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**OF DODGSON AND CARROLL: AN INVESTIGATION ABOUT NONSENSE IN
*ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND***

PORTO ALEGRE

2018

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciado em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

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“Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”

Lewis Carroll

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

RESUMO

Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas (1865), livro publicado por Lewis Carroll (pseudônimo de Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) durante a Era Vitoriana (1837 - 1901) apresenta a história da menina Alice, que cai na toca do Coelho Branco e acaba chegando em um lugar muito estranho, o País das Maravilhas. Como a protagonista acorda, no final da história, podemos concluir que tudo se tratou de um sonho. Assim, o objetivo da presente monografia é compreender como funciona essa aventura onírica, e quais ligações ela tem com o conceito de Nonsense. Para realizar essa tarefa, viajaremos pelo universo ficcional do primeiro dos Livros de Alice de Carroll, que é marcado pela incoerência de um conjunto de elementos ilógicos. O trabalho se estrutura em duas partes. A primeira apresenta certas contextualizações sobre o autor, sobre a época, e sobre Nonsense. A segunda explora três cenas de *Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas*: “Pela Toca do Coelho”, “Uma Corrida em Comitê e Uma História Comprida” e “Um Chá Maluco”. Ao término do trabalho, serão apresentadas algumas conclusões sobre as perguntas que nortearam o trabalho: Qual o papel de Carroll na criação da Literatura Nonsense? Como se chegou ao Nonsense? Que desdobramentos foram provocados? Que relação existe entre esse tipo de fazer artístico e a época em que a obra se insere? Esta pesquisa é uma contribuição aos estudos acadêmicos realizados sobre a obra de Lewis Carroll.

Palavras-chave: Lewis Carroll; *Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas*; Nonsense; Literatura Vitoriana.

ABSTRACT

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) published by Lewis Carroll (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) during the Victorian era (1837 – 1901) presents the story of Alice, a little girl who falls into the White Rabbit's hole and ends up arriving in a very strange place, Wonderland. As the protagonist wakes up, at the end of the story, we can conclude that everything has been but a dream. Thus, the objective of this monograph is to understand how this oneiric adventure works, and what connections it has with the concept of Nonsense. To accomplish the task, we will travel through the fictional universe of Carroll's first Alice Book, which is marked by the incoherence of a set of illogical elements. The work is structured into two parts. The first presents certain contextualization about the author, the time, and about Nonsense. The second explores three scenes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "Down the Rabbit-Hole", "A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale", and "A Mad Tea Party". At the end of the monograph, some conclusions will be presented on the questions that guided the work: What is Carroll's role in the creation of Nonsense Literature? How did he get to Nonsense? What developments have been provoked there since? What is the relationship between this type of artistic work and the time in which it is inserted? This research is meant as a contribution to the academic studies carried out on the work of Lewis Carroll.

Keywords: Lewis Carroll; *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*; Nonsense; Victorian literature.

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INTRODUCTION

As a reader of Lewis Carroll's books since I was a child, I was overwhelmed by the plot, by the images, by the fun, but I missed so many referents that it became impossible to grasp the meaning of a great part of the story. I did not mind that, though, maybe because children are used to navigating in worlds where meaning is only partly open to them, maybe because I heard so often that Lewis Carroll's works do not make any sense, that they are "Nonsense Literature".

Then I grew up and entered a Letters Course. I started studying about British Culture and about Victorianism. I learned about English humor, English wit, and English understatement. Several new keys of understanding were given to me. My relation with Carroll improved one thousand times after I got that excellent companion, *The Annotated Alice*, which approximates readers from different places and times to referents that were easily at hand to Carroll and his Victorian readers, but not to Brazilian readers from the 21st century.

Slowly, I started to discriminate what belonged in the drawer of cultural gaps from what in Carroll was indeed peculiar and different from the other Victorian writers I had been reading. It was then that I got interested in Nonsense, and a new question was posed. Was it a mere coincidence that nonsense nursery rhymes, limericks, charades, were so popular in Victorian times? Or was that a symptom of something else? Everything seemed to have a cleavage to it, everything seemed to have a double, an inverted image, to it. This was perceptible even in the fact often people identified themselves through different names, as if they constantly had to move by wearing masks. Even my author, Lewis Carroll, was a pen name to another person, the respectable Rev. Charles Dodgson.

This is the course of preoccupations that led me, when the time came to decide about my undergraduate monograph, to settle on a research about the meaning of Nonsense in Literature. How does it work? To what extent is it meaningless? As a corpus, I chose *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In order to carry out the research, I divided the monograph in two sections. The first presents some pertinent information about Dodgson, the person, and Carroll, the author; introduces the genesis of the Alice Books; and

considers the concept of Nonsense, establishing possible connections with the Victorian background and framework. The second part focuses on three chapters from the book, “Down the Rabbit-Hole”, “A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale”, and “A Mad Tea Party”, examining the ways in which Nonsense is constructed, and the effects it provokes. Literary critics Jean-Jacques Lecercle (Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Paris Nanterre) and Wim Tigges (Professor of British Literature at the University of Leiden) will provide me the theoretical support, and quotes from Carroll’s book will support the connections made between Nonsense in Literature and Nonsense in Victorian society.

When I put myself in the role of a reader, and consider a word such as “Nonsense”, it occurs to me that readers work with *meaning*. Writers write in a language whose logic follows laws and systems, according to their time and discourses. Therefore, words are not stable or fixed in time, they vary according to different perceptions, because language is the product of difference. (BAKHTIN, 1929; BENVENISTE, 1966). In addition, in order to understand why Nonsense is non-sense, we must have in mind what does make sense in a determined context. We need to focus on what *sense* is. I mean, Nonsense comes from Sense, and sense is normally preestablished in organized societies and cultures by linguistic signs. Therefore, whatever Lewis Carroll is doing in his book, that is connected with the subversion of some pre-established code of order. The reason why the two chosen critics, Lecercle and Tigges, helped me during the research, is that they study Nonsense specifically in connection with Victorian Literature. Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s work *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* explores the reasons why we are so interested in things that do not make sense, especially when in live in societies that are extremely well-organized. With the help of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, Lecercle traces a panorama of the development of Nonsense as a construction that starts in England in the middle of the 19th Century, starting with Edward Lear and soon gathering strength with the works of Lewis Carroll. Lecercle’s point is that Nonsense makes sense, and I decided to pursue that hint in the investigation of the three selected chapters from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

Differently from Lecercle – who has no problems with referring to Nonsense as a literary genre, or sub-genre, – Tigges prefers to call it a “mode”, or a “device”. The different nomenclatures do not affect their contribution to this research, where both ways are well accepted. Tigges’ *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* offers a typology of literary

Nonsense basically designed from Victorian texts written by Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear¹. In both authors similar elements can be found, but in different proportions. Among them we have a play with numbers, letters and oneiric elements:

Perhaps the main distinction between the Carrollian type of nonsense and that of Lear is that in the former the elements of number and logic are more prominent, whereas the latter is more dreamlike and, if not necessarily night-marish, is more fantastic and occasionally grotesque. (TIGGES, 1988, p. 83)

By referring to the prominence of numbers and logic in Carroll's text, Tigges reminds us that our author, Lewis Carroll, is the literary persona, or pen name, of a man called Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (the /g/ not to be pronounced), an Anglican deacon who had literature and photography as his hobbies, and who was by profession a lecturer of Mathematics and Logics at Christ Church, in the University of Oxford, from 1855 to 1881.

Out of the several elements analyzed by Tigges, the most remarkable are the relations respecting cause and effect, time and space. One century after the presentation of Nonsense, Hans Robert Jauss would study the break of the reader's "horizons of expectation". By doing that, Jauss calls attention to the fact that – differently from what might seem – texts are not static, fixed things. They are discourse, and their meaning changes when exposed to different contexts. Jauss explains that "a literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period" So, reading is not an "autonomous, free and individual" experience, but a collection of mutual concepts fitting a period or society. (JAUSS, 1970, p. 8)

I write this monograph to readers like me, who feel that they sometimes lack the means of making sense out of Nonsense, on the anticipation that it may prove useful to my Brazilian fellow students of English literature, as gateway to the work of Lewis Carroll.

¹Edward Lear (1812-1888) is the creator of short five-line nonsense poems for children known as limericks. The rhyme scheme is usually AABBA. (Source of information: <http://www.dltk-holidays.com/patrick/m-limerick.htm>. Access on 17th June, 2018.)

1 THE CONTEXT: MAKING SENSE OUT OF NONSENSE

This first chapter is meant as a contextualization, that provides the reader with some keys for the analysis to the book that will be held in the second part of this monograph. The focus lies on the conflicting forces at work in Carroll's time and context, that seem to provoke a cleavage that makes things seem irregular, double or symmetrical. The first section, "About the Author", shows that Dodgson/Carroll feels the need to present himself with two separate identities, one for the person and professional, another for the artist. We meet a list of other 19th Century Victorian authors who also feel the need to do the same. Next we consider the conditions of production of the book, and the changes it underwent before being sent for publication.

In the second section, "About the Time", we briefly address one aspect of Victorianism, which is the constant presence of contradictory impulses. On the one hand, there is the strong grip of conservatism and morality; on the other, unprecedented progress and the rise of new movements and ideologies. In the light of this social picture, we imagine what kind of art might reproduce such turmoil, reaching the tryptic that involves Sense (the meaning), Non-Sense (without meaning), and Nonsense (literary device).

1.1 About the Author

1.1.1 Dodgson and Carroll

Lewis Carroll (1832 – 1898) is the pen name of Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. In fact, the Victorian Age is the time for pseudonyms. To name a few authors, we can mention in a bird's eye view: Acton Bell (Anne Brontë), Boz (Charles Dickens), Currer Bell (Charlotte Brontë), Edward Garrett (Isabella Fyvie Mayo), Elia (Charles Lamb), Ellis Bell (Emily Brontë), George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), Graham R. Thomson (Rosamund Watson), Henri Gordon (Clara Brinkerhoff), Henry Wade (Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher), Margery Hollis (Emma Elliott), Marguerite (Jessie Margaret King), Ouida

(Marie Louise de la Ramée), PisanusFraxi(Henry Spencer Ashbee), Q (Arthur Quiller-Couch), Rushworth Armitage (Rosamund Watson), Véra Tsaritsyn (Gertrude Elizabeth Blood), Walter (Henry Spencer Ashbee). It looks as if men and women alike have their reasons to keep their passion for literature separate from their social identity.

Abiding to this practice, in this work we will refer to the public person, the Victorian citizen, as Charles Dodgson, and to the author and artist as Lewis Carroll. Charles Ludwidge Dodgson was an ordained Anglican deacon, a mathematician, and a professor at Christ Church College in the University of Oxford. On a sunny summer day (July 4th, 1862) Dodgson, who was then thirty years old, went on a boat picnic trip down the River Thames along with his Oxford colleague the Reverend Robinson Duckworth, and the three daughters of Henry Liddell, the dean of Christ Church. The children were Lorina Charlotte (13 years old), Alice (10 years old), and Edith (8 years old). Alice asked him to tell them a story.²

If we take the first two names of Reverend Dodgson and translate them into Latin, we will come to Carolus (for Charles) and Ludovicus (for Lutwidge) changing them back to other versions of the names in English we come to “Lewis” (from Ludovicus) and “Carroll” (from Carolus). Like in Nonsense, if we pass through certain steps in the process, what seems to make no sense proves to have a hidden sense, a certain process.

