lending some insight into nonsense literature in general. Dodgson's alleged repressed sexual desires perhaps hold the little golden key; Lear's feelings of shame due to his struggles with epilepsy perhaps enough to have driven him to some sort of amicable lunacy. These biographical readings seemingly suggest a hope that the presence of nonsense is something which can be explained logically or as a direct consequence of its relations to the physical or psychological space in which it was created.

Indeed, nonsense is often attempted to be understood as something which can be explained empirically. Many have attempted to give mechanical definitions of nonsense – analyzing it for its syntax, semantics, phonetics, or morphology. Though more elusive subjective operations of both the reader and the writer are often acknowledged as coming into play in the creation of nonsense, they are also often only analyzed to the extent by which they can also be explained mechanically. Modern science has concluded that afterimages persist on the retina for one twenty-fifth of a second, for example, making possible the persistence of vision and the blurring of images. Psycholinguists have defined "phonetic distance," and attempted to map out why nonsense words are so suggestive of real meaning.

But while it may be possible to understand in scientific terms the operations of the mind which work to interpret the illusion of the thaumatrope or understand the processes of reversal in Looking-Glass Land, for example, many other instances of nonsense and impulses of the human spirit are less easily defined. It is not so simple for us to explain why Dr. Abraham Ettleson felt

obligated to translate the hidden messages in *Alice in Wonderland*, while Stefan Themerson felt comfortable rejoicing in the endless possibilities of language, for example.

The idea that, like the relationship between sense and nonsense, there is a fundamental difference between empirical reality and subjective understanding was just beginning to be realized by the mid-nineteenth century. While the eye and brain had before been commonly thought be simple intermediaries between the observer and objective reality, Crary argues that studies of optics in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s suggested a repositioning of the observer and new attention given to the ill-defined relations of the internal to the external (Crary 1990, 24). Crary refers specifically to the camera obscura as a symbol in describing the outdated concept of the internal world of an observer clearly mirroring the outside world.

The camera obscura, a device which first came into use in the seventeenth century, is a dark room closed off from all incoming light except for a small window, through which the incoming light does not bend, diverge, or refract as it passes through the hole – but rather lies projected on the opposite wall, displaying the outside world in all its color and movement, albeit upside-down. For nearly two centuries after its invention, the camera obscura subsisted as a model for how truthful inferences of the world can be gained through observation (Crary 1990, 28). Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), for example, argued the processes of a camera obscura must be much like the workings of the human mind.

> For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of man, in reference to all object of sight, and the ideas of them (as quoted in Abrams 1953, 57).

As a positivistic instrument of observation, the camera obscura was understood – much like the similarly monocular microscope or telescope – as detached from the fallible subjective and presenting an unmediated view of empirical truth, and as authenticating and legitimizing observations (Crary 1990, 53).

But, as the studies of optics in the early nineteenth century suggested, physiology confuses itself with psychology in a hundred places, and an exact relation between the objective, critical state of mind and the emotional, subjective state is less easily mapped than the light which comes through a camera obscura. The desire, therefore, to return to the simple relations of the internal to the external – to understand the world through clear, observable relations and understand people in much the same way as the rest of the natural world – can be seen especially pronounced when, such as in nonsense literature, we feel denied, not only our presence in a clearly-defined camera obscura, but of an entire world of stable relations. For our own comfort, we desire the workings of the human mind to be as easily understood as though it were a machine.

In this vein, many have attempted to draw parallels between Lear and Carroll's characters and their nonsense writings –seemingly in an effort to shed light on how their works should be received. For example, significance is sometimes found in the fact that both Carroll and Lear had a propensity for exactitude. Both kept minute records of their everyday lives, Carroll recording and summarizing all letters which came through his hands for 37 years and leaving some 98,000 cross-references in his files by the time of his death (Sewell 1952, 41). As opposed to his spontaneous nonsense sketches, Lear approached his work as a draughtsman with the utmost seriousness – sometimes laboring over his topographical prints for years. Both men were reportedly shy and slightly strange bachelors from large families; both were afraid of dogs and

fond of children (Pricket 2005, 122). Above all, however, the incongruities, peculiarities, and melancholia of their individual characters seem to enforce in the minds of many the idea that nonsense is connected in some way with a serious break from rational reality, or is in other ways escapist.

Especially in recent years, much attention has been paid to the "aberrant" psychologies of Lear and Carroll in an attempt to understand their nonsense works. In an effort to make sense of nonsense, these types of readings insist on autobiographical, psychological expanations. S.A. Nock attributes most aspects of Lear's writings to aspects of his personal life, attributing his world travels, for example, to a desperate attempt to find some sort of "never-never-land" and regain the childhood of which he felt denied (Nock 1941, 75). As the twentieth of twenty-one children Lear has been painted by many of his biographers as suffering from feelings of abandonment in addition to the crippling shame he associated with his epilepsy.

Lear often made ridiculous self- portraits of himself – both in his nonsense doodles and in several self-portrait verses, such as the one that begins *A Book of Nonsense*. As the text introduces:

> The following lines by Mr. Lear were written for a young lady of his acquaintance, who had quoted to him the words of a young lady not of his acquaintance:
>
> "HOW PLEASANT TO KNOW MR. LEAR!"
>
> "How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!"
>
> Who has written such volumes of stuff!
> Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
> But a few think him pleasant enough.
>
> His mind is concrete and fastidious,
> His nose is remarkably big;
> His visage is more or less hideous,
> His beard it resembles a wig.

(Lear 2008, 15).

In many ways, Edward Lear seems the epitome of a social observer. As an adult he never truly settled in an area, instead preferring to travel around painting his landscapes; he once remarked to a friend in a letter, "I feel woundily like a spectator – all through my life – of what goes on amongst those I know: very little like an actor" (quoted Noakes 1969, 127).

Perhaps related to the desire to more concretely define the elusive connection between psychology and physiology, both Lear and Carroll's writings have inspired a particular focus being on the suggestion that nonsense is somehow connected to sexual repression. For example, Thomas Dilworth views Lear's Old Man of Whitehaven as suffering from the "perversion of eccentricity," and suggests that this perversion may have sexual overtones.

5

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.

As Dilworth explains, "For birds, dancing is part of courtship. Human dancing is likewise sexual… Society wants not to 'encourage this bird'. The verb emphasizes and extends the sexual suggestion since it conventionally applies to a woman inviting a suitor's attentions, perhaps to an improper degree" (Dilworth 1994, 45).

Dilworth also gives a particularly illuminating analysis of Lear's old man in a kettle:

[6]

There was an old man who when little
Fell casually into a kettle;
But, growing too stout,
He could never get out,
So he passed all his life in that kettle.

As Dilworth writes:

> Leaving aside the tempting urinary possibilities of the last line… see the man's gesture. Why does he regard and display the marvelously erect spout? In relation to his body the spout is phallic, but the spout is not a phallus. Where then is his phallus? One possibility visually suggested is that it is inside the spout, so that he is having intercourse with the kettle… the sexual preference of Lear's protagonist would then suggest an anti-social theme, though no society is depicted or referred to. But there is another interpretation. Since his gesture seems to imply an audience, he may well intend to engage society. If so, the kettle with its enormous spout may be a boastful disguise for an easily surmised physical inadequacy… In putting on the kettle, he has put on society. What he actually displays to the reader/viewer, is that phallic and infantile… social valuation that bigger is better (Dilworth 1994, 54).

For Martin Grotjahn, Alice is a "symbolic equation of the phallus," and her journeys down the rabbit hole into Wonderland represent "a trip back into the mother's womb" (Phillips 1971, xxiii). Edmund Miller not only argues that "there is sex everywhere in Lear," but accepts it as a given that "serious attention to Lear's sexual obsessions is helpful in understanding his poetry." A number of sources have attempted to discover what a "runcible spoon" is – Miller believing it to be "a kind of fork with two short blunt prongs and one long, curved pointed one

— a virtual sculpture of the male genitallia, something never far from Lear's mind" (Miller 1973, 44).

Some of these interpretations are no doubt far-fetched, but even readers who are more critical of psychological interpretations often attempt to argue that some deep perversion or disconnect of character can not only be found when looking over Lear's and Carroll's lives, but also can be seen centrally reflected in their writings. And, indeed, many examples of nonsense literature can be said to present an alternative to mainstream behavior, and display a concern for both society and the role of its misfits. Lear's limericks, for example, often focus on individuals brought out against a background of a single-minded majority, which sometimes literally collapses into one opposing unit, as in:

[7]

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

Indeed, most scholars of Lear's nonsense seem to focus their efforts on making sense of the apparent conflict between the eccentric individual and the societal "they" in Lear's limericks, and forcing this struggle into a defined narrative. Aldous Huxley observed that Lear's "they" generally embody the safer, sober, and more practical virtues of common sense, and Angus Davidson pushed this reading even further, assigning "They" a darker tone. As Davidson writes,

"What a world of implication there is in Lear's they! They are the force of public opinion, the dreary voice of human mediocrity: they are perpetually interfering with the liberty of the individual: they gossip, they condemn, they are inquisitive and conventional and almost always uncharitable."

Understanding this divide between the eccentric individual and a practical and conformist society is often seen as essential to appreciating and placing nonsense, and, following along this line of thought, nonsense is also sometimes believed to have emerged as a reaction against the nineteenth-century reforms of the school as an institution. As the middle class grew, more children spent longer in formal education systems, and new laws, such as the Factory Act of 1834, limited work days of children and made school attendance compulsory (Kane 1995, 66). As Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues, "the school is the institution that develops the need for meaning and a reflexive attitude toward language and channels them in socially acceptable ways" (Lecercle 1994, 4) – the streamlining of education and meaning creating a desire for nonsense.

Lecercle also insists, "The school is the institution where not only rules of grammar, but also maxims of good behavior, linguistic and otherwise, are learnt" (Lecercle 1994, 4) –this information perhaps shedding light on why the Victorian era may have seen the rise of a-moral children's literature. Previous to this era, and despite the presence and popularity of nursery rhymes, the overwhelming focus of British children's literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was on moral instruction (Kosanke, 129). In fact, Jack Zipes even refers in his writings to what he calls the "denigration" of fairy tales in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Zipes, xiii). As opposed to Germany and France, where, Zipes argues, fairy tales were widely popular with the aristocratic class and even considered to be an art, on the rare occasions

when these tales were brought to England, they were often marketed to the lower classes, and transformed to encompass values of piety, hard work, and good behavior (Zipes, xiv). While children had been hardly mentioned before in literature, in the Victorian era they suddenly became an area of interest, and became individuals in their own right (Kane 1995, 36). The new area of children's literature in the nineteenth century was a contested space, and one in which it is perhaps possible to observe a tension between the Victorian view of the child as something fighting original sin and the simultaneous, contrasting portrayal by writers such as Blake and Wordsworth of the child as an innocent being innately connected with the nature (Holligsworth, 23).

Furthering this conversation, Lear biographer Vivien Noakes argues for the relevance of the pervasive influence of the Evangelical church during Lear's lifetime, which preached the denial of "virtually everything that was fun" (*Edward Lear: 1812-1888*, 13). Noakes quotes Lear: "'When will it please God to knock Religion on the head & substitute charity, love & common sense?'" To a little girl he wrote: "'My dear child, I'm sure we shall be allowed to laugh in Heaven!'" (qtd. *Edward Lear: 1812-1888*, 13). Many have read Lear's nonsense as mocking the "common sense" of the church – as a covert, but highly politicized, statement of the times.

While exact cause-and-effect parallels between various reform acts or contemporary trends in religious thought would be difficult to draw, there does seem to be some sort of opposition to didacticism in Carroll's nonsense, at least. Carroll's transformations of well-known nursery rhymes are a form of satire in the *Alice* book which may be lost on us today, but which would have been much more obvious to the Victorians. For example, though the Mad Hatter's transformation of "The Star," by Jane Taylor in *Wonderland*, from

Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky" (Milner, 1)

into

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat
How I wonder what you're at!
Up above the world you fly
Like a tea-tray in the sky

– seems innocent enough, and may have only been meant as a humorous play, Carroll completely inverts other children's verses – some of which *do* carry morals. The Duchess's song:

Speak Roughly
To your little boy
And beat him when he sneezes:
He only does it to annoy
because he knows it teases

quite subversively rehashes the well- known David Bates poem:

Speak Gently!
It is better far
To rule by love than fear
Speak gently; let no harsh word mar
The good we may do here! (Milner, 1).