Lewis Carroll, the author whose public persona is The Rev. Charles Dodgson, used his mathematical gifts to create art in different ways. He had an interest in puzzles, photography, drawing, and in the writing of fiction and poetry. If Edward Lear invented limericks, Carroll invented word ladders, an intricate kind of crossword puzzle, that works also as a two-player game. In his poems, he developed a technique for creating a new word from the junction of two previous existing words. This is known as a “portmanteau word”. Carroll wrote poetry since he was a child, and he published some poems before the Alice Books, that is perhaps why he was so familiar with literary techniques.

If Charles Dodgson lived with Oxford intellectuals, Lewis Carroll shared the company of artists. He profitted from his skill as a photographer to get near interesting people, and became friends with most of them. He was closely connected with the Pre-Raphaelites, and shared their agenda of mixing romantic and realistic traits in their close observation of nature. The Pre-Raphaelites blend paintings and words, ballads, lyric and

²Except when expressly specified, the factual data and information referred to in this section comes from the extensive notes presented by Martin Gardner in the Norton edition of *The Annotated Alice*. (GARDNER, 2000)

dramatic monologue. These avant-garde artists can be considered precursors of modern art. And Lewis Carroll was very close to them. He photographed Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, William Morris and their whole families, including Lizzie Siddall, Jane Burden Morris, Christina Rossetti. The famous actress Ellen Terry and laureate poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson also sat to be photographed by Carroll.

Photography was a new, complicated and expensive art when Lewis Carroll took to it, in 1856. He eventually grew to have his own studio, where he used a process of development known as “wet collodion”, using cellulose nitrate, ether and alcohol. His portfolio reaches more than three thousand photographs, and encompasses landscapes, people and objects.

It is possible that the inspiration for the Dormouse, a character in “The Mad Tea Party”, came from Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s pet made famous in the illustrated poem “The Wombat”. According to Ford Madox Brown, another Pre-Raphaelite artist,

The beast that made the greatest impression, at least on Madox Brown, was the singularly inactive marsupial known as the wombat – an animal that seems to have exercised a latent fascination on the Rossettian mind. On high days and holiday banquets it occupied a place of honour on the *épergne* in the centre of the table, where, with imperturbable equanimity, it would remain dormant. On one occasion, however, it belied its character. Descending unobserved, during a heated post-prandial discussion, it proceeded in leisurely fashion to devour the entire contents of a valuable box of cigars, achieving that feat just in time for the exhaustion of the subject under consideration and consequent attention to things mundane.

If Madox Brown may be believed, the wombat of Rossetti was the prototype of the dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland*, the author of which beloved work was a frequent visitor of Rossetti’s household at Chelsea. The ‘Alice’ Books exercised an even greater fascination over Rossetti and for that matter over Madox Brown than the historic wombat had done. (BROWN II, 2018 [1896], digital source)

1.1.2 The Alice Books

The entry in Lewis Carroll’s diary of November 13th, 1862 tells us that the story that had been told to the Liddell sisters during the boat trip held on the River Thames was about to take a written form. It took Carroll one year to write out the complete manuscript called *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, which was designed as a Christmas present for Alice Liddell. The original manuscript, which is displayed at the British Library as MS

46700, is totally illustrated by Carroll, and bears a photograph of Alice Liddell taken by him, one of the many he has taken of the Liddell children.

More than half of Carroll's photographs show children, mostly girls, posing in attitudes considered perfectly appropriate in Victorian times, but that may be considered abusive to our present-day views. This discussion is out of the scope our research, except for this comment, made in the light of our study of Nonsense: so much depends on the discourse of each age, on the eye of the beholder. We will never know to what extent our view is malicious, or their taste was depraved. One thing we can affirm, though: the sensuality that reeks from those images attests to the repression of sexuality, and relates to the tension involving sense, and non sense, that is explored in Nonsense.

Carroll's 37 drawings in *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* show his perception of Wonderland.³ Rabbits were first designed as normal animals, and then he set his imagination loose and drew a well-dressed white rabbit walking on two legs. Carroll was a perfectionist, so there are no mistakes or scratches in the manuscript.

Two years later, in 1865, when Carroll decided to publish his work, he adopted the famous pseudonym, so as to preserve his image from any possible drawback, as he was a famous lecturer, and a deacon. He had used the same pen name previously, when he published the poem "Solitude", in 1853.

When the project of publication took form, Carroll, aware of his role as a writer, decided to make some changes in the book, starting with the title, which was first altered into *Alice's Hour in Elfland*. Then, on June 18th, 1864, he finally decided upon *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The writer preferred "Wonderland" to "Under Ground" because the diction is simpler. On July 4th, 1865, exactly three years after the trip down the river, Alice Liddell received the first presentation copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. (COLLINGWOOD, 2004) In this new version, the animals received anthropomorphic features. A new chapter was added, "A Mad Tea Party" and the Caucus-Race was included.

However beautiful we may find Carroll's illustrations to the original manuscript, the fact is that his sharp eye prevented him from being satisfied with his own drawings. He was an enthusiast of photography and art, and perhaps his appreciation of beauty and aesthetics made him look for a professional artist.

³To see the text illustrated by Carroll, go to <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/alices-adventures-under-ground-the-original-manuscript-version-of-alices-adventures-in-wonderland>> Accessed on: June 17th, 2018.

The illustrating of the manuscript book gave him some trouble. He had to borrow a *Natural History* from the Deanery to learn the correct shapes of some of the strange animals with which Alice conversed; the Mock Turtle he must have evolved out of his inner consciousness, for it is, I think, a species unknown to naturalists. (COLLINGWOOD, 2004, p. 93)

Carroll secured the services of Sir John Tenniel, who created 42 illustrations for the book. I assume that Carroll hired Tenniel because he was a political cartoonist at *Punch*, a British weekly magazine of humor and satire established in 1841.

Tenniel's illustrations in the Alice books are important for the stories and for the construction of one's reading of the stories, especially in the passages in which the reader has to deal with Nonsense. Each one of the drawings has been approved by Carroll, by Tenniel and by the editors. When the book was released, its text was formed by Carroll's words *and* by Tenniel's images. They formed a unique body, where both words and images were to be considered by the reader, in his effort to come to terms with sense, non sense, and Nonsense.

Six years later, in 1875, Carroll and Tenniel repeated their partnership in yet another Alice adventure: *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. This time, the reversal in meaning is represented through the image of a mirror. Like in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, here we also have the alteration of prose with poetry, of language with mathematics, to represent the reversal of reality and imagination. *Through the Looking-Glass* includes two of the most celebrated Nonsense poems in English, "Jabberwocky" and "The Walrus and the Carpenter". The Alice Books seem to challenge reality by threatening the laws of logic, language, and social conventions. This kind of text demands a pro-active reader, who accepts the task of restoring some order into a chaotic context so as to make sense out of Nonsense. Time and space, both in Wonderland and in the other side of the mirror, do not work as we know. Basic mathematics, such as addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication tables change. So do syntax, phonetics, and semantics of the English language. They are subverted.

1.2 About the Time

1.2.1 Victorianism

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was written in a time when England was not ruled by a king, but by a queen. The same as in Wonderland. During the reign of Queen Victoria (1837 – 1901), the British Empire expanded over territories in America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. In 1850, England was the most important country in the world, and the richest, because of Colonialism. The development and subsequent phases of the Industrial Revolution supported the development of the market and economic flourishing. That was a period of unusual economic prosperity and optimism as a nation, in a time when new social classes were created – the working classes. Seen from within, however, the reality of certain layers of the population was not as sunny as the political image broadcasted suggested. The first paragraph of Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* well reflects this state of social ambivalence:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

In this sense, similarly to Wonderland, the time in which Carroll lived was divided. On the one hand, such order and discipline was required, that the things that were repressed either would explode in unexpected fits of violence – such as what we have in the episodes involving the attacks held in White chapel attributed to Jack the Ripper, or would sneak into weird behavior and representations, as in the aforementioned photographs taken by Carroll. This dichotomy also accounts for the huge number of literary doubles that we find in Victorian Literature, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre, to name only two cases.

The Victorian Age is a time of contrasts, with the misery of homeless people living in the dark streets of a polluted London, and the luxurious castles and manor houses of the upper-classes.

Because of the huge growth in population, the number of inhabitants in England went from 14 million to 32 million. (Cf. BANKS, 1968) Houses were put down to open space for Georgian buildings. Industry and technology changed the form of the city, which became one of the first cosmopolitan capitals in the world. The rise of the factory system resulted in long working hours, in some cases with child labor, low wages and poor

housing conditions. The urban agglomeration brought new kinds of infectious diseases and premature death. Mortality data reveals that almost one child in five born alive died before the age of five because of the polluted water. (Idem)

Anticlericalism arose from the free thought derived from the Enlightenment. The anticlerical movement goes against the influence of the church in secular or public spheres. New scientific discoveries, especially in field of physics, experimental medicine, Darwin's evolutionism, and the strong ruptures of literary expression started to change traditional changed worldviews. Things were changing so fast that the Victorian citizens faced difficulties to adapt that remind us of Alice's need to improvise in Wonderland so as to solve the tests that are imposed on her.

Victorian moral codes were based on prudery and decorum. Some etiquette books were very popular during the Victorian era, such as Charles Day's *Hint on Etiquette and the Usages of Society: With a Glance at Bad Habits* (1834). That is a manual of good manners for ladies and gentleman, which prescribes how people should behave, make friends, or throw parties, for example. In addition, the Victorian educational system was very strict, and focused on conducting strong regimentation methods since childhood. Young students had to memorize and recite poems by using some precise techniques. Physical punishment was adopted, and bullying was accepted as a means to introducing children into the toughness of social life. I believe we can say that there is an element of satire in Carroll's Alice Books. According to Ogborn and Buckroyd, "Because the satirist's intention is to expose human folly and weakness, the writer takes a subject from what is happening in the world around, thus creating an intimate connection between content and context". (OGBORN; BUCKROYD, 2001, p. 25)

1.2.2 Nonsense

Our first reaction, when we listen to the word "Nonsense", is to think of it as the opposite of the word "Sense", because we consider the junction of the Latin prefix *non-* which means "not, lack of" and the noun *sense*, a synonym for "meaning". Then, then *nonsense* should mean "no meaning". Popularly, we say that something is nonsense when it makes no sense, referring to something said or written that seems stupid or silly; a text that does not make sense because it does not mean anything. When Alice reaches Wonderland, she expects things to happen there as they do in her world, and is often

disappointed. Her surprise is not restricted to people's speech or behavior. The rules of physics and her relation with time and space are also different.

In *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, Wim Tigges defines Nonsense as literary mode with a definite thematic and that has some recurrent structural characteristics.

I would define nonsense, then, as a genre of narrative literature which balances a multiplicity of meaning with a simultaneous absence of meaning. This balance is affected by playing with the rules of language, logic, prosody and representation, or a combination of these. In order to be successful, nonsense must at the same time invite the reader to interpretation and avoid the suggestion that there is a deeper meaning which can be obtained by considering connotations of associations, because they lead to nothing. (TIGGES, 1987, p. 27)

This definition differs from the popular impression that Nonsense is that which does not make sense. To Tigges, Nonsense represents a hidden meaning that subverts or deconstructs an apparent meaning or expectation. Whenever Alice is disappointed because events do not develop according to her anticipations, she tries another course of action and eventually gets a satisfactory result.

Nonsense is not a Victorian invention. In *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (1988), Tigges traces instances of the kind back into classical times. In ancient Rome it was used in order to entertain the public during the festivities of the Saturnalia. In the Renaissance, Nonsense was found in street plays, and as a rhetoric tool of Court Jesters, especially during the Feast of the Fools⁴. Jesters had to sing songs, and tell stories. Many of them displayed special abilities, such as acrobatics, juggling, telling jokes, and doing magic tricks.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that Nonsense always existed, the enthusiastic way in which Victorians reacted to it is something to be considered. The two masters of Nonsense in the 19th Century are Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll.

The term Nonsense first appeared in Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense*, published in 1846. Lear (1812 - 1888) was an English illustrator, musician, and poet. His book collects Nonsense poems and limericks, and also includes selections from several 19th-century anthologies. John Lehman, in *Edward Lear and His Work*, says:

⁴Feast of Fools, a popular festival during the Middle Ages, held on or about January 1, particularly in France, in which a mock bishop or pope was elected, with ecclesiastical ritual was parodied, and low and high officials changed places. Such festivals were probably a Christian adaptation of the pagan festivities of the Saturnalia.

One of the most interesting unanswered questions of literary history is whether Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll read one another's works or were in any way influenced by one another. There is no mention of either in the other's diaries or letters, as far as we have them. (LEHMAN, 1977, p. 50)

Jean-Jacques Lecercle explores the techniques used by Lear and Carroll to produce Victorian Nonsense, and concludes that they achieve their objectives by subverting the linguistic and pragmatic aspects of the text. Lecercle creates categories and subdivides the semantic incoherencies and logical paradoxes into phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Therefore, nonsense is not only "concerned with language, but also functions as metalanguage." (LECERCLE, 1994, p. 35)

Both Lecercle and Tigges investigate the techniques and devices that create a sensation of lack of meaning, such as neologism, reversals and inversions, imprecision, simultaneity, picture and text incongruity, arbitrariness, repetition, negativity, mirroring, and misappropriation. Nonsense literature is language chaos – it is a way of breaking the limits of language and reality, while still representing the reflex of them, because Nonsense still deals with signified and signifier. Nonsense not only focuses on non-sense, it also looks for meaning and imaginary. This means that nonsense reality is set by verbal language, so language is connected to reality. (TIGGES, 1988) Therefore, something can only make sense if we understand the meaning of the text in history, since language is not fixed, and does not have a single meaning.

In order to make sense out of Nonsense, we start from the understanding of what sense is. Semantics, the linguistic and philosophical study of meaning, focuses on the relationship between signifiers – words, signs, symbols and phrases – and their denotation. Semantics deals with philosophy, society, and politics. We will now briefly examine what three theorists have to say about this question: Bréal, Benveniste, and Bakhtin.

Michel Bréal, in his *Essai de Sémantique* (1897), argues that linguistics is a human and historical science that deals with the logical laws and the relations of language transformations from the human work with the language. This means that language can only be understood through its historical transformations. The center of linguistic temporality and subjectivity is the present, as it can only be a reference for discourse. Thus, the past and the future are simulations given by the present. The past is not the same as seen today. It has different meanings if taken from different temporal instances. The

historical moment re-signifies the discourses, it is in this instance that the signifiers acquire meaning.

Émile Benveniste, in *Problems in General Linguistics* (1966), says that discourse does not obey an axis of successiveness, because there is no instability, as signifiers change. Language is structure, culture, philosophy. Benveniste means that the subjectivity of each language depends on its structure and culture. Therefore, the nonsense in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* must be read in the context of what makes sense in the English language and culture in nineteenth-century Britain.

Furthermore, language is subjective because it talks about the human condition: reasoning and emotion. Language carries the speaker's ideologies, so it also attests to the perspectives of the individual and his/her beliefs. In order to understand a Nonsense text, we must comprehend its historical background because writers write from their perspective within society. I mean, Nonsense texts are full of subjectivity because they deal with discourse, history, and the imaginary. Making sense out of a Nonsense text is only possible if we understand its referents and signifiers.

The early works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and his Circle were strongly influenced by the sociological/Marxist strand present in language studies in the twentieth century in Russia. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929), Bakhtin and Voloshinov argue that language cannot be studied separately from history, as it is not homogeneous. Language varies, and also serves different interests. Because of that, linguistic signs are polysemic because they are inscribed in a symbolic order that is historical. A sign is ideological: it reflects and refracts reality.

Thus, linguistic signs only have value within an organized society, and not only in language. The value of the words comes from the transference of one signifier to another signifier. The concepts of language can explain the questions of consciousness from a historical and social perspective, because they deal with the values that words acquire in different historical contexts. To understand the meaning of words, they must be seen from their social and historical contexts. To illustrate this, The Caterpillar, in the chapter "Advice from a Caterpillar", asks Alice:

'Who are *you*?' said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.'

‘What do you mean by that?’ said the Caterpillar sternly. ‘Explain yourself!’

‘I can’t explain *myself*, I’m afraid, sir’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see.’

‘I don’t see,’ said the Caterpillar.

‘I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,’ Alice replied very politely, ‘for I can’t understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.’

‘It isn’t,’ said the Caterpillar.

‘Well, perhaps you haven’t found it so yet,’ said Alice; ‘but when you have to turn into a chrysalis—you will some day, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you’ll feel it a little queer, won’t you?’

‘Not a bit,’ said the Caterpillar.

‘Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,’ said Alice; ‘all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*.’

‘You!’ said the Caterpillar contemptuously. ‘Who are *you*?’

Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation. Alice felt a little irritated at the Caterpillar’s making such *very* short remarks, and she drew herself up and said, very gravely, ‘I think, you ought to tell me who *you* are, first.’ (CARROLL, 2002, p. 45 - 46)

The expression “Who are you?”, from the 21st-century perspective, is a common question used for getting to know someone. However, “Who are you?” (emphasis on the first and last words) was a popular expression in London. According to Gardner (2000), it refers to an expression that was all rage in Victorian Britain and was recorded by Charles Mackay in *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1841):

Mackay tells of various catch phrases which sprang up suddenly in London. One such phrase was “Who are you,” spoken with emphasis on the first and last words. It appeared suddenly, “like a mushroom....one day it was unheard, unknown, uninvented; the next day it pervaded London... Every new comer into an alehouse tap room was asked unceremoniously ‘Who are you?’”

In “Who Are You: A Reply” (Jabberwocky, Winter/Spring 1990), John Clark points out that Carroll owned Mackay’s book and probably heard the question shouted at him when it was a short-lived London rage. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 46)

This question was uttered quickly, and it was used to almost every situation. With a sharp sound upon the first and last words, it was asked when people did not like a plain answer. Thus, “Who are you?” was asked in order to offend, to expose ignorance or to laugh. If a man entered a room, for instance, everyone asked him “Who are you?”. If he gave a foolish answer or scratched his head, people mocked him. I refer to this episode to illustrate the fact that we can only perceive Nonsense if we are aware of the context.

However, Nonsense does more than subvert language conventions. Lecerle says that Nonsense texts do have meanings, that they are reflective poetry with a critical purpose. Lecerle also argues that nonsense uses a conservative-revolutionary language because the genre has rigid grammar rules, but is nonetheless canonical:

I am struck by the fact that nonsense is on the whole a conservative revolutionary genre. It is conservative because deeply respectful of authority in all its forms: rules of grammar, maxims of conversation and politeness, the authority of the canonical author of the parodied text (LECERCLE, 1994, p. 2)

We can conclude that Nonsense is a bizarre way of making sense. There is as much sense in Nonsense as there is Nonsense in sense. Edward Lear describes nonsense as something happy and inconsequent, like the air that comes from his nose. Lear seems to feel that, in a time of excessive order and pressure, people seriously need to have fun and to play.

According to Noel Malcolm, Nonsense is “the manifestation of the folk’s spirit drive to anarchy and excess” (MALCOLM, 1997, p. 110). Nonsense can be also taken as a reflex of – and a reaction against – people’s anxiety, fatigue, doubt and rigidity in that time of change.

2 ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

This chapter investigates how Nonsense is built in Lewis Carroll's story, which can be taken as the reflex of Alice's dream and in the historical context of the Victorian era. The discussion focuses on three chosen chapters of the book. The first is "Down the Rabbit-Hole", in which the dream frames and the fantastic elements are analyzed. The second is "Caucus-Race and a Long Tale", which is divided into two parts: in the first we consider Nonsense as criticism of the English political system, and in the second, "A Mouse tail or a Mouse tale?" we relate Nonsense to concrete poetry. And then we go to the seventh chapter, "A Mad Tea Party", to concentrate on three topics: (a) Nonsense as a satire of Victorian etiquette; (b) the Mad Hatter's riddle; and (c) a reflection on 19th century industry.

2.1 "Down the Rabbit-Hole"

Lewis Carroll begins the chapter "Down the Rabbit-Hole" by using Alice's name. In *The Annotated Alice* (2000), Gardner says that Carroll may have intended to begin the story by the word "Alice" in reference to his "dream child". Once Alice falls in Wonderland, the reality that surrounds her is questioned by non-sense situations. Wonderland presents her with creatures that seem half animal, half human, with order and chaos, where Victorian decorum is continually violated. Based on that, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* relates to the concept of the Fantastic proposed by Tzvetan Todorov.

According to Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), the concept of the fantastic is defined in relation to what is real and imaginary. In Literature, there are some scenes that cannot be explained in a rational way. For example, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, The White Rabbit talks. This would not happen in our world. Alice, however, does not find it strange that the White Rabbit talks. What she finds amazing is the fact that he has a watch. Strange as they may seem, such facts are

normally taken when we think of hallucinations or dreams whether it has really happened even considering the natural laws. The Fantastic allows a space for different readings: things can be taken for granted and accepted at face value (Alice fell into a hole and ended up in a world that has different mechanisms from ours); or dismissed as impossible (Alice is just dreaming); or both. Todorov refers to “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural even” (TODOROV, 1975, p. 25). Therefore, the fantastic requires three conditions in which the reader takes an active role: 1) situated at the verbal aspect of the text, the reader must consider the world of the book as a world of people and she or he must hesitate between the natural and supernatural; 2) considering syntactic and semantic aspects, the hesitation is also experienced by a character; 3) the reader cannot see the fantastic as allegorical interpretation:

At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous. (TODOROV, 1975, p. 41)

For that reason, we understand that Lewis Carroll's illogical world is real in the fictional world he created. In Wonderland, animals act like humans because they belong to a fantastic world which does not follow the natural laws. The Fantastic is a genre that implies a mysterious event provoking a hesitation in the reader and the character. Therefore, the Fantastic seems to be situated on the frontier of two other genres which could evaporate any moment: the uncanny and the marvelous. The fantastic lasts no longer than the time of this hesitation: common hesitancy for the reader and the character, who must decide whether what they perceive comes from reality. At the end of the story, the reader, if the character has not done so, has two decisions to make: 1) if he decides the laws of reality are intact and they could be understood, for example, as a dream, the literary work can be read as uncanny; 2) on the other hand, if he decides that the laws of nature cannot be explained and it would be necessary to admit new laws, the text enters into the genre of marvelous.