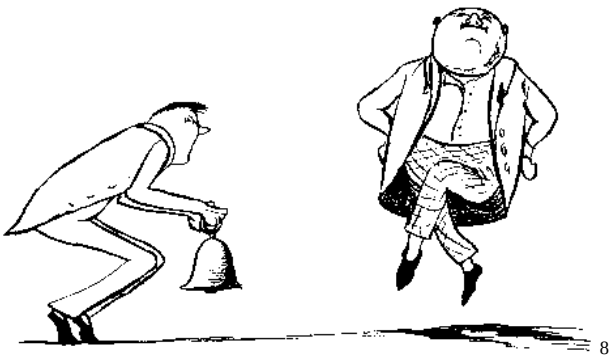
These transformations seem to promote an air of general mischief, which could easily be taken as evidence of the evil and instability which come from nonsense's immoral nature. For example, when Alice first falls down the rabbit-hole in *Wonderland*, she tries to establish her identity by reciting Isaac Watt's poem "Against Idleness and Mischief." However, instead of a moral poem about a busy bee making sure to avoid idleness – and Satan – she finds herself reciting the tale of a crocodile, mischievously smiling as he lazily gobbles up a school of fish

(Milner, 1). Now sure that she has been transformed into someone else, Alice breaks down and cries.

However, Carroll's nursery rhymes don't present any sort of consistency in regard to their contradiction of the morals of the original nursery rhymes under closer examination, and the nonsensical elements in *Alice* more often lead to humor than to a darkly satirical tone. Alice certainly doesn't emerge at the end of the book with a newfound appreciation for logic and morals, either. One can't help but be amused by the nonsense nursery rhymes in the *Alice* books– and the very fact that Carroll's versions of many of these rhymes are now more well-known and loved than the originals speaks attests to how they were received.

And, truly, the play on the didactic nursery rhymes in the *Alice* books seems to be just that – a play on logic and didacticism, rather than a satire or treatise on morality. By challenging logic or the unquestioned assumptions of the normal world, the characters often seem to reach new truth of their own. For example, Alice continually proves herself to be a highly reasoned and logical thinker. When the Red Queen demands that Alice "Speak when spoken to!" Alice protests that "if everybody obeyed that rule… nobody would ever say anything" (Carroll, 140) – logic which the Red Queen cannot refute. Alice's encounters result in spirited debates, rather than moral instruction.

The content of Lear's limericks is truly variable as well. While it is true that Lear's illustrations of his limericks often isolates an eccentric individual, cutting away all background and context, society and the individual are not always at odds. Sometimes the eccentrics bring nothing but delight to the people they meet:



8

There was an old person of Filey,
Of whom his acquaintance spoke highly;
He danced perfectly well,
To the sound of a bell,
And delighted the people of Filey.

– and sometimes "they" even help the individual in question.

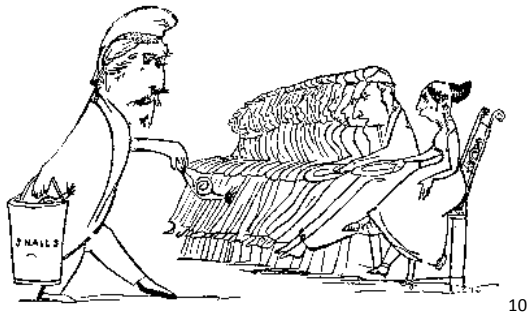
9

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.

In fact, the protagonists of the limericks appease society as a whole almost as often as they are at odds. Indeed, the only aspect of the limericks which truly remains constant is the limerick form itself. Nearly all the limericks begin "There once was a(n) young/old person/lady/man of X," and continue in an AABA rhyme scheme – the first, second, and fifth lines adopting a trimeter pattern, and the second and fourth lines usually in dimeter measures.

Gershon Legman notes in his anthology that the limerick as a folk form is nearly always subversive in its insistence on obscenity, and backs this opinion with similar assertions from Arnold Bennett and George Bernard Shaw (Legman 1964, xi). However, while it is true that many limericks are considered dirty, this may be a relatively modern conception of limerick form. Limerick did not really come into popularity in British literature until the mid-nineteenth century with Edward Lear's nonsense limericks, and there is some evidence to suggest that limericks only truly became obscene though their role as magazine and newspaper contests (Grant 1963, 23).

A more accurate analysis, perhaps, would be to say that violation of taboo in general is inherent to its form. Legman also notes that "from a folkloric point of view, the form is essentially transgressive," and as an example points to how ordinary speech stresses are often distorted in the commonly anapestic pattern of the first line (Legman 1964, xliv). In Lear's limericks as well, the first and last lines are nearly identical with only slight modification, possibly indicating some sort of fatalist causality – but Lear also manipulates the structure, and exploits the idiosyncratic links between spelling and pronunciation, text and image, thought and reality– such as in the forced phonetic pronunciations in:



10

There was an Old Person of Sparta,
Who had twenty-one sons and one 'darter';
He fed them on snails,

And weighed them in scales,
That wonderful Person of Sparta.

or

 [11]

There was an Old Man of Calcutta,
Who perpetually ate bread and butter,
Till a great bit of muffin,
On which he was stuffing,
Choked that horrid Old Man of Calcutta.

As Ann Colley states, "In their haste to correspond, these words trip over each other and expose the stumbling blocks of their individuality. The rhyme is at once completed and broken apart" (Colley 1988, 295).

Nonsense is often viewed as a sort of escapist genre – and this is perhaps true if meant in the sense that it defies categorization and association with any set view of the universe that demands logical consistency. The spirit of nonsense is not reckless abandon, anarchy or departure – even in its nonsensicality. Rather, it presents a dynamic universe which defies all interpretations which demand any sort of relational consistency– historical, biographical, or psychological. Rather than a psychological purging or some sort of revolutionary stance, nonsense seems to argue for equal weight to all alternatives and infinite possibility. A delicate reading on this matter comes from Vivien Noakes:

> In the limericks [. . .] to an extent difficult for us now to imagine, Lear offered children the liberation of unaffected high spirits [. . .]. Here are grown-ups doing silly things, the kind of things grown-ups never do [. . .]. for all their incongruity, there is in the

> limericks a truth which is lacking in the improving literature of the time. In an age when children were loaded with shame, Lear attempted to free them from it (Edward Lear: 1812-1888 13-14).

The laughter produced from Lear's limericks is not obscene or subversive. Instead, it can be taken in a much more innocent sense – seemingly swayed by impulse and reveling in its own inconsequentiality. Nonsense is, at its heart, inconsequential. When the Queen of Hearts shouts "Off with their heads!" it is hardly anything terrifying, as the command has no follow-through. Likewise, the monotonous frame of the limericks turns even the most serious subject matter into something expected, and even comical.

12

There was an Old Person of Tartary,
Who divided his jugular artery;
But he screeched to his wife,
And she said, 'Oh, my life!
Your death will be felt by all Tartary!'

What we are ultimately presented with are units which playfully come together and break apart without any grand philosophy or motive. While nonsense is sometimes drawn to violence and conflicts between individuals and society, harmony can also be found in its strange pairings and connections. The rupture with sense and society which many attempt to find in nonsense instead reveals itself to be a playful game of possibilities.

Indeed, while Lear has often been depicted as lonely and undeniably eccentric, he was hardly a social outcast. However Lear viewed himself, those who met him were easily charmed

by his character. Lear had a way with children, but also socialized with earls and gentlemen, and in 1846 was summoned by Queen Victoria to give her drawing lessons at her residence at Osborne House and later at Buckingham Palace (Noakes 1969, 71-2). Carroll's character also can be found to lie somewhere in between the dichotomies he is presented in, constantly bridging seemingly opposite worlds (penning such titles as *Games of Logic*) – simultaneously of both worlds but belonging to neither. While he delighted in writing nonsenses, Carroll was also a stickler for the rules and formalities of language – always correcting grammar in the letters that were sent to him – and, though Alice herself changes size over the course of *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll was bothered by the incorrect and inconsistent proportions of Tenniel's illustrations – upset that Alice's head seems proportionally too large for her body, and her feet proportionally too small (Morris 2005, 219).

By association with the Alice books, Carroll is sometimes seen as an advocate for a-moral children's literature – if not the father of immoral children's literature – and yet he also wrote the in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno* that the true object of life "is not pleasure, not knowledge, not even fame itself, 'that last infirmity of noble minds' – but that it is the development of character, the rising to a higher, nobler, purer standard, the building-up of the perfect Man" (Carroll 1991, 15).

The man Dodgson was also religious. The preface of *Sylvie and Bruno* further speaks of creating a children's bible, and expurgating Shakespeare. In a letter to Dora Adby, Dodgson writes:

> While the laughter of joy is in full harmony with our deeper life, the laughter of amusement should be kept apart from it. The danger is too great of thus learning to look at solemn things in a spirit of mockery, and to seek in them opportunities for exercising wit. That is the spirit which has spoiled, for me, the beauty of some of the Bible (Collingwood 1967, 331).

In a letter to an unnamed friend apparently after hearing some disagreeable anecdote of his at a dinner party, Dodgson writes:

> The favour I would ask is, that you will not tell me any more stories, such as you did on Friday, of remarks which children are said to have made on very sacred subjects – remarks which most people would recognise as irreverent, if made by grown-up people, but which are assumed to be innocent when made by children who are unconscious of any irreverence, the strange conclusion being drawn that they are therefore innocent when repeated by a grown-up person.
> … I am always willing to believe that those who repeat such stories differ wholly from myself in their views of what is, and what is not, fitting treatment of sacred things, and I fully recognise that what would certainly be wrong in me, is not necessarily so in them. (as quoted in Sewell 1952, 178).

Perhaps, then, nonsense literature in general may be argued as being not quite the historical counter-culture or radical divergence of character that it is tempting to read it as in hindsight. In many ways, of course, the creation of an historical or psychological narrative or schema is only natural, reflecting a desire for logical consistency. But remembering the past involves grouping people and ideas into manageable units at the expense of individuals and the true complexity of situations for which no such convenient, linear reality exists.

In *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*, Kimberly Reynolds argues for the importance of analyzing children's literature within a historical timeframe, noting, "It is not accidental that at decisive moments in social history children have been at the centre of ideological activity or that writing for children has been put into the service of those who are trying to disseminate new world views, values, and social models" – whether this be the reaching influence of Puritanical ideals or a general 19th century push to shape the rising middle class and to set boundaries (Reynolds 2010, 2). Children's literature is often seen as an encoding of ideological assumptions, and, as such often serves a basis of analyses for cultural climate.

But Lear and Carroll did not set out to give reactions to their age, and certainly did not operate according to any sort of systematic manifesto. In fact, most people forget that Lear and Carroll had no correspondence at all, and that the genre of "Victorian nonsense literature" was only designated later on, with some of the first critical studies of nonsense literature in the 20th century – such as Emile Cammaerts' *The Poetry of Nonsense* (1925) and Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense* (1952) (Tigges 1988, 11). Lear and Carroll can perhaps cast as witnesses and barometers to their time, and their work can be tied in tangentially with some key Victorian concerns for the purposes of academic exercise – but if Carroll and Lear approached these issues at all, they did so from many different directions; their thoughts carrying within them as many dynamic contradictions and unresolved dilemmas as did they themselves.

Matthew Sweet discusses the "historical ventriloquism" of the Victorian era, stating, "The Victorians invented us, and we in our turn invented the Victorians" (Sweet 2001, xii). Reading history necessarily involves creating an identity and attempting to create a narrative. While it is perhaps this is a natural impulse to simplify something so broad, it ends up doing an injustice to the complexities of an age. Fascinatingly, in a chapter entitled "The Sensation Seekers," Sweet mentions the philosophical toys in particular to illustrate how the Victorians were not so different from us – and how amusements and spectacles ("panoramas, dioramas, neoramas, nausoramas, physioramas and kinematographs") were as loved and sought out in the Victorian era as much as in any other age (Sweet 2011 ,xi). As Sweet argues, "Most of the pleasures we imagine to be our own, the Victorians enjoyed first. They invented the theme park, the shopping mall, the movies, the amusement arcade, the roller-coaster, the crime novel and the sensational newspaper story. They were engaged in a continuous search for bigger and better thrills." Sweet suggests that we see the Victorians as stiff and the modern age as beginning with

cinema because "motion is life" – but suggests that this energy existed all along, even if it is not commonly remembered.

Of course, on the other end of the spectrum, not all Victorians loved the *Alice* books. An anonymous review of the *Alice* books in 1865 acknowledges the hard labor of Mr. Carroll to "heap together strange adventures and heterogeneous combinations," but declares that "any real child might be more puzzled than enchanted by this stiff, overwrought story" (as quoted in Phillips 1971, 84). Another review published in 1887 declares of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*: "there is nothing extraordinarily original about either, and certainly the former cannot fairly be called, as it once was, the most remarkable book for children of recent times… Mr. Carroll's style is as simple as his ideas are extravagant" (Edward Salmon, as quoted in Phillips 1971, 87).