The Uncanny is defined by Sigmund Freud (1919) as the psychological experience of something familiar but supernatural in a certain way. He states it as the return of the

repressed, so it works as a trigger of something familiar recurring as unfamiliar: “The uncanny is that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (FREUD, 1919, p. 1-2). So, the uncanny establishes in the mind that has been something strange in a familiar and old situation, and this is only possible due to the process of repression. The psychoanalyst argues about the relationship between reality and fantasy, so it is natural for people to understand it and what is unusual, so this unfamiliar situation triggers an emotional effect which is transformed into morbid anxiety. Maybe this is one of the reasons why many readers, especially children, feel uncomfortable and scared when they read *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* for the first time.

According to the psychoanalyst, the uncanny is related to the subject of aesthetics, although in this case aesthetics is understood as the theory of beauty, it represents the qualities of feeling. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, strangeness and the reversal of order evoke a sense of the uncanny because everything is possible, since nothing makes sense. Also, the Fantastic aspect is emphasized by Nonsense because, in Wonderland, nothing is what it is, because everything is what it is not: animals can talk but they sometimes do not make sense.

Wonderland has some characters that behave and act like human beings, however, they are represented by humanlike animals. Although Carroll uses anthropomorphism in order to evoke the uncanny, Alice does not experience it when she meets the White Rabbit. Thus, Wonderland is set in a Nonsense setting; nonetheless, anthropomorphism throughout the book does not cause any effect upon Alice.

This fact can be evident because of the structure of the book. According to Nielsen (2015), the world of Wonderland is a dream frame “in which the opening and closing frames are situated in Alice’s real world, while the dream takes place in Wonderland and Looking-Glass worlds.” (NIELSEN, 2015, p. 23) In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the first frame opens when Alice, in Victorian England, the real world, is sitting down by a tree on a riverbank on a summer day and “[...] the hot day made her feel very sleepy” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 7). Suddenly, she sees a White Rabbit in a waistcoat and with a pocket watch running really fast by her and muttering that he shall be late, and then he jumps down a hole which Alice follows. However, Alice does not seem to be surprised to see a White Rabbit acting like a man. She does not only think there is nothing very remarkable in that scene, but she also considers that quite natural - Alice thinks it is normal

that a rabbit talks and dress like a human, however, she does not accept the fact that he has a watch. The uncanny effect of having an animal talking is broken by Nonsense:

There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but, when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and, burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 11)

This scene is the opening of the second frame which represents the dream. It is interesting to notice that the Nonsense effect starts in this frame because Alice does not feel surprised with a talking white rabbit wearing clothes, so it triggers the uncanny as a sense about what is supposed to be real or symbolic. Although the frame is not clearly drawn between the real world (Alice being awake) and the dream world (Alice falling asleep) because the first frame, which is the reality, never closed. (NIELSEN, 2011, p. 25) Actually, Carroll uses the White Rabbit, instead of the dream, to open the fantastical frame of Wonderland.

The plunge into the White Rabbit's hole represents a plunge into the oneiric world. Alice's dream ends up gaining perfect images to which they were a world fully formed by her conscious and mainly her unconscious. The slow fall alludes to the dream process that begins with Alice's idle daydreaming and ends up when she lands in Wonderland – the imaginary world.

While Alice is falling down the rabbit-hole, the well is so deep that she falls very slowly, as "she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her, and to wonder what was going to happen next." (CARROLL, 2000, p. 12) In this scene, Alice faces a different notion of time, space, and velocity for the first time: Wonderland is a place where the laws of physics cannot be applied. The fall seems unreal with the knowledge that Alice and the reader have of gravity because everything in Wonderland is non-sense. Alice falls at speed and acceleration not allowed by the laws of logic as she falls so slowly that she has plenty of time to observe her surroundings. Lewis Carroll presents the lawless nature of Alice's book through inversions of logic. He, as a logician, knew that Alice could not look at the sides of the well or even take "down a jar from one of the shelves as she passed"

(CARROLL, 2000, p. 12). In the Victorian era, due to the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment, scientists questioned what would happen in case someone or something fell down the center of the earth. As stated by Galileo (*Dialogo dei Massimi Sistemi, Giornata Seconda*, Florence edition of 1842, Vol. 1, pages 251-52),

The object would fall with increasing speed but decreasing acceleration until it reached the center of the earth, at which spot its acceleration would be zero. Thereafter it would slow down in speed, with increasing deceleration, until it reached the opening at the other end. Then it would fall back again. By ignoring air resistance and the coriolis force resulting from the earth's rotation (unless the hole ran from pole to pole), the object would oscillate back and forth forever. Air resistance of course would eventually bring it to rest at the earth's center. (GARDNER, 2000, p 13)

Carroll is a man of his time. As a Victorian, and a professor of Logic at Oxford, he is aware of the discussions of the moment. So, he seems to play with Galileo's ideas because Alice falls at the same velocity and acceleration as the jar:

She took down a jar from one of the shelves as she passed; it was labelled 'ORANGE MARMALADE', but to her great disappointment it was empty: she did not like to drop the jar for fear of killing somebody, so managed to put it into one of the cupboards as she fell past it. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 13)⁵

Through the slow fall, Carroll slowly introduces the reader to a world where all expectations are questioned: the world of Nonsense. Rabkin (1979) says that "the fantastic is fantastic, then, not by virtue of simply violating some rules we have picked up in the real world, but by virtue of reversing the ground rules we are following at any given moment of reading." (RABKIN, 1979, p. 20)

Alice is now operating on the level of her subconscious, she does not let her conscious go, she tries to find logic in her own way. Therefore Alice, herself a Victorian girl who probably has been having a rigid regimentation at home and school, is self-conscious and knows some basic rules from geography and physics. In the Victorian period after the Industrial Revolution and the increase in population, the British government began to invest in education as the belief of progress. At the time, schools had a harsh regimentation in which children had some memorizing techniques as a learning process such as repetition to help students learn the names and dates of kings and queens, or

⁵Gardner also informs us that "Orange Marmalade" is a funny way to refer to King William III of England (1689-1702) who was also William of Orange (GARDNER, 2000, p. 12)

reciting poems. In the beginning, Victorian education had the 3Rs or 4Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic, and most schools also had religion. Afterwards, some governmental investments were implemented gradually, so science, history, and languages were added to the school curricula. Alice is aware that she is falling beyond what would be possible according to what she has studied:

Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end? "I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?" she said aloud. "I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think—" (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the school-room, and though this was not a very good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over) "—yes, that's about the right distance—but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?" (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.) (CARROLL, 2000 p. 13)

The fall is so deep that as Alice fell, she started thinking about her cat, Dinah⁶, and how she missed the pet. Then Alice felt she was falling asleep and then she dreamed that she was holding hands with Dinah, “when suddenly, thump! thump! down she came upon a heap of sticks and dry leaves, and the fall was over.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 14) This is the only evidence of the dream frame. Thus, the narrator does not give any hint that Wonderland is just a dream until Alice awakens from it:

Wake up, Alice dear!’ said her sister; ‘Why, what a long sleep you’ve had!’
‘Oh, I’ve had such a curious dream!’ said Alice, and she told her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers that you have just been reading about; and when she had finished, her sister kissed her, and said, ‘It *was* a curious dream, dear, certainly: but now run in to your tea; it’s getting late.’ So Alice got up and ran off, thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 122)

Finally, after a long fall, Alice arrives in Wonderland, a world which follows an inverse logic. This is the beginning of the third frame. She hears the Rabbit saying, “Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 14), but she is not able to catch up with him. Alice escapes from the Victorian world because she might feel unfulfilled, so in her dream, she goes to a place where she tries to fill her deepest wishes as a child. However, she discovers that Wonderland does not fulfill any of her wishes because this place, through Nonsense situations, thwarts her expectations. In the beginning, the

⁶ Dinah was one of the Liddell family's cats. (GARNER, 2002, p. 15)

White Rabbit can be seen as a frustrated desire that she never reaches – the Rabbit is what motivates Alice to go to Wonderland. However, the animal constantly stays one step ahead of her. Because of that, Alice is driven by her curiosity and her desire to fulfill her wishes. She believes that catching the White Rabbit will give her answers and some sort of satisfaction.

Alice winds up in a very long hall with locked doors all around. Then, she sees a golden key on a little three-legged table. Lewis Carroll uses a golden key as a reference of Victorian poetry because those objects were very common in poems which represented something magical that unlocked mysterious doors, for instance, the fantasy tale “The Golden Key” by George MacDonald. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 15) Alice gets the tiny key and unlocks and opens the door, but it was too small for her to pass through. Then, the little girl sees through the door and can spot the loveliest garden she has ever seen. The beautiful place represents the dream of what she wishes to achieve. Unlike the world above ground, Alice is able to fulfill her imagination in Wonderland: she imagines shutting up like a telescope, “For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 15) However, her expectations are frustrated because nothing happens. So, hoping to find another key, she goes back to the table and found a little bottle with the words “drink me”. Alice knows that it is wrong to drink from suspicious bottles because she has read about that in “several nice stories” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 16) in which bad things happen to children who did not behave well or who failed to remember about the simplest rules of common sense. She is aware of the danger in drinking from that bottle. However, as she has not seen the word “poison” written on the bottle, she chooses to forget about all those tales and she disobeys all the rules. Then, Alice has a curious feeling because she is now only ten inches high, so, due to the fact she was small, she could not take the golden key in the table anymore. Alice has accomplished her wish to become a telescope but feels that she was punished because she has broken a rule. In this scene, Carroll refers to Victorian ages, which had a low tolerance to sinners who deserved to be punished. Alice cries and as a Victorian girl scolds herself:

‘Come, there’s no use in crying like that!’ said Alice to herself, rather sharply; ‘I advise you to leave off this minute!’ She generally gave herself very good advice, (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was

playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people. 'But it's no use now,' thought poor Alice, 'to pretend to be two people! Why, there's hardly enough of me left to make one respectable person!' (CARROLL, 2000, p. 17- 18)

In this monologue, Alice reveals that sometimes she pretends to have two identities. There are two important elements in this scene about Alice's personality: 1) She seems to be very conscious of herself – she knows when she disobeys and scolds herself. 2) The other self behaves without applying rules. Alice understands her two identities in Wonderland as a possible explanation for why everything is going so non-sense there. Therefore, she tries to figure out who she is by determining what she knows and what she remembers from her world. Also, it is important to mention that both Alice and Carroll have two selves: Alice, on the surface, is a gentle Victorian girl who follows those strict manner codes; on another level, she is a child without codes. Carroll is an artist and a writer who can make Nonsense texts and break the logic of all those Victorian manners; but he also Rev. Dodgson, a Victorian teacher of Logic who has to follow the rules of society and the laws of mathematics. Moreover, Dodgson suffered from migraine, which causes a severe headache that is often accompanied by distortions involving the perception of light, sound, or smells. This kind of migraine is known as “The Alice in Wonderland Syndrome”. (Cf. CINBIS & AYSUN, 1992), a disorienting neuropsychological condition that affects perception creating micropsia, macropsia, pelopsia, teleopsia, and size distortion. In his diary, Dodgson writes that he “experienced, for the second time, that odd optical affection of seeing moving fortifications, followed by a head-ache.” (CARROLL, 2004, Digital source) It might be possible that Carroll used his own migraine experience as inspiration for the “drink me” bottles and “eat me” cakes as they can change Alice's size – and personality.