No point in history has ever seen a single, unified opinion or outlook – and Alice herself has been argued to represent at times a model of Victorian virtues, and at others a near-exact counter for the role children in contemporary literature were supposed to behave. Even as Elise Leach struggles to reconcile Alice's place in a time when young girls in children's literature were either impossibly virtuous or woefully naughty and to be ultimately reformed (Phillips 1971, 90), Walter de la Mare in 1932 praises Alice for "her dignity her matter-of-factness, her conscientiousness, her courage (even in the most outlandish of circumstances) never to submit or yield; and with one of the most useful of all social resources, the art of changing a conversation – what a tribute she is not only to her author but to Victorian childhood!" (Phillips 1971, 59).

The impulse to describe the psychic nature of the mind in terms of clear functioning and understandable relations, while often necessary for the purposes of discussion, often results in black and white dichotomies and over-simplifications. M. H. Abrams argues for the analogy of

the mind to either a mirror (portraying a mimetic representation of the world) or a lamp (to indicate the way an artist "projects" his reality on the world around him) as shaping popular aesthetic theory and fostering a dichotomy between the representative and the imaginative (Abrams 1953, 34). This common but artificial hardening of categories perhaps contributes the common classification of nonsense as a rupture and a breaking with the objective tradition almost completely– seemingly favoring the subjective over the rational and literally bursting at the seams of an increasingly repressive society.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the beginnings of physiology as the specialized science we think of it today, and more attention began to be given to the true complexity of how our mind constructs a representation of the outside world. A fascination was held with the differences between the essentially monocular vision of a camera – that mode of vision which presents images more or less how they are in the real world - and the binocular vision of a human eye, which presents the viewer with two images of the world, each at a slightly different angle. With this came the realization that the operations of the human mind are fundamentally different from those of a machine, and are often much more difficult to define empirically or prove according to concrete relations to physical reality.

While the fact that humans have binocular vision has been known since antiquity, real scientific attention to this fact only truly began in the 1830s, when scientists became interested in understanding this phenomenon, and in quantifying the exact ocular disparities (Crary 1990, 119). Two existing theories previously existed on how unity is ever achieved in the visual field: the first theory held that we only see with one eye at a time, while the other theory (Kepler's projection theory, 1750s), asserted that "each eye projects an object to its actual location" (Crary 1990, 119). In the 1830s, however, these theories were reexamined as more information was

gathered about how multiple viewpoints are reconciled and information is organized in the brain. Both of these theories assume the individual validity of each eye's perception, but do not quite account for how both eyes work together, or explain the necessity of two viewpoints.

Perhaps reflecting the scientific interest in how divergent images are reconciled, stereoscopes were popular toward the end of the Victorian era, and created the illusion of depth by presenting two offset images at once – as well as allowing its mechanisms to remain unconcealed so as encourage the viewers' realization that their own minds, rather than the machine, were collapsing the two images into one unit. Crary reads the stereoscope as essentially presenting the observer with sham, never truly giving the impression of a truly homogenous field – instead only giving impressions of localized areas. As he says:

> In the stereoscopic image there is a derangement of the conventional functioning of optical cues. Certain planes or surfaces, even though composed of indications of light or shade that normally designate volume, are perceived as flat; other planes that normally would be read as two-dimensional, such as a fence in a foreground, seem to occupy space aggressively. Thus stereoscopic relief or depth has no unifying logic or order. If perspective implied a homogeneous and potentially metric space, the stereoscope discloses a fundamentally disunified and aggregate field of disjunct elements. Our eyes never traverse the image in a full apprehension of the three-dimensionality of the entire field, but in terms of a localized experience of separate areas. When we look head-on at a photograph or painting our eyes remain at a single angle of convergence, thus endowing the image surface with an optical unity. (Crary 1990, 125)

According to Crary, the stereoscope can be said at best as offering "hallucinatory clarity," and at worst as dehumanizing the observer into assembly-line-like mechanic motions, moving from one image to the next.. As he says, "The content of the images is far less important than the inexhaustible routine of moving from one card to the next and producing the same effect, repeatedly, mechanically. And each time, the mass-produced and monotonous cards are transubstantiated into a compulsory and seductive vision of the "real" (Crary 1990, 132). Like

the readers of nonsense who are unable to fully reconcile all elements of verse or biographical information into one coherent picture, Crary seems to express disappointment with binocular vision, ultimately finding the distinctly human shortcomings of the eye as unfavorably incomparable to orderly and crisp monocular vision.

However, while the stereoscope undoubtedly provokes discussion of how binocular vision compares to monocular vision, it seems to speak more loudly to the realization that, while humans can achieve a crisp and unified visual field, what separates humans from machines is this unique ability to perceive disparities and reconcile images with the mind. While, as the stereoscope indicates, binocular vision has its weaknesses and is not always as successful as monocular vision is in presenting an exact representation of the world, its incorporation of and desire to reconcile more than one viewpoint is also what leads to its greater sense of depth.

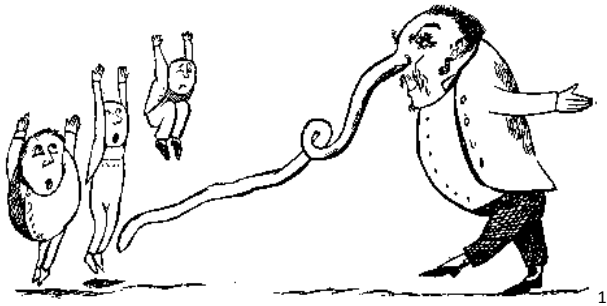
The camera obscura can also be argued as developing into the camera – film replacing the role of the human observer and forcing the realization that human abilities will forever fall short when compared to those of a machine. But the camera obscura can also be seen as developing into the camera obscura room – an entirely new created space of spectacle, entertainment, and education. Whole rooms were devoted to the experience of walking into the camera obscura long after the invention of the pinhole camera, and many still exist today – the experience meant purely for aesthetic enjoyment and seen as worthwhile in itself, rather than for any technical use (Wilgus 2012).

Additionally, there seems to be quite a difference between the monotonous routine of an assembly line and the unquenchable thirst for more images inspired by looking at stereoscopic slides. Stereoscopes were made as travelers explored and photographed foreign lands, and families often enjoyed armchair vacations through the flight of the imagination offered through

these slides. Instead of suggesting the entrapment of the viewer in structure and routine, the stereoscopic slides can be said to instead present the viewer with the ways in which knowledge of and experimentation with the logic of vision can be enjoyed and lead to more entertainments than were previously available. Dioramas, panoramas, and cosmoramas all transported the Victorians elsewhere, and sparked the imagination through their appropriation of optical science.

In fact, ultimately, neither nonsense literature nor stereoscopes seem to despair much in their occasional inability to achieve a fully unified read. Rather, both use this shortcoming to their advantage, presenting those who are willing to really look with a more complex and productive use of seeming dichotomies, collapsing thoughts and visions together and breaking them apart in order to present something uniquely unexpected and entirely new.

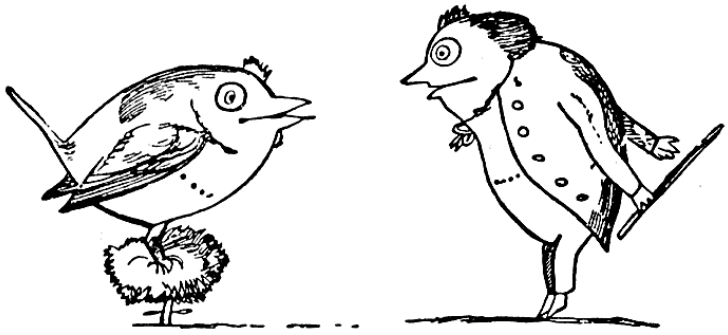
As opposed to his academic drawings, which take pains to represent the world precisely as it exists in nature, for example, Lear's nonsense limericks cut away detail and present things instead as they feel or appear more subjectively to the mind. For example, Lear's "Old Man with a nose" exclaims: "'If you choose to suppose, That my nose is too long, You are certainly wrong!" – a statement which would otherwise seem complete, if not for its slightly disjunct relationship with the limerick's illustration. While Lear's limericks have been printed as text alone, Lear's drawings serve as more than mere accompaniments to his words. The drawings not only illustrate the limericks, but their disparities and divergences with the words send the whole thing in new directions – and can be said to add to much of the fun of reading the limericks. Indeed, the children don't just "choose to suppose" that the man's nose is long – the man's nose is actually several feet in length, and even seems to be attacking the children – making them jump out of the way of its path:

 [13]

If there is a punchline in Lear's limericks, this is where it is to be found. Susan Stewart defines incongruities and intertextual contradictions as essential parts of nonsense – writing that humor arises from the clash of different planes of discourse. As she says, "When a fiction concomitantly presents two domains of reality as a set of voices in conflict with one another, irony results" – and humor arises when differences are seen to be compatible, or when ideas which are generally thought to be compatible are broken apart (Stewart 1989, 20). For instance, she gives puns as an example of humor may arise from the breaking apart of two things thought to be compatible. While the two words the pun brings to mind may sound the same, their meaning is split.

In many ways, nonsense humor laughs at the audience's expectations, its humor resulting from techniques which highlight how the application of logic can be used inappropriately. Many of the *Alice* jokes center on logical fallacies, for instance – the failures of casual human reasoning and structure leading to joy, rather than frustration. But, ultimately, nonsense does not seem to speak to the shortcomings of form. It does not seem to be a hyper-consciousness, a self-critical consciousness, or an affected cynicism. While in many ways the relationship between the language and the illustrations of the limericks, like two slightly dissimilar images on a stereoscope, can be seen as highlighting the ambiguities of language and the points at which the mind can be seen to put images together in a unreliable way, the drawings also engage in active

play with the words of the limericks– assisting Lear in drawing unlikely connections, breaking apart expectations, and creating something new and exciting to contemplate.



14

There was an Old Man who said, 'Hush!
I perceive a young bird in this bush!'
When they said, 'Is it small?'
He replied, 'Not at all!
It is four times as big as the bush!'

His friend Lord Cromer wrote of Edward Lear:

> He was too warm-hearted to be satirical. His laughter was, indeed, akin to tears. I have known him sit down at the piano and sob whilst he played and sang: *Tears, Idle Tears*, which he had himself set to music, and the next morning send me the subjoined sketch, accompanied by the following literary production, in which he poked fun at his favourite poet and devoted friend:

15

Nluv, fluv bluv, ffluv biours,
Faith nunfaithkneer beekwl powers
Unfaith naught zwant a faith in all (Cromer 1911, 2).

G. K. Chesterton, in his 1888 "Nonsense as a Fine Art," outlines a subtle but key difference in his perception between the humor of nonsense when it appears as fine art, and the humor of wit. Whereas wit shows contempt and scorn, he argues, the humor of nonsense looks with "kindly and playful forgiveness on all those frailties, incongruities, and absurd contradictions of mortal life" (1888). A further elaboration, in Chesterton's 1889 article "Concerning Nonsense" states, "That which excites the laughter of the vulgar is not nonsense exhibited as a Fine Art. There is a difference between vulgar ridicule and genuine mirth, just as there is a difference between wit and humour" (*All the Year Round*, 1889). He argues that wit should not be dismissed – for it can "truly be the sword of the spirit," but elaborates that while wit is in some ways the divine virtue of justice, needing to "bear the sword with ease," humor can be open in its guard, and confesses its inconsistency. Humor, for Chesterton, is related to humility, a confession of human weakness, human entanglements and contradictions – and "is only more divine because it has, for the moment, more sense of the mysteries" (Chesterton 1964).

Stephen Leacock mentions in his 1935 essay, "[Victorian humor consisted of more than verbal incongruities [and] "the effects of jangling syllables and misused words [but rather that it reached toward] the higher stages of the humor of character, turning on the contrasts of incongruities that make up 'queer' people" (As quoted in Wagner-Lawlor 2000, xiii). Instead, humor is often to be found in the incongruities of life. As Stephen Prickett remarks, "Lear's love of incongruity and delight in word play and word abuse is not the less a sense of fun for being intimately bound up with his private guilt, fears, and obsessions" (Prickett 2005, 119). The human psyche is not so easily divided and analyzed, or understood in terms of cause and effect.

In many ways, Lear's personal life was filled with sadness and loneliness – but so too was it filled with genuine laughter and personal charm.

In letter addressed to "Mrs [later Lady] Digby" and dated the "22toothoktobr", 1866, for example, Lear confides his despair, but in a light–hearted manner. As he writes, "I have been having no end of despair at the darkness of late … – & thort I shudavadda Phittavasmer again today as I have frequently had of late" – ending his letter with a "P.Eth," and a report that he has had a "thaddakthident, & have broken off my front teeth, so that I thall never thpeak plain again. (Thith Cometh of biting crutht)" (Bonhams 2011).

In the physiological world of optical toys, binocular vision is bound in the necessity of reconciling dissimilar images and binocular vision, rather than highlighting the limitations of the human eye, is found to give a wider field of view as a result of the perceived disparities. We now know that with both eyes a human can see 200 degrees, as opposed to a mere forty degrees with one eye (Harper 2012), and stereoscopic images even appear to be more realistic to viewers the greater the disparities between the images are, and the greater number of points of disharmony there are. When an object is far removed or there are not many objects in the frame, it appears mainly the same to both eyes. Only when there is great disparity can the stereoscopic photos achieve this larger-than-life tangibility which lifts the scene off the paper.

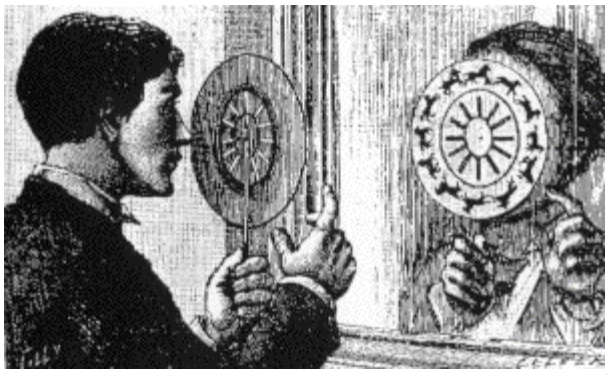
Like the stereoscopic images, nonsense literature does not approach incongruities and slight differences suggesting criticism or alternatives – but instead suggests that multiple dimensions of a single person may coexist in harmony. "For while sense is, and must remain essentially prosaic and commonplace," argued Edward Strachey's Quarterly Review of 1888, "nonsense has proved not to be an equally prosaic and commonplace negative of sense, not a mere putting forward of incongruities and absurdities, but the brining out a new and deeper

harmony of life in and through its contradictions. Nonsense… has shown itself to be a true work of the imagination, a child of genius, and its writing one of the fine arts" (Strachey 1888, 365).

The Lover of Universal Life:

The Movement of Nonsense

In the 1853 essay "The Philosophy of Toys" Charles Baudelaire speaks in reverence of the toyshop as representative of a child's first ideas about beauty, and toys themselves as a child's first interaction with art – filling the child with feelings of warmth, enthusiasm, and conviction (Baudelaire 1978, 199). In his short essay, Baudelaire briefly describes several different types of toys – among them the scientific, or philosophical toys. Specifically, Baudelaire describes the phenakistoscope (literally, "deceptive view") – developed in the early 1830s by Belgian physicist Joseph Plateau, and one of the first toys to use the persistence of vision to create the illusion of motion (Leskosky 1993, 176). Similar to the stroboscope (from the Greek "whirlpool" and "to look at") or the zoetrope ("wheel of life"), the phenakistoscope, at its simplest, consisted of a single disc divided into equal segments separated by slits, with figures drawn in apparent successive action on one side of each of its segments. When the figures were faced toward a mirror and viewed through the slits, they appeared to be in motion.



16

As Baudelaire writes:

> Apply your eye at the level of the little windows, and spin the cardboard discs rapidly. The speed of rotation transforms the twenty openings into a single circular opening, through which you see twenty dancing figures reflected in the mirror, all exactly alike and executing the same movements with a fantastic precision. Each little figure has availed himself of the nineteen others. On the card the figure spins and its speed makes it invisible; but in the mirror, seen through the revolving windows, it is motionless, executing on the spot all these movements that are distributed between all twenty figures. The number of pictures which can thus be created is infinite (Baudelaire 1978, 201).

Baudelaire describes the phenakistoscope mainly to speak to how endless hours of entertainment may be derived from the philosophical toys, spinning and slowing their motion and attempting to discover the secrets behind their motion. However, in an essay essentially about how children interact with art and beauty, it does not seem so unreasonable to note that, for Baudelaire, this sort of critical engagement with the transience of vision is also an important motif in some of his other writings, and is elsewhere described by Baudelaire as a sensibility specifically connected to the idea of "modernity" – that which he describes as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (Baudelaire 1978, 13).

For Walter Benjamin, Baudelaire seems remarkable as a poet who not only withdrew himself from movement and searched for stable and eternal beauty, but who also allowed himself to get caught up in the movement of everyday life. For Benjamin, it is this quality of interaction – like a child spinning a phenakistoscope both forward and backward, interacting in an invested but critical way with its movement – for which Baudelaire represents one of the first truly modern poets.

And, indeed, writing in the bustling metropolis of nineteenth century Paris, Baudelaire proposes in his 1859 essay "The Painter of Modern Life" that the fleeting beauty to be found in

modernity demands a new type of aesthetic sensibility, and that the "painter" or "hero" of modern life is a "botanist of the sidewalk" – or one who realizes that beauty is made up of both an eternal element, and a relative, temporal element determined by current fashion and the artist's surroundings. Baudelaire encourages artists not to discount modernity or to concern their art only with the attempt to create some sort of eternal ideal. Like a child, the painter of modern life participates in and gives form to a world in which all is new, continually in flux, and filled with fragmented experience.

Baudelaire portrays Constantin Guys, the subject of his essay "The Painter of Modern Life," as a passionate spectator– one who, through careful observation of the passing moment – the "particular beauty, the beauty of circumstances and the sketch of manners," as well as the classical beauty of artists and poets – is able to observe movement divorced from progress and distill the eternal from the transitory (Baudelaire 1978, 190).

Baudelaire also gave rise to the term "flâneur," to describe a type of urban wanderer who can be said to encompass this creative attitude. In French, "flâneur" suggests the meaning of a wanderer, stroller, or idler, and Baudelaire appropriated its use to describe one who walks the city in order to experience it – one who embraces the role of the spectator and finds beauty in the transitory. The flâneur both resisted the movement of modernity– slowly wandering through the arcades of Paris with no other aim than to observe the passing moment – and participated in its movement, fascinated by the speed of the modern city.

Baudelaire's "A une passante" ("To a Passer–By") – is arguably one of his most flaneuristic poems:

> The deafening street howled around me.
> Tall, thin, in full mourning — majestic sorrow —
> A woman passed, with a stately hand

Lifting and swinging her widow's reeds and her hem,

Agile and noble, with the foot of a statue.
As for myself, clenched like a madman, I drank
From her eyes — pale sky giving birth to the hurricane —
Sweetness that mesmerizes and pleasure that kills.

A bolt of lightning ... Then night! — Fugitive beauty
Whose glance suddenly brought me back to life,
Will I see you again only in eternity?

Somewhere else, so far from here! Too late! Never, perhaps!
For I do not know where you are fleeing, you do not know where I am going,
Oh you whom I could have loved, oh you who knew this!

But, while there certainly can be seen movement in the howling of the street, the swinging of widow's weeds, and in the woman's appearance and sudden disappearance – and while movement in other places does seem to be stalled with contemplation of a stately hand or of a foot like a statue's – the actual joy derived from this fleeting beauty seems to be more ambiguous in nature. Beauty here is not distilled, but fugitive, and the poet is not left marveling in the joys of transience, but mourning as though from the loss of a loved one. There definite melancholy in its ending – "Oh you whom I have loved, oh you who knew this!"

In "The Philosophy of Toys," Baudelaire writes that we long to find life. In interacting with toys, he argues, what the child is truly searching for evidence and an understanding of the toy's soul. To illustrate this idea, Baudelaire describes a scene he stumbled across one day – a wealthy, well–dressed boy standing in a pretty garden behind a wrought–iron fence, standing over a fine doll, discarded on the floor. Instead of on the expensive toy, the boy's attention is fixed on the other side of the grille where, sitting in the road and sitting amongst 'the nettles and thistles,' a filthy street urchin played, teasing the rich boy with his splendid pet rat. The boy's

expensive doll simply cannot compare to the live rat, with all its life and possibilities of interaction (Baudelaire 1978, 200).

The desire to see the life of the toy and to understand its movements, Baudelaire asserts, sparks the imagination of the child and "fills his fingers and nails with an extra–ordinary agility and strength. The child twists and turns the toy, scratches it, shakes it, bumps it against the walls, and throws it on the ground. From time to time he makes it re-start its mechanical motions, sometimes in the opposite direction. Its marvelous life comes to a stop... But *where is its soul?*" (Baudelaire 1978, 203). Where is the origin of its life? According to Baudelaire, this futile search marks the child's introduction to melancholy and gloom (Baudelaire 1978, 203).

But Benjamin ultimately finds Baudelaire to be an entirely different species than the despairing Romantic poet who searches in vain for life and beauty in some sort of intransient ideal. As Benjamin writes, "Far from eluding the eroticist in the crowd, the apparition which fascinates him is brought to him by this very crowd. The delight of the city–dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight" (Benjamin, 77). The beauty of the moment is seen to be like that of the passing the woman – "extravagant in its grief" (Benjamin, 78). As A. S. Kline writes in his critical essay of Baudelaire's writings, "Romanticism begins and ends in the Idyll: from cradle to cradle, from dream to exhausted calm. Romanticism: dissatisfied with its own perpetually thwarted emotions, wearied with the imperfect and frustrating reality. Romanticism: searching for what cannot be found on Earth or in the sky" (Kline 2012). But, he argues, Baudelaire is rarely the poet of these things – "of tranquil harbours, of setting sail, of calm voyages and ecstasy in the depths" (Kline 2012). Kline notes that Baudeleaire's voyages into the world do not always leave him with a sense of ennui – and rather agrees with Benjamin in

emphasizing the view that Baudelaire is the first truly modern poet, creating gold from mud and seeing beauty in movement (Kline 2012).

Instead of finding a universe of either joy or sorrow, the painter of modern life, as Baudelaire argues, exemplifies another quality of childhood recovered at will – that of viewing the world with fascination. The painter of modern life becomes like a child for whom no aspect of the world has become set or stale, and who is as much a flâneur of emotions as of time and space. While the phenakistoscope may in some ways lead this child to a sense of melancholy, the fascination he derives from slowing the motion of the figures or speeding them up –forcing them to go forward, backward, or spin so quickly as to be almost invisible – seems to far outweigh his despair. The child desires to see the figures spin, jump, and run, but instead of attempting to find a consistency of their motion is also drawn by seemingly morbid curiosity to the equal beauty in the ways in which the figures break down their motions, or seem to flee forever away.

Nonsense literature also seems concerned with the implications of living in a world of transience and in the midst of the "ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" – even if this ephemerality is not specifically connected to a sense of "modernity." In the world of nonsense, scenes and images fly away, leaving only fleeting impressions on the mind.

> "Things flow about so here!" [Alice] said at last in a plaintive tone, after she had spent a minute or so in vainly pursuing a large, bright thing that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a work–box, and was always on the shelf next above the one she was looking at. "And this one is the most provoking of all—but I'll tell you what—" she added, as a sudden thought struck her. "I'll follow it up to the very top shelf of all. It'll puzzle it to go through the ceiling!"
> But even this plan failed (*TLG*, 154–5).

Like the childlike fascination inspired in the painter of modern life, nonsense also holds an interest in the observation of movement, and allows for play with the pushing and stalling of

its parts. Like figures on a phenakistoscope, the fragmented units of nonsense's language often seem to be propelled forward by some inherent force of motion, and, like the phenakistoscope, by the "deceptive view" of the sense produced from quasi–logical connections drawn between its parts. Nonsense verse especially seems to play with the sounds it makes and explore the natural propulsion of its words. For example, Lear's second Nonsense Alphabet begins:

> A was once an apple–pie
> Pidy
> Widy
> Tidy
> Pidy
> Nice Insidy
> Apple–Pie
>
> (Lear 1980, 11).

Its words seem propelled by nothing other than the spontaneous associations of their sounds, and their movement is apparently divorced from any significance or meaningful progress.

Nonsense also loves counting and the apparent linearity of its numbers, as well as its sounds. Numbers seem to at once suggest and subvert the logical progression of its movement.