In conclusion, the reader sees Wonderland as a world at the same time similar and very different from reality. Firstly, it seems to be a non-sensical and an incoherent place, where there are no tracks of manners, rules, time or space. However, many elements of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* reflect aspects of Lewis Carroll's time, the Victorian age – the real world.

According to Todorov (1975), poems can only be made from other poems, because Literature is created from Literature, not from reality, so this means that every literary work is conventional. Additionally, a writer can only write based on his previous

experience in literature, since everything new in Literature is, actually, old material that has been forged. Moreover, Freud says that the author is responsible for evoking the uncanny through sensations that can be created by using fictional aspects, such as the restrictions of real life. Thus, in the interest to reach the uncanny effect, the writer must construct the setting of the book based on the real world in order to provoke the feeling of the uncanny, so both readers and fictional characters would react as they would react in real life. (FREUD, 1919, p. 15-20) As stated by Freud, the effect of the uncanny is only possible if the literature is based on the “reality testing principle”. In this sense, Lewis Carroll’s Nonsense is not merely random and pointless as it can seem to a child who reads the Alice books.

In the case of Carroll’s books we are dealing with a Nonsense written especially for British reader of the nineteenth century, so no joke makes sense or is funny unless we understand the historical and social point of it. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 7) Furthermore, some of Carroll’s jokes “could be understood only by residents of Oxford, and other jokes, still more private, could be understood only by the lovely daughters of Dean Liddell.” (GARDNER, 2000, p. 7) In order to decodify Carroll's Nonsense, it is crucial that the British society, the most important people of the era, the author, and Alice Liddell be studied. I mean, we only make sense out of Nonsense if it is connected to reality.

2.2 “A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale”

In the third chapter, “A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale”, Alice meets a group of wet animals assembling on a bank and wondering how they will get dry. They are in a bad mood, upset and unwell. Those are also human characteristics concerning feelings, it is not that common to meet animals in a bad temper: “They were indeed a queer-looking party that assembled on the bank—the birds with draggled feathers, the animals with their fur clinging close to them, and all dripping wet, cross, and uncomfortable.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 27) Alice is not surprised that animals can be as grumpy as adults.

Among those animals there is the Mouse, who seems to be the authority in the group; he is a mandatory and intelligent animal, who commands everyone to sit down and listen to a history lesson. According to Gardner, the Mouse was based on Miss Prickett,

Liddell's maid. So, we can infer she might have been a demanding person, due to the Mouse's strict behavior.

Another animal is the Dodo, which was one of the first species extinct by men around 1681. Gardner quotes Charles Lovett, who once told him that Carroll and the Liddell sisters used to visit the Oxford University Museum in order to see some dodo remains. The Dodo can represent Carroll mocking at himself, as he suffered from stuttering, that is the reason why he sometimes pronounced his name as "Dodo-Dodgson".

The Duck, another character from the third chapter, is connected to Reverend Robinson Duckworth, the person who accompanied Carroll and the Liddell girls in some boat trips. Also, there is Lory (a Parrot), who would represent Lorina, Alice's older sister. This reference can be seen when Alice is in a heated discussion with the Lory over who knows best how to dry off. So, The Lory declares that he is wiser than Alice because he is older than her:

Indeed, she had quite a long argument with the Lory, who at last turned sulky, and would only say, 'I am older than you, and must know better'; and this Alice would not allow without knowing how old it was, and, as the Lory positively refused to tell its age, there was no more to be said. (CARROLL, 2000, pg. 27)

Because of this statement, Alice feels childish and immature, although her emotions are really mature comparing to her chronological age. However, the Lory does not say how old he is, so although he may be more mature, it is not certain that he is older than Alice, as he refuses to reveal his age – this is the Nonsense in the scene.

The animals wonder how they will ever get dry. They have conflated two meanings of the word *dry*, as taken from the Oxford Dictionary: (1) Free from moisture or liquid; not wet or moist; (2) Unemotional, undemonstrative, or impassive. The Mouse tries to dry them physically by telling a long, boring, dry story about William the Conqueror, while the other animals frequently interrupt him. The Duck and the Mouse have an argument over the meaning of the word "it" and the Eaglet complains that the story has lots of words that are difficult to be comprehended: "Speak English! I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and I don't believe you do either!" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 28) Later, the bird also accuses the Mouse of not knowing most of the words he is saying. Therefore, it turns out that this lesson story, whose meaning is difficult to comprehend by the characters, has no effect on any of them. As the story is totally non-sense, the Dodo asks: "How are you

getting on now, my dear?’ it continued, turning to Alice as it spoke’’. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 28) Alice then says that she is wet as ever and that the story is not getting her dried at all. So as no one is getting any drier, the Dodo proposes a Caucus-Race. Alice asks what a Caucus-Race is, and the Dodo says: “The best way to explain it is to do it.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 29)

The Caucus-Race is a Nonsensical satire of the caucus system. The word “caucus” had its origins in the 18th century when the United States was still a colony, to refer to private meetings held by New England local voters. Next the meaning evolved to refer to the American competitive process in which a political party, during a committee meeting, elects their candidate. In The United Kingdom, the word “caucus” relates to a structured system of management. It is not generally used for politics – the usual term for a member of a party in Parliament is, in fact, “parliament party”. However, the word “caucus” had a wide currency in the United Kingdom in the late 19th-century, which referred to a structured system of management and control within the Liberal Party. Also, it was a derogatory term, with overtones of corrupt American political practices, used by detractors of the system. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 28) The caucus system was designated in Birmingham in 1869 for the general election⁷ under the 1867 Reform Act⁸. In that election, the city had three votes, but each elector had only two votes, so that the votes were spread evenly, William Harris, the father of the Caucus and the secretary of the Birmingham Liberal Association, organized ward committees, general committee, executive committee, and management committee, which Liberal electors could be instructed in the combinations to vote. Afterward, the Caucus was defamed by socialists and trade unionists as well as The Times newspaper referred to it as “all its evils”.

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the Caucus-Race represents a contest in which all participants may run in circles, going nowhere and never changing their positions, until the Dodo says it is over and everyone wins prizes. This Nonsense race may represent a veiled criticism of the English political system in the nineteenth century, or even some questioning the meaninglessness of life and routine. The competitors run in a circle without getting anywhere, spending much energy, and not getting anywhere. “But who has won?”, Alice asks (CARROLL, 2000, p. 29) Political progress at that time

⁷ The 1868 United Kingdom general election was the first after passage of the Reform Act 1867, and was the first election held in the United Kingdom.

⁸The Reform Act of 1867 or the Second Reform Act (The Representation of the People Act 1867, 30 & 31 Vict. c. 102)was a piece of British legislation that enfranchised part of the urban male working class.

seemed essentially random and circular, that is the reason why the characters must run in circles while they progress towards nowhere. Moreover, the Caucus-Race might criticize life itself, since it implies that people run in circles with no purpose at all. Although the animals suggest the race with the idea of getting dry, they do not seem to have a clear understanding of what they are doing. The dry story and the race are indeed very dry, in the sense of being boring and meaningless.

It is interesting to mention the Caucus-Race did not belong in the original version, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. In the manuscript, the Dodo suggests going to a house to dry off. It replaces the following deleted passage:

“I only meant to say” said the Dodo in rather an offended tone, “that I know of a house near here, where we could get the young lady and the rest of the party dried, and then we could listen comfortably to the story which I think you were good enough to promise to tell us,” bowing gravely to the mouse.

The mouse made no objection to this, and the whole party moved along the river bank, (for the pool had by this time begun to flow out of the hall, and the edge of it was fringed with rushes and forget-me-nots,) in a slow procession, the Dodo leading the way. After a time the Dodo became impatient, and, leaving the Duck to bring up the rest of the party, moved on at a quicker pace with Alice, the Lory and the Eaglet, and soon brought them to a little cottage, and there they sat snugly by the fire, wrapped up in blankets, until the rest of the party had arrived, and they were all dry again. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 28)

As said before, Alice is not disturbed by the animals that behave like humans. Still, she feels uncomfortable for Wonderland not having the same logic as the real world does—she does not understand why a race (Caucus-Race) does not have a winner. Firstly, “all the party were placed along the course, here and there”, and then “there was no ‘One, two, three, and away,’ but they began running when they liked and left off when they liked,” (p. 29), so Alice could not know when the race started or was over.

There However, when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out ‘The race is over!’ and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, ‘But who has won?’

This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, ‘*Everybody* has won, and all must have prizes.’ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 29)

In the real world, people have fun by playing games such as football and croquet. Both sports have one goal: to have a winner. Alice knows that a race has a beginning, and

end, and a winner, and she is used to competing to win the prize. But in Wonderland everybody wins prizes because there is no shape and no competition. To have a winner is not a matter of concern in Wonderland, so the Dodo gives prizes to all the participants.

Alice, a British imperialist girl who is exploring new lands, cannot agree with those rules, and she is not very respectful towards the Caucus-Race. Alice has some rules internalized from what she has learned from books, adults, and a strict regimentation, so she decides that everything in Wonderland is absurd and she laughs at the race. Much of what Alice knows is useless in Wonderland because the organization of that world is different. Therefore, instead of adapting to this new reality, she attempts to impose her Victorian codes, manners, and rules.

2.2.1 A Mouse Tail or a Mouse Tale?: Nonsense and Concrete Poetry

The Mouse has told Alice that he dislikes both cats and dogs, which is normal, considering he is a mouse, and cats and dogs chase mice. The Mouse says there are some reasons why he does not like those animals, however, he actually does not explain those reasons until Alice insists that he tells the story of Cs and Ds⁹. “You promised to tell me your history, you know” said Alice waiting for the Mouse. Then, he says:

‘Mine is a long and a sad **tale!**’ said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.
‘It is a long **tail**, certainly,’ said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse’s tail; ‘but why do you call it sad?’ And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this.
(CARROLL, 2000, p. 30, emphasis added)

Alice misunderstands ‘tale’ for ‘tail’. Carroll here is playing with homophones, words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and are frequent in the English language. Both Alice and the readers could only differentiate *tail* from *tale* by interpreting the context. As Alice is still a child, it is common for children to address the literal meaning rather than the metaphorical both in words and in situations.

The Mouse tells his *tale*, which involves visual as well as aural wordplay. The Mouse’s tale is an example of concrete poetry – it is a quadruple pun so that the words form the shape of a mouse’s tail. Martin Gardner notes that this is one of the most emblematic or figurative poems in the English language because it was printed in a similar

⁹*i.e.*, “cats” and “dogs”.

way to its theme. (GARDNER, 2000) Augusto de Campos, in *Concrete Poetry: A Manifesto* (2007), says that “The concrete poet sees the word in itself – a magnetic field of possibilities – like a dynamic object, a live cell, a complete organism, with psychophysico-chemical proprieties, touch antennae circulation heart: live.” (CAMPOS, 2007, p. 213)

As the Mouse tells his story aloud, Alice would neither differentiate between the words *tale* and *tail*, nor imagine that, in printed form, the poem would imitate the shape of a mouse’s tail.

‘Fury said to
a mouse, That
he met
in the
house
Let us
both go
to law:
I will
prosecute
you. –
Come, I’ll
take no
denial;
We must
have a
trial:
For
really
this
morning
I’ve
nothing
to do.’
Said the
mouse to
the cur,
‘Such a
trial,
dear sir,
With no
jury or
judge,
would be
wasting
our breath.
I’ll be
judge,
I’ll be
jury,’
said
cunning
old Fury:
‘I’ll try
the whole
cause,
and
condemn
you
to
death.’¹⁷

FIGURE 1: “The Mouse’s Tale” (GARDNER, 2000, p.32)

In addition, Gardner also informs us that in 1989 Gary Graham and Jeffrey Maiden, two New Jersey teenage students, discovered that Carroll's Mouse Tale can be considered a tail rhyme – a rhyming couplet followed by a short unrhymed line. Because of its free form, rhymes are difficult to be found due to the fact that the lines are different and get shorter and shorter. Therefore, if the poem is printed in traditional form as shown, it visually represents a mouse with a long tail:

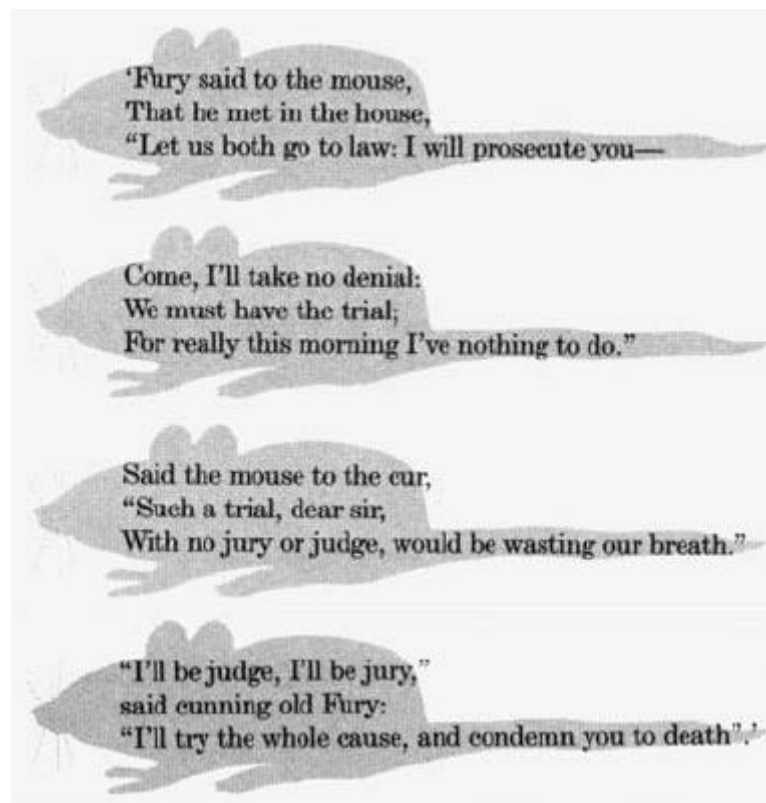


FIGURE 2: A Mouse's Tale as a Tale Rhyme (GARDNER, 2000, p. 33)

Holsquit (1980) defines Nonsense as a collection of words or events in which the meaning of a single word depends on its connection to the system of the other constituents. Alice's confusion between spelling, pronunciation, and meaning can be explained by Saussure when he states:

The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract. (SAUSSURE, 1970, p. 66)

In Wonderland, language changes meaning and significance from moment to moment. Dialogues have no lasting impact on the meaning, and they also do not work outside of a specific scene or in the context in which it operates. Because of that, in Wonderland, signs have no consistent pattern of meaning, so it is not possible to create a linguistic system that might allow foreigner such as Alice able to make sense out of it.

Besides, Carroll uses words in the denotative sense, and also all of them have a very simple meaning (e.g. house, mouse, denial, trial). Campos says that “the concrete poet does not turn away from words, he does not glance at them obliquely: he goes directly to their center, in order to live and vivify their facticity.” (CAMPOS, 2007, p. 213)

As Nonsense is a playful field in literature, semantic shifts create images and, due to the fact it deals with linguistic experimentation, which may involve the creation of new words, so some situations appear nonsensical from the conventional point of view. Harold de Campos (1975) says that

The concrete poem aspires to be: composition of basic elements of language, optical-acoustically organized in the graphic space by factors of proximity and similitude, like a kind of ideogram for a given emotion, aiming the direct presentation—in the present—of the object. (CAMPOS, H.; CAMPOS, A.; PIGNATARI, D., 1975, p. 48)

The Mouse explains how a cur (a dog) called Fury¹⁰ plotted to condemn him to death by serving as both judge and jury. So, the poem gives human qualities to dogs as they are able to judge and be judged. Also, Carroll might have seen a cur as a Victorian person, so he implied that Victorian society has rigid morals and judgment. The tale ends with the dog executing the mouse after the trial.

The Mouse’s tale should teach Alice about the Mouse’s past experience in hating cats and dogs. It is non-sense because there is no reason why the Mouse would hate cats, as the only villain in the tale is Fury, the dog. However, *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, the original version of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, contains a different poem at this point in the story, which includes both cats and dogs as the enemies of the mice: “We lived beneath the mat,/ Warm and snug and fat./ But one woe, that/ Was the cat!”

¹⁰ Fury was the name of a fox terrier owned by Carroll's child-friend Eveline Hull. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 33)

Both versions of the poem are complex. Martin Gardner alludes to a theory that this poem may have been inspired by Alfred Tennyson, who told Carroll about a dream:

Tennyson once told Carroll that he had dreamed a lengthy poem about fairies, which began with very long lines, then the lines got shorter and shorter until the poem ended in fifty or sixty lines of two syllable each [...] the opinion has been expressed [...] that this may have given Carroll the idea for his mouse's tale. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 31)

It is important to mention that the definition of concrete poetry was created in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, in which messages can be conveyed via words and images. I do not believe that Lewis Carroll has influenced concrete poetry, but he was a precursor and may have influenced various fields of literary and arts.

2.3 “A Mad Tea Party

In the chapter “A Mad Tea-Party”, Alice approaches a large table set under a tree, and then she encounters The Mad Hatter holding a tea party. Carroll not only satirizes important people of the British society, he also mocks the Victorian age values, social conventions, manners, and etiquette, representing them through bizarre characters and situations. In this chapter, the author creates not only a parody of the most traditional British event, the afternoon tea, but also of the etiquette book *Hint on Etiquette and the Usages of Society: with a Glance at Bad Habits* (1834) written by Charles Day.

The afternoon tea is a typical custom originated amongst the wealthy social classes in the Victorian era typically served between “from four to six o'clock (DAY, 1834, p. 119), which is a way of entertaining friends and gathering people for a pleasant chat. According to Day, “Tea is as English in origin as Kettle-drums, but without their formality and stateliness. In England, it is the costume for ladies and gentlemen of a family to assemble and take a cup of tea before dressing for dinner.” (DAY, 1834, p. 117-18)

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the chapter “A Mad Tea Party” opens with the March Hare and the Mad Hatter drinking tea while the Dormouse is sleeping on the table, which was used as a pillow to rest Hare's and Hatter's elbows. Then, Alice, as the table is huge and the chairs are empty, approaches the table. However, the characters shout: “No room! No room!” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 67) Indignantly, Alice says: “There's

plenty of room!’’ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 67), and sits down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table. Thus, Alice joins the tea party without being invited, which was an unacceptable thing to be done for those in the upper echelons of society as Alice.

Of course every society must follow some rules in order to establish expectations and keep things running, like whether to wear a seatbelt while driving, or driving on the right or on the left side of the road. In Victorian society, however, rules and etiquette were too stiff in respect to social exchange and class position.

The growth of manufacturing during the Industrial Revolution brought with it a re-accommodation of the social classes. As a result, the newly wealthy sought to emulate the traditional upper class by consuming books of etiquette, manuals describing rules for making new friends, visiting people, attending balls and dinners. According to the book *Hint on Etiquette and the Usages of Society: with a Glance at Bad Habits*:

Luncheon, or déjeuner à la fourchette is rather a lady’s meal, although in reality invitations are given as generally to the one as to the other. [...] The invitations to luncheon are generally written by the hostess on her own note-paper, in a very formal style. (DAY, 1834, p. 113)

At this point, Carroll satirizes those everyday manners described in Charles Day’s book. The tea party is a chaos; the three characters, Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse, break all the English etiquette: the Dormouse sleeps at the table, the Mad Hatter rests his elbows on the table, and they argue and change their seats every minute. The comic scene is described in the first paragraph of chapter VII:

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head. ‘Very uncomfortable for the Dormouse,’ thought Alice; ‘only, as it’s asleep, I suppose it doesn’t mind. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 68)

Additionally, etiquette at the table should be closely observed. According to Day, the manner of sitting at the table is one of the most fundamental rules to be observed: “one should not sit on the edge of her chair; nor sideways; nor should her back rests continually on the back of her chair.’’ (DAY, 1834, p. 105) Also, everyone who was supposed to be well-bred knows that while using the knife and fork, they need to gently move their wrists

and not their elbows; another proper thing is not to rest the elbow. So, the really well-bred man and woman should know how to behave while holding a tea-party. (DAY, 1834)

We can clearly see the difference in manners when the March Hare offers Alice some wine, but actually, there was no wine on the table: “‘Have some wine’, the March Hare said in an encouraging tone. Alice looked all around the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. ‘I don’t see any wine’, she remarked. ‘There isn’t any’, said the March Hare.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 68)

Alice tries to remind the Hare and other characters of the good manners: ‘You should learn not to make personal remarks,’ Alice said with some severity; ‘it’s very rude.’ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 68) She gets angry with him because in British etiquette it was not educated to offer something if you do not have it. However, the March Hare also complains about Alice behavior when she sets on the table without being invited: “‘It wasn’t very civil of you to sit down without being invited’, said the March Hare.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 68)

Also, Alice tries to understand their odd behavior, but because she, as a Victorian girl from an upper class who is aware of etiquette, is not used to such rudeness, so she gets frustrated and impatient.