> "When did you begin?"
> The Hatter looked at the March Hare, who had followed him into the court,
> arm–in–arm with the Dormouse. "Fourteenth of March, I think it was," he said.
> "Fifteenth," said the March Hare.
> "Sixteenth," added the Dormouse.
> "Write that down," the King said to the jury, and the jury eagerly wrote down
> all three dates on their slates, and then added them up, and reduced the answer
> to shillings and pence (*AW*, 167).

The confident progression of numbers pushes the conversation forward without pausing for reflection, and therefore allows the conversation to end up in unexpected places. Numbers are even often ornamental, seemingly having no other purpose than to drive the text forward.

> 'Then fill up the glasses as quick as you can,
> And sprinkle the table with buttons and bran:

> Put cats in the coffee, and mice in the tea—
> And welcome Queen Alice with thirty-times-three*!'*
> ...
> 'Then fill up the glasses with treacle and ink,
> Or anything else that is pleasant to drink*:*
> Mix sand with the cider, and wool with the wine—
> And welcome Queen Alice with ninety-times-nine*!'*(*LG*, 89).

Like the figures on a phenakistiscope, dancing through their false connections, elements of nonsense encourage the impulse to make sense of the serial, collapsing isolated pieces into a manageable, logically–progressing whole, and forging a unity between them. The linguistic structure of nonsense verse often further encourages this force toward order by imposing regular metrical pattern or excessive alliteration to pair together thoughts.

> The time has come, the walrus said,
> To talk of many things,
> Of shoes and ships and sealing-wax,
> Of cabbages and kings,
> And why the sea is boiling hot,
> And whether pigs have wings. (*TLG*, 235)

The pattern here seems logical, and the rhymes between the lines seem satisfying. It makes sense to the ear, if not to the brain. Shoes, ships, and sealing-wax all seem to belong together, as do cabbages and kings. This same game of alliterative listing is also played by Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*. When Alice makes a remark about the strange attitudes of the messenger Haigha coming down the road, the White King exclaims, "Not at all….He's an Anglo–Saxon Messenger– and those are Anglo–Saxon attitudes. He only does them when he's happy. His name is Haigha."

> ... "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. "The other Messenger's called Hatta" (*TLG*, 100).

–and the three little sisters from the Dormouse's story at the Mad Tea Party similarly draw all manner of things that begins with an M from the bottom of the treacle, including mouse-traps, the moon, memory, and muchness.

But, as part of its play, nonsense also loves to keep the illusion of its movement transparent and encourage its dissolution. A meaningless progression of numbers and sounds suggest a structure of logical progression, but only very briefly, and not one which stands up to investigation. In her article "The Language of Nonsense in Alice," Jacqueline Flescher also points out that, while alliteration is often used in Carroll's nonsense, he very rarely employs assonance and internal rhyme except on rhyming lines. If he had, she argues, he would have weakened the effect and transparency of suggested serial order. With alliteration, Flescher argues, the emphasized first sound binds units together, while simultaneously distinguishing each unit from the next. Assonance and internal rhyme would have blended the sounds too completely, in her opinion, and would have in fact been counter-productive, depriving the units of their individuality and inherent separateness (Flescher 1969). Just as nonsense creates motion, then, spinning its words so quickly as to make them dance, it also takes pleasure in slowing their motion down, breaking its motion into parts, and contemplating the nature of its movements. Like a phenakistoscope, the language of nonsense has the power to push forward, but it can also reveal itself as detached from progress, seemingly moving merely for the sake of moving.

Baudelaire's flaneurs pursue movement for its own sake. As A.S. Kline argues, Baudelaire is a poet concerned with movement and voyage, but without an end destination in mind. Nonsense literature, too, in addition to the movement of the units of its language, seems hold certain affinity for the idea of a voyage. Alice is constantly wandering and absorbing new

and changing sights in Wonderland, and Lear's nonsense, too, seems very much concerned with the idea of physical movement. Almost every single poem in *Nonsense Songs and Stories* is concerned in some way with travel. The Owl and the Pussy-Cat, the Daddy Long-Legs and the Fly, and the Jumblies all set to sea and find harmony in their travels. But melancholy is also sometimes found in the fleeting nature and shifting perceptions of nonsense. For example, in Lear's "Calico Pie":

> Calico pie,
> The little birds fly
> Down to the calico-tree:
> Their wings were blue,
> And they sang "Tilly-loo!"
> Till away they flew;
> And they never came back to me!
> They never came back,
> They never came back,
> They never came back to me!
>
> Calico jam,
> The little fish swam
> Over the Syllabub Sea.
> He took off his hat
> To the Sole and the Sprat,
> And the Willeby-wat:
> But he never came back to me;
> He never came back,
> He never came back,
> He never came back to me...
>
> (Lear 2008, 106)

-and, as The Mad Gardener from *Sylvie and Bruno* sings,

> 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!' (*SB*, 65)

In the world of nonsense, one can have jam tomorrow and jam yesterday, but never jam today. The prettiest rushes are always beyond Alice's reach, those which can be picked fade away almost instantly. It often seems to the reader as though beauty flees from us, leaving only fragments. But, like many aspects of nonsense, there is rarely consistency in either the movement or the melancholy. When the Mad Gardener sings of a bear without a head who appears suddenly, he is drawn to pity ("'Poor thing,' he said, 'poor silly thing! It's waiting to be fed!'") – and is at other points in the same song led to epiphany through the unpredictable changes he moves through.

> He thought he saw a Garden–Door
> That opened with a key:
> He looked again, and found it was
> A Double Rule of Three:
> 'And all its mystery,' he said,
> 'Is clear as day to me!' (*SB*, 65)

Though nonsense finds ample space for sadness, it does not linger to despair for any longer than it takes for the next moment to come along and enchant the wanderer with new sensibility. Like the interest inspired by spinning a phenakistoscope, Alice seems unconcerned even though rushes fade nearly as soon as she picks them – her interest and curiosity in other objects equally as strong:

> 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… they lay in heaps at her feet — but Alice hardly noticed this, there were so many other curious things to think about (*TLG*, 159).

Spinning around the little shop in *Through the Looking-Glass*, trying to get a glimpse of the objects of the shelves, Alice is described by the Sheep shop-keeper as a teetotum – a kind of spinning top. Martin Gardner, in *The Annotated Alice*, explains that teetotums were popular children's toys, the flat sides of which were inscribed with numbers or letters, and the letter "T" signifying "Totum" – or that the player "took all" (Gardner 1960, 253). Since Alice is, however, still spinning, she is therefore like a top which has not yet settled on a winner, and has not yet knocked out any possibilities of action, and opens herself to them all. Indeed, Alice finds herself comfortably in the role of a flâneur travelling through a Wonderland which is full of changes and of which she cannot quite get a hold – a world which, ultimately, disappears from her sight altogether.

Alice is a passionate wanderer in many senses, moved to both laughter and tears on her journey, but she also encompasses another characteristic of Baudelaire's gentleman flâneur. That is, she maintains a formal distance between herself outside world – demanding elbow room as she walks. She is an outsider to Wonderland, and even separates herself from her own emotions, and rationalizes her thoughts:

> 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said Alice, 'a great girl like you,' (she might well say this), 'to go on crying in this way! Stop this moment, I tell you!' But she went on all the same, shedding gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching half down the hall (*AW*, 32).

The necessity of a detached, contemplative observer in order to understand the movements of the world is often seen in discussions of the flâneur. While the flâneur lives in the transitory modern world and is a wanderer amongst the masses, he never truly becomes one with

the crowd or allows himself to be swept entirely away by the motion of daily life. Instead, flâneurs thought to approach the movement of life from a position of insight, self-consciously distinguishing themselves in thought from the crowd and it is this distance and promise of understanding, perhaps, which is what allows them to continue living amongst the motion of the modern world – it's threats of transience tamed if the flanuer is in some way detached or able to understand its motions without fully succumbing to them.

Interestingly, as well as conducting many investigations on the nature of perception of movement, an increasing objectification and artificial separation of the senses was seen in the optical studies of the 1830s and 1840s in order to achieve more exact measurements of individual processes of the eye. This contemplative neutrality was understood to be not only as a precondition for a mastering of the body, but also for the creation of an observer who, like the flâneur, would therefore be open to an increasing number of experiences and play of illusions. As Crary writes, this separation of the senses represented not "the remaking of the visual field not into a tabula rasa on which orderly representations could be arrayed, but into a surface of inscription on which a promiscuous range of effects could be produced… a condition for the formation of an observer who would be competent to consume the vast new amounts of visual imagery and information increasingly circulated during this same period" (Crary 1990, 96). Like the figures on a phenakistoscope which seem invisible when seen directly on the spinning card, and yet appear clearly when viewed through a mirror, a certain distance from the body was seen as necessary in order to truly understand the workings of movement.

In his writings on Baudelaire, Benjamin compares time to a photographer, producing images of the essence of life in negative. The developing agent has been lost, Benjamin writes, but he imagines Baudelaire to be able to read the plates through careful contemplation –

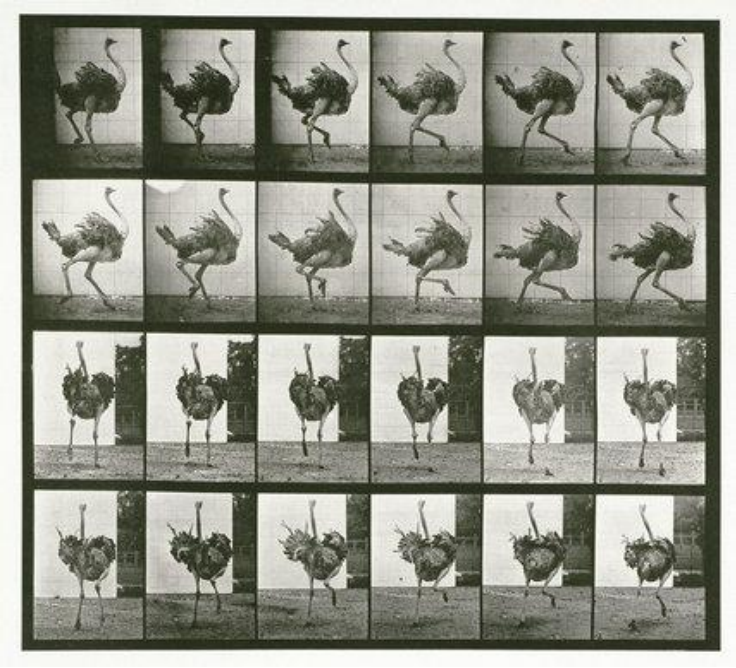
recognizing images of beauty in a medium which others are unable to read. This analogy suggests that by experimenting with and observing motion, there is some truth to be found and mastered and some eternal secret to be uncovered.

Along this line of thought, perhaps another passionate spectator marked by this same interest in movement is the photographer Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge can be seen as both a photographer literally capturing and articulating the moment, and, like Benjamin's imagining of Baudelaire, as a contemplative observer of time – perhaps in some way mastering time and learning its secrets. According to Randy Malamud, Muybridge was an apologist of modernism and industrialization and one who could find eternal beauty in the modern landscape. To illustrate this, Malamud points specifically to the beauty and formal balance which can be found in Muybridge's landscape photographs of railway tracks in rural settings (Malamud 2012). Interested in everything from stereoscopes to panoramas, Eadweard Muybridge in his early career photographed landscapes and cityscapes, and admirers of his work have pointed out that even his most apparently straightforward his photographs transcend a mere replication of reality, and display a fascination with the "mystery of time and motion," and how reality is presented differently to the naked eye as to film. In the most literal sense, the necessarily long exposures of his early landscapes do blend several seconds into an apparent instant. Photography in the mid–nineteenth century was still a new medium, and it was a slow process, initially. Emulsions took time – whole seconds, if not whole minutes – and photography was therefore best suited to images of still and intransient things.

But the reason why Muybridge's work inspired the field of chronophotography, which literally means 'picturing time,' came with his later work. By 1870s, improvements in cameras and the increased possible speeds of photographic emulsions made it possible to truly

photograph subjects in motion for the first time – shutter speeds becoming as fast as to be able to capture 1/1000th of a second (Burns 1999). And Baudelaire wrote, we desire to see the life of a toy and understand its movements – and photography began to be able to convey images of a world in motion and both capture its instantaneous movements and present them to the observer for study and contemplation.

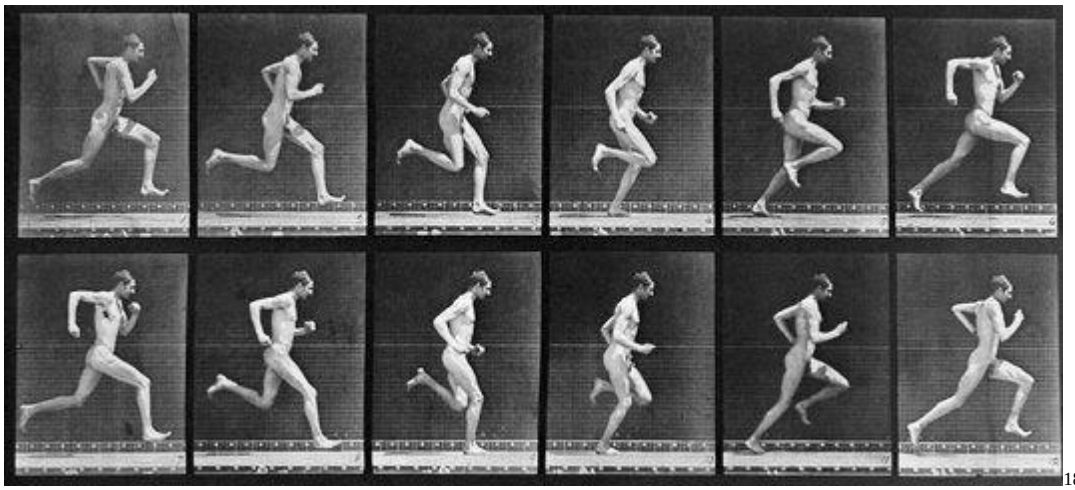
Commissioned and paid for by scientists at The University of Pennsylvania, Muybridge's studies of animal locomotion in 1877 and 1878 used a series of large cameras placed in a line to photograph his subjects – at first triggered by a thread as the animal passed, and later triggered by a clockwork device (Burns 1999).



17

Muybridge's photography seemingly transformed the animal into something to be studied and improved, and Muybridge himself was confident that his inventions would have practical applications as well as provide simple entertainment. Muybridge even claimed that no race would ever be used without the aid of one of his instruments to determine the winner and,

indeed, much of Muybridge's work is praised for its scientific contributions (Burns 1999). Figures in *Animal Locomotion* are alienated from their natural contexts, appearing against either a white or black plain background the bettered to be observed and studied, and were often accompanied with a grid of numbers and measurements. Muybridge's photographs, in their mechanical detachment, promised a scientific laying-clear of motion. The mechanical precision and neutrality of their frames suggested possibilities of sight and revelation of motion unachievable through the fallible processes of unaided human vision.

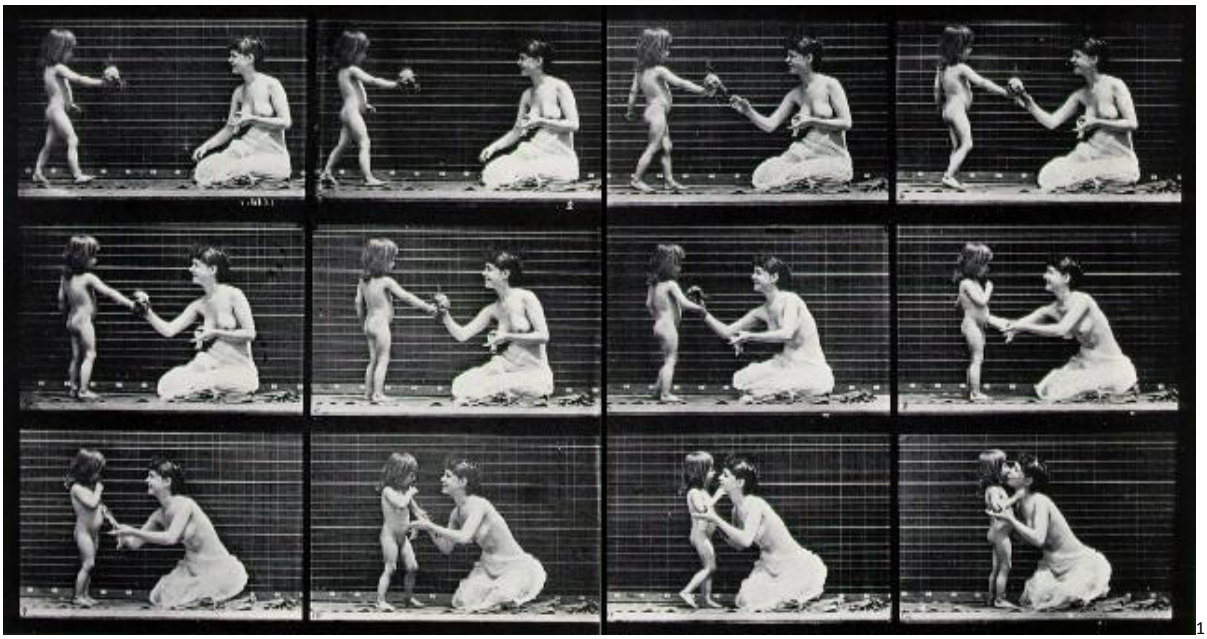
 [18]

Muybridge photographed people in the same way as he did the animals – apparently presenting some sort of typical example of mechanical movement for each animal or type of subject he photographed. Further, by presenting side by side nearly identical photographs of both ostriches and humans running, Muybridge seemed to be saying, "these are the secrets to mechanical motion, as universally true to one species as to another."

Muybridge seems to have achieved the mastery of understanding motion promised but denied by the phenakistoscope. By contemplating motion he seems to have unveiled its secrets – even distilling beauty from its motions.

Indeed, there was an overall interest in the mid–nineteenth century of what the visible reveals, as can be seen in the rise and growing popularity of physiognomy in the nineteenth century – the belief that the human face could be "read" for emotion, social type, and other information, for example (Flint 2000, 14). This interest in the visible seemed to posit that it is in some way possible to understand the universe through observation. Benjamin begins his discussion of Baudelaire by discussing the emergence of the "physiologie" as a paperback literary genre, noting that by 1841, there were 76 of these orientating physiologies which indentified and examined on the various "types" of people one would could run across on the street (Crickenberger 2012). These physiologies were also referred to as examples of "panoramic literature" in reference to the visual spectacles of the panoramas and panoramic paintings which became popular around the mid–nineteenth century. These panoramas were large, wide–angle, 360–degree representations of \ landscapes or historical events intended to give the viewer the illusion that they were standing in the midst of the scene presented (Cary 1990, 35). Panoramas were intended to perfectly imitate nature, incorporating special–effects and creative lighting of huge paintings of scenes to produce realistic–like effects for their audience. "Panoramic literature," therefore, referred specifically to the pamphlet's promise to represent a perfect representation of an example of nature against painted backdrop. The articulation of types in Muybridge's photographs seems reflect an interest in classifying the natural world. Muybridge's work also included a section on "abnormal" movement. Seemingly clinical in intent, Muybridge photographed patients at Blockley Hospital for the Poor, and 23 patients, such as a woman with multiple cerebro–spinal sclerosis, or a child with double amputation of the thighs getting on and off a chair, appeared in the final publication of *Animal Locomotion* (Muybridge 1986, 11).

But though apparently scientific in outset, Muybridge's exact methods often were not. He would strip the photographs down to silhouettes to better be studied, but would often replace a failed exposure in a sequence for a comparable figure from another sequence (Burns 1999). Something about Muybridge's photography also seems to reach beyond mere studies of motion, as well. For example, "Child bringing a bouquet to a woman":

 [19]

Muybridge seems to have thought of himself as an artist, as a passionate observer, and Curator Philip Brookman notes that, "In May 1894, he advertised a course of talks, stating 'although the training of the eye to a just appreciation of the movements of everyday life is their main object, they will be entirely free from technicalities" (Muybridge 2010, 99). Muybridge has also had solo exhibitions at London's Tate Modern and New York's Museum of Modern Art, and *The Human Figure in Motion* is still used today in art schools as a model of human motion. As Andry Grunburg muses, "In his early career, he produced large–format, wet–plate landscape picture that adhere in most important respects to a classical, pre-modern model of what a

landscape should be… [then] he devoted himself almost entirely to devising ways to depict instantaneous, sequential view of motion" (Muybridge 2010, 9).

Muybridge's photographs seem to truly break down time and freeze it, stopping its motion. But, as "Child bringing a bouquet to a woman" shows, the motions in his studies are sometimes more lively than mechanical, and more than can be grasped only via the intellect. There is an element that gets lost between their plates. These shots show the care between the woman and the child as well as just their physical motions, and their movements seem slightly unpredictable – the child seems to take a step back from the mother, pulling his hand back before embracing her.

For Benjamin, the world of created physiologies signified less a panorama, and more a phantasmagoria – a type of visual spectacle which used creative lighting to project and impose supernatural images onto walls, puffing smoke, and using screens to present the viewers with fleeting moments and apparitions….suggesting the presence of things that the eye cannot see. According to Benjamin, the physiologies, in their effort to assure the public that "everyone could — unencumbered by any factual knowledge — make out the profession, character, background, and lifestyle of passers-by" these physiologies actually helped to fashion a "phantasmagoria of Parisian life" (Benjamin, 39) – producing the illusion of images which are not really there, rather than telling the true situation. But phantasmagorias were also purposefully-made spectacles – theatrical ghost-shows which used smoke and mirrors to give the impression of specters from other worlds wandering through this one. The phantasmagorias ultimately suggested, not knowledge or certainty of the outside world, but a delight in confusion and fear of an uncertain world.

Muybridge's work held an interest for the imagination and a love for things which cannot be seen by the naked eye alone. For example, one of the most famous of Muybridge's studies of motion is that which he produced in response to the Governor of California, Leland Stanford, in 1872. The businessman and race-horse owner Stanford had sought out Muybridge's help in proving scientifically a fact which was popularly debated in that day – the debate over whether a horse in motion ever fully leaves the ground – each of his for hooves suspended for a brief instant in the middle of its gallop.

In 1877, Muybridge managed to capture Stanford's horse, Occident, completely airborne:


20

Muybridge showed that all four hooves of a horse do leave the ground at the same time – though not reaching forward and back and painters before that time had commonly imagined. Rather, the hooves met in the middle, their motion somewhere suspended between active pulling and pushing. While Muybridge often approached his studies scientifically, he did not set out to confirm what we already know through empirical studies of the natural world like the physiologies did, promising and imposing stability. Rather, Muybridge was more interested in seeing through his photography what the unaided eye could not.

Like Muybridge's photographs, nonsense language seems to explore non-linear motion, but does not explicitly state any sort of purpose or conclusion. Instead, it seems simply look or play with it, able to take joy and derive excitement from setting out without a set hypothesis.

For example, Lear's "Teacups and Quails":

> Cutlets and Eyes,
> Swallows and Pies,
> Set it a flying
> and see how it flies!
> ..
> Thistles and Moles,
> Crumpets and Soles,
> Set it a rolling
> and see how it rolls!

Nonsense loves to go in a circle, as Susan Stewart's example shows:

> That's tough.
> What's tough?
> Life.
> What's life?
> A magazine.
> Where did you get it?
> Newsstand.
> How much?
> Fifteen cents.
> I've only a dime.
> That's tough.
> What's tough?
> (Stewart 1989, 130).

Conversations in nonsense also often end where they begin, and deny true connection and understanding between the speakers. In an 1855 letter to his siblings Henrietta and Edwin, Carroll describes the importance of a tutor keeping his distance from his pupils and degrading them as much as possible so that they will always remember their place. "So I sit at the further end of the room" Carroll writes, "outside the door (which is shut) sits the scout; outside the outer door (also shut) sits the sub–scout: half–way downstairs sits the sub–sub–scout; and down in the

yard sits the pupil. The questions are shouted from one to the other, and the answers come back in the same way" –

> Tutor. What is twice three?
> Scout. What's a rice tree?
> Sub–Scout. When is ice free?
> Sub–sub–Scout. What's a nice fee?
> Pupil (timidly). Half a guinea!
> Sub–sub–Scout. Can't forge any!
> Sub–Scout. Ho for Jinny!
> Scout. Don't be a ninny!
> Tutor (looks offended, but tries another question). Divide a hundred by twelve!
> Scout. Provide wonderful bells!
> Sub–Scout. Go ride under it yourself!
> Sub–sub–Scout. Deride the dunder–headed elf!
> Pupil (surprised). Who do you mean?
> Sub–sub–Scout. Doings between!
> Sub–Scout. Blue is the screen!
> Scout. Soup–tureen!
> (Collingwood 1967, 198–9).