The Mad Hatter and the March Hare contradict Alice’s knowledge of what a tea party should be and how people should behave. As she learns that nothing in Wonderland makes sense, she struggles to stay cheerful and to maintain her own understanding of the real. At the end of the chapter, Alice is so disgusted by the characters rudeness that she leaves: “‘At any rate I’ll never go there again!’ said Alice as she picked her way through the wood. ‘It’s the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!’” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 75)

2.3.1 Riddle and Language: The Non-Sense of Nonsense

After the Mad Hatter insults Alice by saying that she needs a haircut, he asks “‘Why is a raven like a writing-desk?’” (CARROLL, 2000, p.68) Alice gets enthusiastic about finding a proper answer to this enigma; however, the other characters do not show any interest in the riddle implying that they already know the solution. Alice spends time thinking about an answer, but she is not able to solve the riddle, so she gives it up and immediately asks the Mad Hatter to provide her with a solution, as he was responsible for proposing the challenge, he would be expected to know its answer. But the Hatter disappoints Alice because he does not know the answer as well:

“Have you guessed the riddle yet?” the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.
“No, I give it up,” Alice replied. “What’s the answer?”
‘I haven’t the slightest idea,’ said the Hatter.
‘Nor I,’ said the March Hare.
Alice sighed wearily. ‘I think you might do something better with the time,’ she said, ‘than waste it in asking riddles that have no answers.’ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 69)

Disconnected dialogues are given by Nonsense. In “A Mad Tea Party”, dialogues are not linear, so the characters do not finish their speeches, nor are they interested in finishing them. (Cf. FLESCHER, 1969) Nonsense causes the senses to be reduced to a minimum, making inconclusive conversations that no one can understand. Flescher also states that there is never any argument or conclusions in the Nonsense dialogue since the meanings change because each interlocutor interprets the text in his own way. This is because the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign generates the multiplicity of meanings, so a single word can have several conventions. (Cf. SAUSSURE, 1970)

This nonsense riddle has received lots of different answers throughout the years as each reader of Carroll’s book interprets it in different ways. In response to hundreds of Alice fans writing to Carroll to learn the “real” answer to the riddle, Carroll wrote:

Enquiries have been so often addressed to me, as to whether any answer to the Hatter's Riddle can be imagined, that I may as well put on record here what seems to me to be a fairly appropriate answer, viz: "Because it can produce a few notes, tho they are very flat; and it is never put with the wrong end in front!" This, however, is merely an afterthought; the Riddle, as originally invented, had no answer at all. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 69)

Therefore, neither Carroll nor the characters know the answer of the riddle.

Alice, upset, suggests that they could do something better with the time. The Hatter doubts she knows Time better than he does. Although what moves Alice in Wonderland is her curiosity, time moves the real world, and it is crucial in Wonderland. Time is defined as a concept to the indefinite continued progress of existence. Because Wonderland is an endless repetition, Time is a person there.

‘If you knew Time as well as I do,’ said the Hatter, ‘you wouldn’t talk about wasting *it*. It’s *him*.’
‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said Alice.

‘Of course you don’t!’ the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. ‘I dare say you never even spoke to Time!’
‘Perhaps not,’ Alice cautiously replied: ‘but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.’ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 70)

When the Hatter says that Time is a person and not merely a concept, Alice realizes that not only social manners are inverted, but the basic laws of logic and the established order of universe do not work as she knew – everything is turned upside down in Wonderland. A simple concept such as time confronts Alice’s expectations. In Wonderland, Time is not *it*, but *he*, and he can punish everyone who has offended him, including the Mad Hatter. Thus, Wonderland is timeless due to Time’s punishment in stopping the clock at six o’clock, trapping the characters in an endless teatime.

‘Ah! that accounts for it,’ said the Hatter. ‘He won’t stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he’d do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o’clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you’d only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner!’ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 70 – 71)

Then, the Mad Hatter looking at and shaking his watch asks “what day of the month is it?” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 69) Alice says it is the fourth. The Mad Hatter replies: “two days wrong!”. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 69) Therefore, Alice’s adventures in Wonderland happen on May 4th.¹¹ Alice Liddell was born on May 4th, 1852, so she was ten years old in 1862, the year Carroll first told and recorded the story.

Alice questions why the Mad Hatter has a watch to see the days of the week instead of the hours. The Hatter replies Alice wondering if her watch tells what year it is. Alice says that it has no sense to have a watch for the years because years stay “the same for such a long time together”. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 69)

Therefore, when the Hatter says the day is wrong, Carroll might have read that A. L. Taylor, in the book *The White Knight*, says that on May 4th, 1862,

There was exactly two days’ difference between the lunar and calendar months [...] Taylor suggests that the Mad Hatter's watch ran on lunar time and accounts for his remark that his watch is "two days wrong." If Wonderland is near the

¹¹The previous chapter reveals that the month is May, establishing the date of Alice's underground adventure as May 4.

earth's center, Taylor points out, the position of the sun would be useless for time-telling, whereas phases of the moon remain unambiguous. The conjecture is also supported by the close connection of "lunar" with "lunacy", but it is hard to believe that Carroll had all this in mind. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 71)

Thus, in the mad tea party, the characters have pointless conversations. Alice, as she associates English with coherence, struggles to make sense out of the dialogues, but she fails due to the fact she is a child and perhaps her perception of language is not well established yet. As the Tea Party challenges what Alice knows, in order to make sense of the Nonsense party, Alice and the reader must adjust their own perception of language, social manners, and time.

Although chaos rules Wonderland and the riddle seems to exist only to make disorder, a strange sense of order still remains. During a non-sense conversation, The Mad Hatter, confused by Alice's speech, tells her to say what she means:

Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?' said the March Hare.

'Exactly so,' said Alice.

'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on.

'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know.'

'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'You might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see"!'.

'You might just as well say,' added the March Hare, 'that "I like what I get" is the same thing as "I get what I like"!' (CARROLL, 2000, p. 72)

The Hatter talks about semiotic and syntax confusion and demonstrates a distinction between those statements: "I say what I mean" does not mean the same thing as "I mean what I say". He compares those sentences with "I eat what I see" and "I see what I eat", reminding Alice that she would not assume they have the same meaning. Alice tries to understand what the Hatter is explaining, but he does not seem to speak with much sense.

Wittgenstein (1963), who states about word-games, says that language and games should not surprise the reader because they function according to pre-established rules. On the other hand, speakers can imagine, create, and subvert language rules. The philosopher also points out that grammar does not tell us how language must work and be constructed in order to have a real purpose and effect on speakers. Grammar is only responsible for describing and explaining the use of signs. Michel Pêcheux (1982) says that when we try to

understand language as a space of rules which are capable of games, we assume that language rules are neither logical nor social. Therefore, syntax is not a formal autonomous system which is external to the lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and enunciative systems.

2.3.2 Nonsense as a Satire of Industry

According to Gardner (2000), Carroll might have asked Tenniel to draw the character similar to a famous furniture dealer in Oxford, Theophilus Carter. As Gardner states, Carter's nickname was Mad Hatter due to his top hat and his eccentric ideas. In addition, Carter created The Alarm Clock Bed, which tipped out the sleeper at a waking-up time into a tub of cold water. This might explain why the character Mad Hatter is always worried about time and he constantly wakes up The Dormouse. However, Hillman (1973), in an article titled *Who was the Mad Hatter* for the *Jabberwocky* journal, says that The Mad Hatter was actually inspired by Samuel Ogden, a hatter in Manchester, who was known as "Mad Sam", and who in 1814 designed a special hat for the czar of Russia. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 68) Furthermore, Hillman says that "Mad Hatter" sounds like "Mad Adder" if we drop the letter "h", so in this case the Mad Hatter could be Lewis Carroll himself as he was a mathematician, or Charles Babbage, a mathematician of Oxford, who was known for being crazy due to his efforts in order to build a mechanical calculating machine.

In addition, hatters used mercury, which is a powerful neurotoxin, to make felt hats. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ¹²data show that people exposed to high levels may experience some health issues, such as memory loss, shaking hands, personality changes, impairment of speech, hearing, walking, and cognitive thinking. Victims of mercury poisoning normally developed a tremor called hatter's shakes". In advanced stages, mercury poisoning could cause hallucinations and other psychotic symptoms. In the Victorian age, "mad as a hatter" was a common expression to suggest that a person is suffering from insanity. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 63) Of course that Carroll created his Mad Hatter based on that. Therefore, is the Mad Hatter a victim of mercury poisoning?

Furthermore, "mad as a March hare" was as well a well-known expression. Male hares were believed to be aggressive throughout their entire eight-month breeding,

¹²Source: <https://www.epa.gov/mercury/health-effects-exposures-mercury>

especially in March, a period that consists of males chasing females, and then getting into boxing matches with them.

Also, “the British dormouse is a tree-living rodent that resembles a small squirrel much more than it does a mouse.” (GARDNER, 2000, p. 68) Dormice, which are endangered today, were common in Carroll’s day. These little animals are basically nocturnal, so they sleep during the day, that is why the Dormouse remains in a torpid state in the Tea Party. Victorian children used to have dormice as pets, “keeping them in old teapots filled with grass or hay”. (GARDNER, 2000, p. 75) Perhaps, this is the reason why the Mad Hatter and the March Hare try to put the Dormouse into the teapot.

From 1793 when Britain became involved in the French Wars (1793-1815), the price of food increased dramatically that the working-class could no longer afford it. During the nineteenth-century, due to the Industrial Revolution, Victorians were obsessed with making money and industrialization, and much of the food consumed by the British population was adulterated by unknown substances. Almost anything you bought was likely to have had something added. The main reasons for such practices were, firstly, by the mid-19th century the population had risen drastically, so feeding people was a challenge; in order to achieve that, industry started diluting products in order to increase the profit margin; secondly, chemicals were added to give food a better color, a technique which is still employed by food industry.

Much of the bread dough was mixed with bean flour, chalk or alum (aluminum-based compound, today used in detergent, but then it was used to make bread desirably whiter and heavier).

By the 1840s home baked bread had died out among the rural poor; in the small tenements of the urban masses, unequipped as these were with ovens, it never existed. In 1872 Dr. Hassall, the pioneer investigator into food adulteration and the principal reformer in this vital area of health, demonstrated that half of the bread he examined had considerable quantities of alum. Alum, while not itself poisonous, by inhibiting the digestion could lower the nutritional value of other foods. (WOHL, 1983, p. 18)

Also boracic acid was used to purify the milk. Not only did it cause nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain in the European people, but children also died.