The motion seems to move the conversation and stall it, all at once. The puns generate a vacillation between meanings, and leave nothing but fleeting impressions on the mind. We cannot fix on any one meaning any more than Alice can fix on any one object on the shop's shelves. A similar proliferation of meanings is seen in Alice's conversation with the Sheep shop-keeper:

> 'Can you row?' the Sheep asked, handing her a pair of knitting–needles as she spoke.
> 'Yes, a little — but not on land — and not with needles —' Alice was beginning to say, when suddenly the needles turned into oars in her hands, and she found they were in a little boat, gliding along between banks: so there was nothing for it but to do her best.
> 'Feather!' cried the Sheep, as she took up another pair of needles.…
> …'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.'

As Gardener explains, "The Sheep is asking Alice to turn her oar blades horizontally as she moves them back for the next "catch" so that the lower edge of the blade will not drag

through the water…. ‘Catching a crab’ is rowing slang for a faulty stroke in which the oar is dipped so deeply in the water that the boat's motion, if rapid enough, can send the oar handle against the rower's chest with sufficient force to unseat him” (Gardner 1960, 60).

Like a phenakistoscope , in which sequential images are not perceived to be progressing in sequence, but rather one on top of the other, their motion coming from the conflict between the figures, nonsense often sees conflict is productive and as moving the conversation forward, instead of stalling it. In this way, nonsense can perhaps be said to reach even farther than simple play with a phenakistoscope – offering even more room for interaction on the part of the reader or observer and more proliferation of possibilities and ideas. For Baudelaire, the hero of modern life participates in motion and is able to give form to the fragments of life – as well as the paradoxes and illusions - and, playing with its component parts to the point of abstraction and creating something entirely new. Nonsense has the ability to spin forward or backward, speed up or slow down, but it also has the ability to break free from this rigid pattern and cave in on itself – its infinitely repeating parts mirroring with a dimensionality beyond anything a phenakistoscope can provide. Further, these moments of abstraction can be said to reach the level of art before they are separated again, their art coming from their temporality and ability to be re–arranged in infinite ways.

Perhaps another connection, then, can be drawn to the kaleidoscope. Invented in 1815 by Sir David Brewster, the kaleidoscope uses two inclined mirrors to invert, multiply, and rotate simple forms (Crary 1990, 113). For Brewster, the invention of the kaleidoscope was justified by arguments of productivity and efficiency – and as “a mechanical means for the reformation of art according to an industrial paradigm” (Crary 1990, 116). As Groth explains: “Initially intended as an instrumental demonstration of Brewster’s celebrated experimentation with the polarization of

magical unity" (Groth 2007, 222). And yet the kaleidoscope also falls short of creating a complete abstraction, or completely releasing control of the mind's flow of images. The images created always suggest that they might at any moment slide back together, and the observer is still very much a manipulator and creator of his own vision.

For Baudelaire, to become a "kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness," with it complete surrender to instability and perpetual transformation was the goal of "the lover of universal life". Instead of merely holding off melancholy by a sustained interest in spinning a phenakistoscope, starting and stopping its action, the player with a kaleidoscope responds with a "multiplicity of life" to the paradoxes of the universe. In his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, the kaleidoscopic flâneur displays a complete surrender to instability, and is none the less interested in finding beauty in the temporal for his interest in eternal, classical beauty.

> The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flaneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito. The lover of life makes the whole world his family, just like the lover of the fair sex who builds up his family from all the beautiful women that he has ever found, or that are—or are not—to be found; or the lover of pictures who lives in a magical society of dreams painted on canvas. Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidescope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life. He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non–I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive.

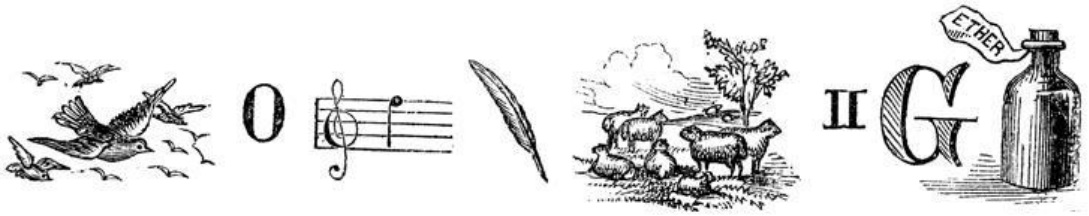
For the viewer of the kaleidoscope, the world is in a state of constant flux and transformation. What Baudelaire, nonsense literature and the philosophical toys suggest perhaps more than anything else is this idea of alternatives or options, and a surrender to instability. The outside world is presented to our mind as a "kaleidoscopic flux of impressions" which has to be organized, but which retains the possibility to be rearranged, as well as held still. As Baudelaire writes, the failure of a child to find life in his toy and understand its movements leads to melancholy – but the "hero" of modern life not only realizes that beauty has a temporal as well as an eternal element, but is also one who recognizes the tenets of modernity, and who is "simultaneously engaged in an inevitably doomed struggle against them" (Benjamin, 40).

As G.K. Chesterton writes in his 1911 essay "Two Kinds of Paradox": "as a live rhinoceros ought to produce more rhinoceri, so a live paradox ought to produce more paradoxes. Nonsense ought to be suggestive"

Conclusion

So, why is a raven like a writing desk? As the Mad Hatter admits, "I haven't the slightest idea." The world of nonsense is, at its heart, inconclusive, the questions it poses apparently untethered musings rather than articulated hypotheses or purposeful trains of thought. As G.K. Chesterton wrote in his 1902 article "A Defense of Nonsense," "There is all the difference in the world between the instinct of satire, which, seeing in the Kaiser's moustaches something typical of him, draws them continually larger and larger; and the instinct of nonsense which, for no reason whatever, imagines what those moustaches would look like on the present Archbishop of Canterbury if he grew them in a fit of absence of mind" (Chesterton 1902). Instead of reaching enlightenment or communicating insight, nonsense seems perfectly content to play with its thoughts and associations with no greater aim or purpose in mind - twisting and rearranging the natural world seemingly just for the fun of it, and constantly undermining and collapsing its own conclusions. But always at the forefront of nonsense, as Chesterton writes, is the insistence that "the Quangle-Wangle meant absolutely nothing, and the Lands of the Jumblies were absolutely nowhere" (Chesterton 1902).

Perhaps, then, rather than addressing a connection between nonsense literature and optical toys like a riddle and believing it capable of presenting some sort of concise conclusion or offering some reward for its investigation, this connection should instead be thought of as more in the nature of a rebus letter: a riddle-like letter which communicates its messages through the combination of symbolic figures and words.



21

The rebus letter became popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and can be said to delight less in clever thoughts than it does purely in the action of collapsing two different systems of representation and of reading them together. Like a riddle, there is an initial confusion or seeming disharmony of it parts, and then a spark of insight when the solution is found. However, unlike a riddle, when a rebus is solved its answer is rarely anything incredibly profound, or even anything which couldn't have more simply articulated in a single system. The reward the rebus presents is not to be found in clever wordplay or brilliant solution. Rather, it simply delights in presenting a new style of reading.

Like attempting to discuss both nonsense literature and studies of vision at once, rebus letters seem to hold similar interest in how the same sounds can be produced by different material - exploring the ways in which the two systems overlap and break apart. The satisfaction of its game, perhaps, comes from the exercise of reconciling fragments of images and sound initially thought to be dissimilar and the wonder of recasting the obvious or most accepted usage of a thing. The rebus presents a game of association and translation which leads not to any grand or clever belief or statement, but perhaps to a greater appreciation and realization of the senses and the process of reading itself.

Further, while it is generally acknowledged that word "rebus" comes from the Latin root "res," or "thing," Zoe Beloff has also noted that the word "rebus" has been traced back to the French rêver ("to dream") (Beloff 2011). Though incorrect, this confusion of lineage seems

fairly fitting. “Thing” and “dream” at first seem incompatible. “Thing” refers to concrete objects and objective content, whereas “dream,” is thought of as connected with the mind’s imaginative power of association and transformation. And yet, somehow, both “things” and “dreams” have been read into rebuses. The “things” in rebuses may be said to be the rebus’s decontextualized objects, letters, and numbers - existing in the rebus merely as physical symbols. Instead of its meaning faltering and failing with the introduction of so many different and seemingly incongruent symbols thrown together, however, the rebus instead presents these objects in dream–like conversation with those around them – the power of association and imagination slurring borders and creating a language of word and image.

Though the desire that our world be a tangible one of clear logic and concrete relations may be a natural one, nonsense in many ways suggests the benefits of ambivalence – of drawing dreamlike connections where none may exist, of attempting to articulate something a little impossible, and of constantly questioning and investigating our perception of the world. Perhaps the amusement of a rebus letter, like that of a pun, even comes from these misguided associations and from the seemingly liberating realizations that a word can convey something other than its phonetics, or that an object can rise above its physicality and take part in a larger conversation.

Rather than articulating the impossibility of knowledge or communication, these slippages of structure instead give way to new discoveries and meanings. As Ina Rae Hark writes, “in the universe of nonsense, pragmatics, conformity, lack of imaginative daring provide a slim defense against the disasters, but a creature who posses these qualities necessarily forfeits a chance at the miracles” (Hark 1978, 116). Nonsense seems to create a poetry of conflict and paint a dynamic universe which suggests that we always take another look, read it in another

way, move either forward or backward or even collapse in altogether, but always keep searching, and keep looking.

Bibliography

Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* New York: Oxford UP, 1953.

Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. New York: Garland Pub., 1978.

Beloff, Zoe. "Philosophical Toy World." *Net Art Commissions on Turbulence*. Web. 03 Sept. 2011. <http://turbulence.org/Works/illusions/index.html>.

Bonhams, "LEAR, EDWARD (1812-1888, Self-styled 'Dirty Landskip Painter', Nonsense Poet and Travel Writer) - Papers & Portraits: The Roy Davids Collection Part II." *Artfact*. Bonhams, 2011. Web. 11 Apr. 2012. <https://www.artfact.com/auction-lot/lear,-edward-1812-1888,-self-styled-dirty-lands-a3r38518dj-86-m-216e4ab9bb>

Brown, Liz. "Never Mind the Pussy Cat: The Ornithological Art of Edward Lear." *Albert R. Mann Library*. Cornell University. Web. 07 Mar. 2012. <http://exhibits.mannlib.cornell.edu/lear/>

Burns, Paul. *The History of The Discovery of Cinematography --- An Illustrated Chronological History*. Oct. 1999. Web. July 2011. http://www.precinemahistory.net/

Burstein, Mark. "To Stop a Bandersnatch." *Lenny's Alice in Wonderland Site*. Web. 16 Oct. 2011. <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/explain/alice842.html>

Byerly, Alison. *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Campbell, John. "History of the OED." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. Web. 02 Apr. 2012. http://www.oed.com/public/oedhistory

Carpenter, Humphrey. Secret Gardens: a Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

Carroll, Symbolic Logic, Part I, Introduction to Learners, February 21, 1896.

Carroll, Lewis, Henry Holiday, James Tanis, John Dooley, Martin Gardner, Charles Mitchell, and Selwyn Hugh. Goodacre. *Lewis Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark*. Los Altos, CA: William Kaufmann, in Cooperation with Bryn Mawr College Library, 1981.

Carroll, Lewis, and John Tenniel. *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. New York: Morrow, 1993.

Carroll, Lewis, and Martin Gardner. *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass,*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1960.

Carroll, Lewis, and Renée Flower. *The Complete Sylvie and Bruno*. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991.

Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. "A Defense of Nonsense". The Defendant, second edition, London, R. Brimley Johnson, 1902.

Chesterton, Gilbert Keith, "Humour", and Dorothy Collins. *The Spice of Life and Other Essays*. Beaconsfield: Darwen Finlayson, 1964.

Christ, Carol T., Catherine Robson, and Stephen Greenblatt. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.

Christ, Carol T., and John O. Jordan. *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1995

Christ, Carol T., and John O. Jordan, "Introduction." *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California, 1995. xix-xvii.

Ciardi, John, and Miller Williams. *How Does a Poem Mean?* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1975.

Coats, Karen. *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2004.

Colley, Ann. "Edward Lear's Limericks and the Reversals of Nonsense." *Victorian Poetry*Comic Verse 26.3 (Autumn 1988): 285-99. *JSTOR*. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40001967>

Collingwood, Stuart Dodgson, and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C.L. Dodgson).* Detroit: Gale Research, 1967.

"Concerning Nonsense." *All the Year Round*. February 2, 1889, pp. 115-7.

Conley, Craig. *Magic Words: A Dictionary*. San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2008.