As late as 1877 the Local Government Board found that approximately a quarter of the milk it examined contained excessive water, or chalk, and ten per cent of

all the butter, over eight per cent of the bread, and 50 per cent of the gin had copper in them to heighten the color. (WOHL, 1983, p. 18)

When the Dormouse tells Alice the story of Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie, she asks about food, suggesting that the girls have been ill:

“What did they live on?” asked Alice, who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking. “They lived on treacle” said the Dormouse... “They couldn't have done that, you know,” Alice gently remarked; “they'd have been very ill.” “So they were,” said the Dormouse; “very ill.” (CARROLL, 2000, 74)

In the 1850s, food alteration was investigated and reported in newspapers. Carroll seems to satirize this episode in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* because all the food and drink in Wonderland are adulterated. For instance, tarts and soups have sneeze-inducing ground pepper. In the Victorian age, the lower classes used pepper to disguise the taste of rotten vegetables and meat. Alice, then, suggests that the relationship between people and pepper was because “Maybe it is pepper that makes people hot-tempered,” she went on, very much pleased at having found out a new kind of rule, “and vinegar that them sour-- and camomile that makes them bitter.” (CARROLL, 2000, 74)

The “drink me” bottles and the “eat me cookies” make Alice shrink or grow – she never knows what will happen if she eats/drinks something in Wonderland. In the nineteenth-century enter that age in which people never know what they are really consuming, because food may have been adulterated to increase production, and as a consequence people could get sick or die. Furthermore, the character of the Mock Turtle was named so because of the “Mock Turtle soup”, a popular English dish that was created as a cheaper imitation of the green turtle soup. It was made from brains, head and hoof of calves, to imitate the texture and the flavor of the original.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland has been explored in critical and academic works through many keys of interpretation: as a playful book for children, a Freudian reading, a political satire, a mathematic puzzle. The contribution of this monograph aimed at the discussion of Nonsense in Carroll's adventure in the dreamworld of Wonderland. Helped by Tigges' and Lecerle's theories, I analyzed ways in which literary Nonsense deals with language – phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics – creating an apparent sense of chaos. Beneath this layer of disorder, however, Nonsense deals with sense. I argue that the way to make sense out of non-sense relates to the way we read signs, as signs depend on historical background and on ideology. For that reason, the Nonsense present in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* start to make sense when we understand the referents that are being used by the author and his Victorian readers. This would not have been possible without the help of Gardner's notes, in *The Annotated Alice*, a necessary companion to the usages and codes of the Victorian era, which helps us to restore the meaning to things that might otherwise seem meaningless.

The first half of this monograph focuses on the cleavage always present in the Victorian Age, which was illustrated in the biographical data involving the Dodgson/Carroll biography, which illustrates the fact that in different social collocations, only certain aspects of a person's personality should be presented. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, the mathematical lecturer and Anglican reverend, moved within the premises of at Oxford University. He was not extremely respected for his Mathematics books that were so rarely read. Although he was a deacon, he almost never preached, because of his stuttering. Regarding politics, Martin Gardner labels Dodgson a Tory, so he was politically, religiously, and personally a conservative. In arts, however, his alterego Lewis Carroll wrote poems and short stories from a young age, and held connections with avant-garde groups such as the Pre-Raphaelites. He was also a famous photographer who was known for taking pictures of children, especially little girls. But no matter how hard respectable Rev. Dodgson tried to separate his profession from his hobbies, the truth is he ended up known throughout the world by the name he tried so jealously to guard so as to

preserve his privacy: Lewis Carroll, the author of the Alice Books. Through his pseudonym, Carroll was able to release all the repression Dodgson had to deal with. As an artist, Carroll is free to break rules, manners, and the etiquette of the Victorian era. Carroll is free to play with logic, language, social conventions, even to mock some important characters and situations of the nineteenth-century.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland has different settings to it, or different levels of reality: the real world – the Victorian era – in which the author lived, from which he wrote his work; Alice's fictional real world where she is seated on a bank down a tree when she falls asleep; and the imaginary world, or dream world of Wonderland. Alice finds Wonderland in her dream. Then she returns to the real world, and wakes up.

Three sections have been devised to explore Alice's understanding of the world, in relation to Nonsense. The first analyses Alice's fall down the rabbit hole, which represents the opening of the dream frame, when Alice crosses from one set of discourse to another, and finds a world that does not make sense. According to Freud's interpretation, a dream offers the proper scenario where the unconscious becomes more prominent. In *The interpretation of dreams* (1899), Freud describes the dream as a primary process marked by physical diminution of what comes from the external world, or a plunge into the unconscious. Dreams are a different kind of language, and they reveal our innermost wishes. Wish is the idea or thought that can satisfy the dreamer. Dreams are not absurd; their meanings, although hidden, come from the realization of the primitive desires that were vetoed by the existing processes of morality. Wishes sometimes cannot be accepted by the dreamer, because of repression; this prevents the dream language from becoming conscious. Censorship is between the boundary of the unconscious and the conscious and it is responsible for deforming the thoughts of the dream. (Cf. FREUD, 1996)

The dream process, according to Freud, occurs in six categories. In the first one, dreams are realizations of desires that produce experience and satisfaction. Freud means that the essence of the dream comes from some repression that occurred in childhood and that is still present in our unconscious, so every dream is the fulfillment of a wish. The second category says that dream ideas are hallucinatory. When we close our eyes, we open them to the hallucination, we begin to think in the language of images. These experiences occur, in general, through visual images and occasionally through thoughts and feelings. The third instance says that the language of dreams is absurd and contradictory and it is linked to the forgetting of psychic experiences. The fourth category shows that there is a

motor discharge in dreams. Consciousness partially shuts off when we sleep and the unconscious goes into action. The fifth says that the memory of dreams is weak because they are not on the surface, because of that dreamers have to seek under layers. The sixth and last category refers to the consciousness that dreams provide.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland happens in the dream world of a Victorian girl. Taking into account that Wonderland corresponds to Alice's dream, we can say that this place is a construction, an arrangement of Alice's unconscious. Wonderland is a place full of strange events where animals act like humans; they can talk, walk, wear clothes and watches, and participate in everyday events such as the afternoon tea. In this way, it would be possible to say that the aspects present in Carroll's work do not correspond directly to the unusual situations and the fantastic characters, but to the appeal that such allegories exert on a reality that we do not approach consciously, that is, the unconscious. As Freud points out that the origin of the contents observed in dreams usually goes back to memories and experiences lived in childhood, it means that some common experiences are represented through dreams. The Nonsense that happens in Wonderland can happen in dreams, because of that, the scenes are perceived as real. Thus, Carroll's narrative is strictly dreamlike, so what is in it are the impasses of Alice in confronting her own existence, which materialize in the encounters and disagreements with the different characters, who present themselves in their dream adventures.

It is interesting to notice that when Alice enters Wonderland she experiences the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious: estrangement. Carroll's narrative is about the impasses Alice has in confronting her own existence. Alice searches unconsciously for her identity. In Wonderland, every time she eats or drinks something, she grows or shrinks - that makes her fit into that world.

'Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them. (CARROLL, 2002, p. 47)

Also, the Wonderland scenario can be taken as Alice's dream, and its setting is therefore her unconscious. This makes it difficult for Alice (and for readers) to decide whether things have really happened or not. Many of the characters Alice meets are related

to her reality - they recite songs and poems, drink tea, and play games. Thus, the functioning of the fictional universe created by Carroll has things in common with the dream universe; so readers come to understand how things work without necessarily using their rational side of the brain.

Another important factor in Freud's theory is its representability (or figurability), that is, how the transposition of thoughts into images is made. Freud reports that the oneiric thinking gives preference to visual representation. In dreams we often reshape the verbal form to create an imagery expression. The dream process, then, requires that the abstract expression be replaced by the concrete expression: the more concrete the thought, the stronger the imagery is. Also, during the dream process, a sort of condensation happens, which shows that a single image can be turned into a collective figure, combining contradictory elements. The fall is non sense as it presents inverted laws of nature. Carroll plays with acceleration, velocity, and gravity. This is a reflex of his life as Dodgson, the teacher of logic.

The second scene I analyzed is Alice's meeting with the animals in the Caucus-Race, where she finds a group of animals. There we seem to be very comfortable in the presence of anthropomorphism. However, Alice does not accept the fact that the Caucus-Race has no rules. She complains about that and sees no sense to it. When the Mouse tells her a tale, Alice is so confused by the Nonsense atmosphere that she misunderstands "tale" for "tail", creating a concrete poem.

The third scene is the tea party, where Alice encounters three peculiar Wonderland inhabitants who test her understanding of rules, etiquette, and language. She attempts to make sense out of Nonsense by changing the discourse of the tea party into the discourse she knows. Also, the chapter is full of wordgames, and a riddle, however, no joke is funny unless we can understand it; therefore, the meaning must be explained – and Alice does not have any answer in "The Raven and the Writing Desk" riddle. Actually, Nonsense language has disconnected dialogues and no conclusion because of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

Nonsense is not random as it might seem to be, and the atmosphere of dream can sometimes even bear aspects of a nightmare. Nonsense creates defamiliarization, causing Alice and the reader to move away from Wonderland and try to find the meaning of the world they know. However, literary language must be understood within the work itself, because it is constituted in the fictional universe. I mean, the escape into a world ruled by

Nonsense creates a defamiliarization which does not require its own linguistic, historical and social resources, but the same resources that are present in daily life. As stated by Shklovski, “the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known”. (Cf. SHKLOVSKI, 1998, p. 18) Therefore, by wondering about sense, non sense, and Nonsense, readers become aware of how linguistic signs work.

As Nonsense works have signs that can start from any assumption, we can create different interpretations since we are dealing with linguistic signs - and they re-signify with time and must be read within the historical and social context that they are inserted - and each reader interprets those signs in their own way according to their experience and ideology, there is a certain difficulty in interpreting those works. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the characters and scenes are puns, jokes, and a satire of the Victorian era. However, it is not necessary to seek a great explanation to understand the Mad Hatter, for example, because the reader can stick to the references given only by the work and his worldview.

In conclusion, Carroll’s world follows its own social codes. Wonderland is a world ruled by nonsense and incoherence, where there are no tracks of time or space. Alice is a British girl from a well-off family, and she is educated according to a strict regimentation. As a result, the girl moves so as to impose her rules on Wonderland. But Alice’s knowledge of logic and language fails in Wonderland. As she is a child, she is able to adapt to new rules – she questions, struggles, enforces her logic, and then she seems to accept/adapt to Wonderland’s (lack of) logic. Alice’s horizons of expectation are always being undermined. The girl gets frustrated each time she meets some Wonderland inhabitant because many of them contradict what she knows, or even correct her, making her question her own knowledge. Still, because Alice is young, she rebounds quickly and begins to move in the new way that is required. She improvises all the time. Usually, situations end up being solved.

In the duality perceived in the Victorian era we have a repressive system that invites people to adopt prim, prudish, and strict codes of behavior. On the other hand, that is also a time of great changes and improvement in the industrial, political, scientific, technological, and cultural spheres. In this context, that is simultaneously conservative and modern, Nonsense arises. The literature of Lewis Carroll grasps the essence of this ambiguity and brings it into fiction. In a way, they anticipate the confusion, the excess of voices and different thoughts coming from the confrontation of different world perceptions

of the various social classes. We live in a world in which it is difficult to impose a single truth or a kind of order that is accepted by everybody. So, people have to learn to move and make sense of what does not seem to make sense.

Lewis Carroll's Nonsense, therefore, is built from the action that streams in Alice's conscious/unconscious. Everything that happens in Wonderland is a reflection of Alice's emotions and thoughts, which are dictated by the reality in which the little girl moves: the Victorian era. So, the real world referents are what moves Alice throughout her journey in Wonderland. Therefore, we can conclude that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is much more than a trip into the dream of a little girl, it is also a trip into the dreams of a Victorian man – Dodgson/Carroll – who, through the book, was able to turn his deepest and repressed wishes into literature.

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