Conniff, Richard. "The Brittle-Stars Danced. The Stingray Smoked a Pipe." *Opinionator: Exclusive Online Community from the Times*. The New York Times, 30 Jan. 2011. Web. 07 Mar. 2012. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/the-brittle-stars-danced-the-stingray-smoked-a-pipe/>

Courtney, Ben. "Nonsense Books." *Nonsense Books by Edward Lear, 1894*. Web. 06 Mar. 2012. <http://www.bencourtney.com/ebooks/lear/>

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990.

Crickenberger, Heather Marcelle. "The Flaneur." *The Arcades Project Project or The Rhetoric of Hypertext*. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <http://www.thelemming.com/lemming/dissertation-web/home/flaneur.html>

Cromer, Evelyn Baring "Preface." Preface. Lear, Edward. *Queery Leary Nonsense; a Lear Nonsense Book,*. London: Mills & Boon, Limited, 1911.

Davidson, Angus. Edward Lear. New York: Kennikat, 1938.

Ettleson, Abraham. *Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass," Decoded*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1966.

"Linguistics." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/342418/linguistics>.

"Liverpool and Manchester Railway." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 15 Jan. 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/344677/Liverpool-and-Manchester-Railway>.

"Rebus." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/493346/rebus>.

Flescher, Jacqueline. "The Language of Nonsense in Alice." *Yale French Studies* The Child's Part 43 (1969): 128-44. *JSTOR*. Yale University Press. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2929641>

Flint, Kate. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Fordyce, Rachel, and Carla Marello. *Semiotics and Linguistics in Alice's World*. Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1994.

Gallagher, Catherine. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction : Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988.

Gardner, Martin. *The Universe in a Handkerchief: Lewis Carrol's Mathematical Recreations, Games, Puzzles, and Word Plays*. New York: Copernicus, 1996.

Grant, C. Loomis. *Western Folklore*. 3rd ed. Vol. 22. Western States Folklore Society, July 1963.

Graziosi, Marco. "Mr Lear, Humpty Dumpty and Finnegan | A Blog of Bosh." *A Blog of Bosh | Edward Lear and Nonsense Literature*. 08 Jan. 2011. Web. 08 Aug. 2011. <http://nonsenselit.wordpress.com/2011/01/08/mr-leer-humpty-dumpty-and-finnegan/>

Hackett, Lewis. "Industrial Revolution." *World History International: World History Essays From Prehistory To The Present*. Web. 15 Jan. 2012. <http://history-world.org/>

Hark, Ina Rae. "Edward Lear: Eccentricity and Victorian Angst." *Victorian Poetry* The Victorianism of Victorian Poetry (Spring - Summer) 16.1/2 (1978): 112-22. *West Virginia University Press*. Web. 28 May 2011. <www.jstor.org/stable/40002589>.

Harper, D. "Online Etymology Dictionary." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Web. 28 Feb. 2012. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=binocular>

Hancock, Stephen. *The Romantic Sublime and Middle-class Subjectivity in the Victorian Novel*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Heath, Peter Lauchlan, Lewis Carroll, and Lewis Carroll. *The Philosopher's Alice; Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-glass,*. New York: St. Martin's, 1974

Heyman, Michael B. "Isles of Boshen: Edward Lear's Literary Nonsense in Context." Diss. University of Glasgow, 1999.

Hollingsworth, Cristopher. *Alice beyond Wonderland: Essays for the Twenty-first Century*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2009.

Horton, Susan R. "Were They Having Fun Yet? Victorian Optical Gadgetry, Modernist Selves" (pg. 1-27). *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1995

Hudson, Mark. "Eadweard Muybridge: The Moving Story of a Mysterious Pioneer." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 6 Sept. 2010. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/7980477/Eadweard-Muybridge-the-moving-story-of-a-mysterious-pioneer.html>.

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens; A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1955.

Jenkins, Alice, and Juliet John. *Rereading Victorian Fiction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000.

Jo Elwyn Jones, and J. Francis. Gladstone. *The Alice Companion: a Guide to Lewis Carroll's Alice Books*. New York: New York UP, 1998.

Kane, Penny. *Victorian Families in Fact and Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1995.

Kline, A. S. "Voyage To Modernity: The Poetry of Charles Baudelaire." *Poetry in Translation*. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/VoyageToModernitypage.htm>.

Landow, George P. "Victorianism as a Fusion of Neoclassical and Romantic Ideas and Attitudes." *The Victorian Web*. Brown University. Web. 11 Apr. 2012. <http://www.victorianweb.org/vn/abrams1.html>.

Leach, Karoline. "'Lewis Carroll': A Myth in the Making." *Lenny's Alice in Wonderland Site*. Web. 11 Mar. 2012. http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/explain/alice803.html.

Lear, Edward. *Nonsense Books: A Book of Nonsense; Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets ; More Nonsense Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc. ; Laughable Lyrics* ... Boston: Roberts Bros., 1888.

Lear, Edward, and Lori M. Campbell. *The Complete Nonsense Books of Edward Lear*. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2008.

Lear, Edward, and Philip Sherrard. *Edward Lear, the Corfu Years: A Chronicle Presented through His Letters & Journals*. Athens: D. Harvey, 1988.

Lecercle, Jean-Jacques. *Philosophy of Nonsense: the Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Legman, G. *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography*. New Hyde Park, NY: University, 1964.

Levi, Peter. *Edward Lear: A Biography*. New York: Scribner, 1995.

Lowth, Robert. *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Delmar/N.Y.: Scholars, 1979.

Macbeth, John Walker Vilant. *The Might and Mirth of Literature: A Treatise on Figurative Language*. Sampson Low, 1876.

Malamud, Randy. "The Chronicle Review." *Eadweard Muybridge, Thief of Animal Souls*. Web. 01 Apr. 2012. http://chronicle.com/article/Eadweard-Muybridge-Thief-of/66024/ :

Mannoni, Laurent, and Richard Crangle. *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*. Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter, 2000.

McGann, Jerome John. *The Point Is to Change It: Poetry and Criticism in the Continuing Present*. Tuscaloosa (Ala.): University of Alabama, 2007.

Menninghaus, Winfried. *In Praise of Nonsense: Kant and Bluebeard*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999.

Miller, Edmund “Two Approaches to Edward Lear’s Nonsense Songs”, The Victorian Newsletter, 44 (Fall 1973).

Milner, Florence. "The Poems in Alice in Wonderland”, as Published in The Bookman XVIII, September 1903. <http://www.durrant.co.uk/alice/>.

Morris, Frankie, and John Tenniel. *Artist of Wonderland: The Life, Political Cartoons, and Illustrations of Tenniel*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2005.

Muybridge, Eadweard, Edward J. Nygren, and Frances Fralin. *Eadweard Muybridge: Extraordinary Motion*. Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986.

Muybridge, Eadweard, Philip Brookman, and Marta Braun. *Eadweard Muybridge in a Time of Change*. London: Tate Pub., 2010.

Noakes, Vivien. *Edward Lear: Life of a Wanderer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969. 127.

Nock, S. A. "Lacrimae Nugarum: Edward Lear of the Nonsense Verses." *The Sewanee Review, The Johns Hopkins University Press* Jan. - Mar., 1941 49.1 (1941): 68-81.

Ogden, C. K., I. A. Richards, Bronislaw Malinowski, F. G. Crookshank, and J. P. Postgate.*The Meaning of Meaning; a Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism,*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1946.

Otis, Laura. *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001.

Panshin, Alexei. "Falling Down a Rabbit Hole, 1." *The Abyss of Wonder*. 30 Nov. 1999. Web. 22 Apr. 2012. http://www.enter.net/~torve/articles/alice/falling1.htm

Parsons, Marnie. *Touch Monkeys: Nonsense Strategies for Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry.* Toronto: University of Toronto, 1994.

Phillips, Catherine. *Gerald Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.

Phillips, Robert S. *Aspects of Alice; Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen through the Critics' Looking-glasses, 1865-1971*. New York: Vanguard, 1971.

Prickett, Stephen. *Victorian Fantasy*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2005

Quinion, Michael. "Folderol." *World Wide Words*. 19 May 2010. Web. 12 Jan. 2012. http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-fol1.htm

Reynolds, Kimberley. *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*. Basingstoke u.a.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Sewell, Elizabeth. *The Field of Nonsense. Elizabeth Sewell.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1952.

Shires, Linda M. "Nonsense, Parody, and the Status of the Real: The Example of Carroll."*Victorian Poetry* Comic Verse 26.3 (Autumn 1988): 267-83. *JSTOR*. Web. <www.jstor.org/stable/40001965>

Simpson, Donald Penistan. Cassell's Latin Dictionary: Latin-English, English-Latin. London: Cassell, 1977.

Skoyles, John. "It May Sound Funny" *The Atlantic — News and Analysis on Politics, Business, Culture, Technology, National, International, and Life – TheAtlantic.com*. Web. 12 Jan. 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/12/it-may-sound-funny/5529/>

Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966.

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1975.

Stewart, Susan. *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Strachey, Sir Edward, Nonsense As a Fine Art, Littel's Living Age. Fifth Series, Volume LXIV, Oct-Nov-Dec 1888, pp. 515-531 (reprints from Quarterly Review, 167, 1888, pp. 335-65).

Sussman, Herbert L. *Victorians and the Machine; the Literary Response to Technology,*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1968.

Sweet, Matthew. *Inventing the Victorians*. New York: St. Martin's, 2001.

Tigges, Wim. *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988.

Tigges, Wim. *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987.

Victorian Web. < http://www.victorianweb.org/ >

Wagner-Lawlor, Jennifer A. *The Victorian Comic Spirit*. Aldershot [u.a.: Ashgate, 2000].

Wells, Carolyn. *A Nonsense Anthology*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911.

Weynants, Thomas. "Anamorphoses, The World of Hidden Images." *Early Visual Media*. SOFAM.BE, 2003. Web. July 2011. <http://www.visual-media.be/>

Wilgus, Jack and Beverly. "What Is a Camera Obscura?" *Bright Bytes Studio Home Page*. Web. 06 Mar. 2012. <http://brightbytes.com/cosite/what.html>

Yaguello, Marina. *Language through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics*. Oxford [U.K.]: Oxford UP, 1998.

Zipes, Jack. *Victorian Fairy Tales: the Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*. New York: Routledge, 1989

Images Cited

1. "Nonsense Botany (1871)." *Edward Lear, Nonsense Botany (1871)*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/ns/nb.html>

2. "Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets." *Edward Lear*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/ns/index.html>

3. "Jack and Beverly's Thaumatropes." *Bright Bytes Studio Home Page*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://brightbytes.com/collection/thaum.html>

4. "Edward Lear's Diaries." *Edward Lear's Diaries*. Web. 01 May 2012. <http://www.nonsenselit.org/diaries/>

5. "Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon010.html

6. "Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon010.html

7. "One Hundred Nonsense Pictures and Rhymes." *Edward Lear, More Nonsense Limericks*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/MN/mn030.html

8. "One Hundred Nonsense Pictures and Rhymes." *Edward Lear, More Nonsense Limericks*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/MN/mn030.html

9. "One Hundred Nonsense Pictures and Rhymes." *Edward Lear, More Nonsense Limericks*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/MN/mn030.html>

10. "Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon010.html

11. "Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense*." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense 61-70*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon070.html>

12. "Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon010.html

13. "Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon010.html

14. "Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense." *Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/BoN/bon010.html

15. "Queery Leary Nonsense: Introduction." *Edward Lear: Queery Leary Nonsense*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/QLN/introduction.html>

16. "MOMI - MOVING PICTURE TOYS." *Moving Picture Toys*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~s-herbert/phenak.htm>

17. "Eadweard Muybridge; Photogravure Company of New York; University of Pennsylvania -- Ostrich; Running; from 'Animal Locomotion. An Electro-Photographic Investigation of Consecutive Phases of Animal Movement 1872-1885' -- High Quality Art Prints, Canvases -- Royal Academy Prints." *Royal Academy Prints*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://www.royalacademyprints.com/image/776226/eadweard-muybridge-1830-1904-ostrich-running-from-animal-locomotion-an-electro-photographic-investigation-of-consecutive-phases-of-animal-movement-1872-1885>

18. http://www.peripatetic.us/classes/timebased09/timebased.html

19. "History of Art: History of Photography." *History of Art*. Web. 28 Apr. 2012. <http://www.all-art.org/20ct_photo/Muybridge1.htm>

20. "The Anti-Cinema of Eadweard Muybridge." - *Early American Cinema*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://early-american-cinema.com/articles/muybridge.html>

21. "Birds of a feather flock together" *Educational Technology Clearinghouse*. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/65300/65328/65328_friend-rebus.htm>